

“THE SUBSTANCE OF THE VIRTUES”:
DEIFICATION ACCORDING TO MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR AND THE
TRANSFORMATION OF ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS

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A la memoria de mi padre, Sergio Salés Reyes (1952–2016)

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Abstract

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation studies the relationship between virtue and deification in the thought of the ascetic intellectual Maximos the Confessor (580–662). It would be no exaggeration to note that Maximian studies enjoyed a renaissance in the twentieth century on which the twenty-first century built an impressive collection of outstanding monographs and articles. So, while I concur with Aidan Nichols that the (western European) modern study of Maximos the Confessor can be traced to 1857, when Karl Joseph Hefele published “Sophronius und Maximus über die zwei Willen in Christus” in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* and Klaus Oehler released his edition of the Confessor’s most important work, the *Difficulties* (or *Ambigua*), concerted intercontinental interest in his work only developed in earnest in the wake of the Second World War. For the following decades, the work of Maximos was studied from a wide variety of historical, theological, and philosophical subfields or for thematic threads, including Christology, spirituality, ecclesiology, anthropology, the essence-energies distinction, the politics of the seventh century in the Roman Empire, deification, and the perennial question regarding his relation to Classical and Hellenistic thought and, specifically, to so-called “Neoplatonism.”¹

To date, however, no study extensively considers the interrelationship between his aretology (i.e., doctrine of virtue) and deification despite their prominence in his theological and philosophical system. Certainly, studies of one or the other theme, largely in isolation from each other, have been penned. For instance, Jean-Claude Larchet’s encyclopedic *La divinisation de l’homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur* (1996), a volume nearly eight hundred pages in length, remains a field-defining piece of Maximian scholarship, specifically with regard to deification. But even here, Larchet does not explore the relationship between virtue and deification in depth.² Needless to say, far from being a shortcoming of his study, this absence bespeaks Larchet’s regard for a manageable scope. Regardless, the gap remains.

Further, the methodological approaches to Maximos’ work have, with a few very recent exceptions, remained in the tradition of an exclusively historical-theological mode of analysis. This method certainly enjoys considerable explanatory power for some, but surely not all, aspects of the Confessor’s oeuvre. Thus, while numerous other aspects and figures in early Christianity have been explored by means of critical-theoretical modes of analysis, these modes’ usefulness for illuminating Maximos’ thought-world have yet to be substantively probed.³ Accordingly, in what follows I avail myself of a

¹ For Christology see: Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, García, “Seréis como dioses,” Zañartu, “Las naturalezas.”

For spirituality, see: Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, Blowers, *Exegesis*, Dalmais, “L’anthropologie spirituelle,” “L’oeuvre spirituelle,” and “La doctrine ascétique,” Hausherr, *Philautie*, Montmasson, “La doctrine,” 36–41, Viller, “Aux sources,” 156–184, 239–68, 331–336. Wilken, “Maximus the Confessor,” in Wimbush and Valantasis, 412–423.

For ecclesiology see: Riou, *Le monde et l’église*.

For anthropology see: Prado, *Voluntad y naturaleza*, Renczes, *Agir de Dieu*, Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, De Angelis, *Natura, persona, libertà*, Mondin, *L’uomo secondo il disegno di Dio*, Kattan, *Verleiblichung und Synergie*.

For the essence-energies distinction, see: Larchet, *Le théologie des énergies divines*, Karayiannis, *Maxime le Confesseur*.

For his involvement in seventh-century politics, see: Lackner, “Der Amtstitel,” 63–65, Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, Pareti, “Verdi e azzurri,” 305–315, Olster, *The Politics of Usurpation*, Riedinger, “Die Lateran Synode,” in Heinzer and von Schönborn.

For his doctrine of deification see: Savvidis, *Die Lehre*, Larchet, *La divinisation*, Perl, “Methexis,” Jili, “The Doctrine of Theosis.”

For his relationship to “Neoplatonism,” see: Moore, “The Christian Neoplatonism,” Von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus*, Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*.

² See e.g., Larchet, *La divinisation*, 482–488.

³ Paul Blower’s recent monograph, *Maximus the Confessor* (2016) is perhaps a pioneer in this regard in that he uses Jean-Luc Marion’s “saturated phenomenon” to illumine Maximos’ liturgical theology.

constellation of methods, including certain features of historical theology, critical and comparative philology, and literary analysis. But I will also adapt the critical angles of Hispanic post- and decolonial theory, as constructed, for example, by Leopoldo Zea, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Santiago Castro-Gómez, to expose an array of colonial assumptions and prejudices at work in the historiography of philosophy in late antiquity. I also turn to some of Michel Foucault's and Michel de Certeau's insights into "technologies" or "practices" of the self to elucidate Maximos' ascetic doctrine and will combine this analysis with Derridean grammatology to explain the dynamic model of virtue as Maximos envisions it.

The methodological salience of these choices requires some elucidation. Foucault and de Certeau investigated, in their own way, the various acts that the self can perform on the self to pattern the self on a certain desirable model. In this regard, Foucault's idea of "technologies of the self" is especially important, because he believes that the human subject can "attain" certain states by means of these technologies.⁴ As we will see, that is true for some early Christians and late ancient non-Christian philosophers, but it does not aptly describe the constitutive dynamism of Maximos' aretology. Rather, Michel de Certeau paints a somewhat different picture (though, admittedly, for a different context). In *La invention du quotidien*, de Certeau describes the scene of a tightrope balancing act where the *appearance* of stability can only be achieved by an incessant process of adjustments and interventions. Thus, stability is a paradoxically-formed illusion that relies on an incessant dynamism and process of recalibration to create the semblance of fixity.⁵

This image bears striking resemblances to Derridean grammatology and poststructuralist linguistics generally.⁶ On Derrida's analysis, language does not signify by an ontological or necessary link between signifier and signified; rather, following de Saussure's "first principle" articulated in his *Cours de linguistique générale*,⁷ Derrida held that the link between these two is entirely arbitrary. Accordingly, signification is made possible by an infinite network of differences that mark a language's simultaneous sedimentation and correlative insufficiency. While repeated use of certain phrases and linguistic conventions creates the appearance of fixity by the sedimentation of linguistic practices, language is always liable to change and can thus be otherwise.

In my study, I ask whether such a model of linguistics may also share a parallel with Maximos' ethics that can by extension illumine the dynamics at play in "becoming virtuous." In other words, what does it mean "to be" virtuous? Can one "attain" the "state," as Foucault called it, of virtue? Or is it, rather, that one negotiates one's ethical identity from step to step on an infinite, heavenward tightrope of moral discourse that is both the condition of and for an elusive virtue? The fluidity of language as described by poststructuralist linguists has great appeal for elucidating this dynamic model of ethics. After all, if virtue must be interstitially negotiated by means of certain practices of the self, the teleological locus of human effort shifts from a transcendent reality and unattainable end to an embodied representational theo-drama wherein divine and human ephemerally coincide. This, Maximos calls the "incarnation of God in the virtuous"⁸ and an "evermoving rest" (στάσις ἀεικίνητος).⁹

In this dissertation, I argue that the Confessor articulated the struggle to become virtuous as a process of moral recalibration that is under incessant negotiation. In my take, this dynamic model of

⁴ See, for instance, Foucault, *Ethics*, 225.

⁵ He writes: "Danser sur une corde, c'est de moment en moment maintenir *un équilibre* en le recréant à chaque pas grâce à des nouvelles interventions; c'est conserver un rapport qui n'est jamais acquis et qu'une incessante invention renouvelle en ayant l'air de le «garder»." De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, 143.

⁶ Here I have particularly in mind the project widely conceived in *De la grammatologie*, as well as in a series of essays like "La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines" and "Signature, événement, contexte."

⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure. *Cours de linguistique générale*, de Mauro, ed., 100.

⁸ E.g., *Ambigua to Thomas*, prol. 2; *Ambigua to John*, 7.21–22; 10.2, 4, 9, 27, 35, 41, 85, 119; 48.6, etc.

⁹ E.g., *Thal* 59, ll. 123–131.

ethics derived from Aristotle’s moral philosophy, particularly from the *Nikomachean* and *Eudaimonian Ethics*. Such a proposition, however, is likely to meet much sedimented scholarly resistance. There are several reasons for this pushback. First, it has long been a scholarly commonplace to juxtapose Platonic and Aristotelian thought as if they were opposite poles on a greyscale spectrum of philosophical identities. Second, the story continues, because there were hardly any Aristotelian figures in late antiquity—one can think of perhaps a handful—it is improbable that Peripatetic philosophy functioned as a dialectically-constitutive agent in Christian intellectual identity formation. Rather, the argument goes, Christians widely used Platonic and Stoic ideas, but generally dismissed Aristotle or were simply unfamiliar with his thought. Third, the case of Maximus’ relationship to Aristotle is particularly compounded by the fact that a substantial cadre of Neothomistic scholars has sought to rehabilitate the Confessor’s use of Aristotelian ideas over the past sixty years. These scholars, however, have been repeatedly (and even harshly) critiqued for introducing a Thomistic Aristotle into Maximus’ world. For that reason, present attempts to elucidate Maximus’ thought by recourse to the Stagirite’s philosophy are likely to encounter resistance due to the reasonable concern for conceptual anachronisms that are endemic in his field of studies.

The first two sedimented assumptions are highly problematic, as chapter one demonstrates. Recent trends in the history of philosophy have challenged the assumption of Aristotle’s and Plato’s ideological incompatibility.¹⁰ Among late ancient philosophers, especially so-called “Neoplatonists,” Aristotle was widely regarded as second in authority and philosophical sublimity to Plato alone. In effect, they considered him Plato’s intellectual progeny and possibly the best expounder of his thought. Accordingly, most late ancient philosophers presupposed and sometimes elucidated Plato’s and Aristotle’s agreement on most matters. Thus, it is not inexplicable that the “Neoplatonists” collectively wrote more commentaries on Aristotle than on any other figure, Plato included. Moreover, I interrogate the foundation for a radical juxtaposition of Aristotle’s and Plato’s philosophy by examining the available sources that Gemisthos Plethon, at the twilight of the Roman empire (ca. 1439) employed to argue for Plato’s superiority over Aristotle (the fact that he was not arguing for their *opposition* but for a *ranking* suggests that even he situated them within a coextensive matrix of philosophical identity). Instead, I draw a different picture of Aristotle’s place in late antiquity by turning to quantitative data analysis of digital humanities resources for the study of late antiquity, such as the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. I contend that all the evidence points to late antiquity as the “golden age” of Aristotelian studies in the Greek language (with two further, though not as sustained or intensive, peaks during the renaissances under the Komnenoi Palaiologoi) and that interest in his work, it bears mentioning, was not limited to non-Christians. In effect, he often enjoyed greater attention from both Christians and/or Hellenes than Plato. And yet, the significance of these findings has yet to be probed for the representation of Christian intellectual history.

The third point listed above must be understood against a larger discursive backdrop, also presented in chapter one, that interrogates the invention of so-called “Neoplatonism.” For this purpose, I resort to the analytical resources of the postcolonial and decolonial Hispanic academies, including the work of Ramón Grosfoguel, Leopoldo Zea, Santiago Castro-Gómez, and others. The objective is to expose colonial prejudices in the western European narrative of late ancient philosophy. Of particular interest is the sustained dismissal of “Neoplatonists” as non-Europeans due to their mixture with “Oriental” ideas and their consequent erasure from the history of “western” philosophy. In other words, Neoplatonists were intellectual hybrids of Greece and Orient for whom no discursive space existed in the colonizing narratives of modern western European self-invention that were

¹⁰ Two landmark monographs were published nearly simultaneously in this regard: Lloyd Gerson’s *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (2005) and George Karamanolis’ *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?* (2006).

predicated on the imaginary inheritance rights to a tradition they never in fact had owned. Such a position is not only problematic for its endemic racist and Eurocentric worldview, but for its systemic distortion of all intellectual agents engaged in late antiquity, such as Maximus. My response to these three problems is to create a thick description of Maximus' thought world through an interdisciplinary approach that transgresses long-held disciplinary and methodological boundaries. Perhaps this is in keeping with the decolonizing sensitivities of this project and its embrace of methodological hybridity.

Chapter two aims to present a radical revision of Maximus' early career that is consistent with the reconstructed matrix of cultural production articulated in chapter one. This task becomes immediately complex due to the existence of two strikingly different accounts of his early years, one in Syriac and one in Greek. The Syriac account was written by one of Maximus' contemporaries, George, the bishop of Resh'aina, whose distaste for the Confessor's person is on lavish display throughout the account. Of particular importance is the author's claim that Maximus was born in Palestine, the questionable result of a trinket-selling Samaritan's fornication with a Persian slave girl. Some scholars have defended the credibility of this account's broad outline, noting that his birth in Palestine can successfully account for Maximus' seemingly longstanding friendship with Sophronios of Jerusalem (as gleaned from Maximus' *Epistle* 8), who would have been a monk in a monastery not far from the Palaia Lavra, where the Confessor was taken after his parents' (arguably symbolic) deaths. Moreover, a Palestinian origin also explains Maximus' concern with Origenism (as articulated, most famously, in *Difficulty* 7), such as it is purported to have returned in Palestine in the sixth and seventh centuries. After all, the Palaia Lavra was headed, if George of Resh'aina is to be believed, by a certain Pantoleon (فيلليون), "wicked and Origenist" (*Syriac Life* 7).

The Greek account, in fact a complex of three complexly interrelated recensions and a number of other biographical materials from which it was culled, tells a poignantly different story. On this account, Maximus was born of pious Christian aristocrats in the imperial capital, received the standard training in rhetoric and philosophy to which illustrious youths were entitled by rank and wealth, and in 610 became the chief of imperial records under Herakleios' new regime. Three years later he took the cloth and spent the rest of his tumultuous life steeling monastic resistance against imperial heresy, for which he paid with a literal pound of flesh. Some of this account's historical errors (such as imputing Maximus' departure from Roman bureaucracy due to its implication with Monenergism, which would not come about for another two decades) and its infancy's striking similarity to the *Life of Theodoros Stoudites* have thrust its credibility into question.¹¹ Its proponents point to Maximus' knowledge of aristocratic jargon and his correspondence with powerful figures in the imperial entourage, such as an imperial κουβικουλάριος (*koubikoularios*) called Ioannes, as evidence for his high-born Constantinopolitan provenance. The problem, then, is that the Greek life, like the Syriac life, has certain strengths as a relatively reliable source for reconstructing Maximus' youth, but they surely cannot both be right (and perhaps neither is). The end scene, then, is that of a scholarly stalemate concerning Maximus' early life.

Chapter two argues that both accounts are unreliable. Because the Greek lives, particularly the third recension, which details Maximus' early years, were the established account of Maximus' origins for the better part of a millennium, the majority of critical scholarship has undermined these, and not the Syriac, telling of things.¹² Critics of the Syriac account have largely dismissed its details as outlandish and incensed fabrications of an ill-disposed adversary—the account features Maximus' brother mauled to death by a camel and his mother's death as she falls from a pomegranate tree. But the Syriac account has yet to be contextually analyzed from within the discursive complex of Syriac

¹¹ In this regard, see especially Wolfgang Lackner's "Zur Quellen und Datierung der Maximosvita BHG 31234."

¹² The most sustained and to a degree successful effort on this count is Phil Booth's *Crisis of Empire*, particularly chapter four, "Maximus and the Mystagogy."

literature and cannot so lightly be cast aside—not, especially, after compelling arguments have been penned in its favor. Accordingly, much of chapter two offers the first in-depth linguistic and literary evaluation of the Syriac infancy narrative in order to underscore its literary and creative features. Only a few details can be gleaned, indirectly and with some degree of uncertainty, about Maximos’ provenance through such a reading, but they are not, for that, insignificant. For instance, I interpret certain turns of phrase and symbols in the Syriac account to argue that Maximos was, in effect, from wealth extraction (though likely not from Constantinople). In light of this analysis, my suggestion is to disregard both the Greek and Syriac infancy narratives with respect to his place of origin and to consider the remaining evidence to attempt to reconstruct Maximos’ early life.

I grant that his place of birth is now lost to us, but add that it is not as significant for his intellectual development and his contextualization as the place of his upbringing. Indeed, even by the Syriac account’s chronology, Maximos was conceived in Tiberias, born in Hesfin, and raised for most of his youth in the monastery of the Palaia Lavra and the account still fails to explain, primarily by omitting nearly forty years of the Confessor’s life, how Maximos acquired the very philosophical acuity that enrages his authorial detractor. Mobility, in this view, was a permanent fixture for many late ancient people so that birth in any given place did not permanently cloud one’s future horizon of possibilities.

My reading of the available and reliable evidence, primarily Maximos’ epistolary corpus, dossiers surviving in his name, and a few other tangential writings by his contemporaries, leads me to conclude that, wherever Maximos may have been born, he was most likely raised in Alexandria and had received substantial philosophical training there, perhaps under the late-sixth century Aristotelian commentator David himself. In this respect, it is telling that scholarship has long denied the legitimacy of attributing a collection of notes on David’s lectures on Porphyry’s *Eisagoge* and Aristotle’s *Categories* to Maximos, under whose name they survive in manuscript witnesses. The logic, of course, has been that Maximos could not have studied under David because he was in Constantinople (or Palestine), and not in Alexandria. But if the claims of both infancy accounts are questionable, the objection is no longer valid. Moreover, the bulk of the Confessor’s correspondence points, as Christian Boudignon has already argued, to Alexandria.¹³ My case goes further in pointing out that Maximos is not only a regular correspondent with the highest echelons of Alexandrian power through some inexplicable historical serendipity, but with *all* of its social echelons—aristocratic, bureaucratic, scholarly, clerical, and ascetic (including male and female monasteries). An amalgam of these various levels would suggest more than a passerby’s stint in the capital of Roman Egypt.

If my tentative reconstruction of Maximos’ life has merit, it would substantially alter the portrait of his career trajectory and the conceptual framework of his ideas. On such an account, Maximos would have been fully immersed in the philosophical tradition of the late ancient commentators on Aristotle, particularly the tradition that was housed at Alexandria. In effect, there are numerous clues in his work that suggest such a background, though recent scholarly trends have tended to minimize them or outright misrepresent them; they attribute them, at best, to doxographical knowledge that any relatively educated person in late antiquity may have possessed. I contend that such representations are tendentious, distort the Confessor’s ideas, and, especially for our purposes, render numerous tensions (and resolutions thereto) illegible by erasing their robust Aristotelian framework. Accordingly, the second part of the dissertation—chapters three to five—elucidates the relationship between virtue and deification in Maximos’ thought by dialectically showing the various features of Aristotle’s philosophy that undergird the Confessor’s logical frame of mind.

Chapter three begins with the articulation of the driving tension that holds the study together by identifying the underlying Aristotelian logical structures that inform the Confessor’s theology and

¹³ See Boudignon, “Maxime le Confesseur, était-il Constantinopolitain?” 11–43.

philosophy. Specifically, the difficulty is squaring Maximos' interrelated claims that virtues are deifying, that virtues are natural to humans, and that deification cannot be attained by the actualization of any natural potentialities of the human substance. By all appearances, these three claims, presented as propositional content, seem to suggest at least a tension, at worst a contradiction, in the Confessor's doctrine of deification. The objective of the dissertation is to address this conundrum by emphasizing, more than most studies to date, the numerous Aristotelian dimensions at play here.

Therefore, chapter three deals with Maximos' appropriation of Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, specifically to understand the semantic and conceptual range of the term *ousia* (οὐσία), which can be variously rendered as "essence," "substance," or "quiddity," though long-held Aristotelian studies preferences gravitate toward "substance." Currently, scholarly engagement with Aristotle's ideas for the sake of comprehending Maximos' work has been unsystematic and meager, typified by little more than footnotes referencing Aristotelian passages for the sake of vague comparison. Chapter three goes further by analyzing the various logics of Aristotle's ontology through contextual immersion in the imaginable limits of the Confessor's time. The hermeneutic principle, then, is not simply to point to Maximos' bald use of Aristotle's terminology, but to understand his active role in learning from, contributing to, and transforming a millennium-old trajectory of the reception among Platonic, Aristotelian, and Christian commentators on the Stagirite's contested concepts.

Thus, we underscore the philosophical liminality and complexity of the Peripatetic ontological apparatus, one that recent cultural studies, particularly in queer, gender, and racial studies have all too frequently represented reductively as the point of origin of western "essentialism" (other theorists, like Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray have transmuted this locus of essentialization to Plato's *Timaios*). Certainly, there is a historical precedent to which these critical views respond and there is undoubtedly a multi-tiered systemic injustice rooted in essentialism that they have necessarily and successfully destabilized; simultaneously, however, I would challenge the validity of imputing the origin of such views to Aristotle. Rather, later intellectuals, perhaps as early as Latin Scholasticism, are themselves to blame for promoting a somewhat static and "essentializing" take on Aristotle's *ousia*. Such a view, however, is inextricable from the forming colonial discourse of western superiority birthed during the Crusades that sought to create a universal category of "essential" humanity as a discursive matrix wherein to organize, class, and hierarchize its individual members.

Accordingly, what ought to be critiqued is not Aristotle's work (western-centric teleologies and colonially-prejudiced discursive strategies ironically inform such approaches), but the mistranslation and misappropriation of his work, such as Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda's misrepresentation of Aristotle's concept of "slaves by nature" (φύσει δοῦλοι)¹⁴ in his *Democrates alter de justis belli causis apud Indios* to justify the enslavement of the Mexica (incidentally, he also employed Proverbs 11:29 to justify slavery).¹⁵ Needless to say, even then his interpretation of Aristotle was contested by contemporaries, like Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, who proposed an alternate vision of humanity in Christ in his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*. We must then ask why an anachronistic, misappropriated, medieval-to-modern conception of Aristotle's *ousia* should figure in our analysis of late antiquity at all. The only connection, it seems, is to extricate the Peripatetic's work from fights he never picked and to understand him on his own terms and in light of other Greek commentators on his ideas.

Once we take this step, it is clear that Aristotle did not even have a univocal understanding of *ousia*. In the *Categories*, for instance, the term has a relatively fixed meaning and refers to a specific existing something (τόδε τι), like a horse, a man, or a plant, that is the subject of varying predicates (κατηγορία or *kategoria* in Greek means "predicate" or "attribute"). In the *Metaphysics*, by contrast, Aristotle tells

¹⁴ *Politics* 1254b16–19.

¹⁵ See *Democrates Segundo*; Coroleu, "A Philological Analysis," 175–195; Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians*; Losada, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*; Mechoulam, *L'antihumanisme de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*.

us that *ousia* has no fewer than four meanings.¹⁶ He devotes much time to explicating each of these meanings.¹⁷ What may be remarkable here is the intrinsic, indeed, inescapable dynamism of chronologically-distended existence that Aristotle attributes to *ousiai*. If there is any principle of fixity to be found in an *ousia*, it is, precisely, *not* the *ousia*, but the definition of the *ousia* expressed through the unwieldy phrase “what is was being for it to be existing” (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, e.g., *Metaphysics* 1029b13–14). It was this phrase that Latin Scholastics rendered, presumably for simplicity’s sake, as *essentia* or *quidditas*. In effect, even in this phrase the verb “to be” (εἶμι) surfaces twice and in both cases the tense (imperfect, present) expresses an ongoing process of existential (re)definition that in no way conveys a sense of ontological closure. Such interpretations are not unknown in Aristotelian studies, but their consequences for understanding late ancient thinkers like Maximos have yet to be systematically examined. Chapter three addresses that deficiency.

If, then, the Confessor’s ontology is informed by the dynamism of Aristotle’s *ousia*, what does that mean for an embodied asceticism? Chapter four picks up this question by investigating Maximos’ moral psychology and the formation of the deiform subject through the strategic negotiation of virtue. Specifically, we examine the roots of the Confessor’s psychology—or doctrine of the soul—and challenge a longstanding consensus that it is primarily of Stoic derivation. In effect, this chapter articulates the numerous ways in which Stoic ethics themselves had drawn on Aristotle’s aretology and accordingly offers a radical reinterpretation of the commonplace ascetic term *apatheia*—variously rendered as “dispassion,” “impassibility,” or, as I prefer, “emotionlessness.” Of central importance to this question is the matter of deliberate choice (προαίρεσις) and self-determination (αὐτεξούσιον). How did Maximos understand the deliberative process and what was its moral charge?

Here, certain patristic figures like Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius of Pontos are especially important for contextualizing Maximos, given their critical development of the term *apatheia* and early notions of the will (θέλημα, βούλησις) and their promotion of their centrality for ascetic subjectivity. While the Confessor had extensively read both of these authors, his take on *apatheia* is markedly different in several regards. Most important is his position that *apatheia* signifies a condition of the soul that is only with difficulty moved toward vice (δυσκίνητος). The reason this is significant is because of the dynamism it again introduces into the negotiation of moral selfhood—*apatheia* is ultimately not the final stage of human progress, but divinely-granted deification, the only surety for remaining fixed in the good. Just as important is the fact that by contrasting *apatheia* with vice, Maximos implies that *apatheia* does not simply refer to the absence of the passions (or vices), but of the emotions “in themselves,” so to speak. Surely, this position may seem *prima facie* problematic. After all, the lion’s share of early Christians not only affirms the constitutive function the emotions play in humanity, but insist on their usefulness for pursuing the divine.

Maximos is not at odds with this tradition, though his extended meditations on the human will, which was especially fine-tuned by the dialectical cross-examinations of Monothelitism, led him to invest the depths of human decision-making with new and original meanings. For him, the emotions as such are faculties of the soul that are potential and can only be considered “in themselves” through abstraction and analytical conceptualization; they are not, however, separable from their active exercise. If so, the emotive faculties can only ever be engaged in ethically-charged ways. That is to say that the emotive faculties of the soul, when operative, are irreducibly agents of subject formation and cannot, accordingly, be morally neutral. Any exercise of the emotive faculties implies in itself the disposition-forming character states or habituations (ἔξεις) that are termed virtues or vices, depending on use. Thus, to speak of a “neutral” emotion is to speak of an inactive, analytically-derived feature of

¹⁶ See *Metaphysics* 1028b34–1029a3.

¹⁷ This discussion takes place primarily in books 3 and 4 of the *Metaphysics*.

the human soul that has no direct bearing on embodied subjectivity or on progress in the ascetic struggle. I contend, therefore, that for Maximos all practices (in effect, Maximos subtly included the reading of texts with a specific disposition as part of these practices) were irretrievably ethical, that is, habituating, and accordingly morally-charged. If so, the most quotidian of deeds have micro-level morally-formative force for human subjectivity.

The solution that Maximos proposes is to transcend, to the degree that it is possible, the very process of deliberation through Christomimesis; virtue, needless to say, is intrinsic to this process. In the Confessor's aretological articulations, Christ is in effect the *ousia* of the virtues, that is the embodied, active performance of the divine life in the willing human subject. Christ becomes flesh in the virtuous human subject, while the human subject, through Christification, is exalted to deification. Scholars, nonetheless, have drubbed this position because it is predicated on the denial of Christ's deliberative or *gnomic* will. Some have pointed to the soteriological problematic such a position raises, particularly in light of Gregory of Nazianzos' oft-quoted aphorism in his *Letter to Kledonios* "what is not assumed is not healed."

Chapter four challenges the validity of these objections to Maximos' Christology by demonstrating their incomplete grasp of the ascetic intellectual's anthropology and, again, Aristotelian ontology. The *gnomic* will is not a universal human predicate, but refers to a dynamic, ongoing, and incessant manner of use of the existential resources of psychosomatic being. In other words, there are no two identical or even similar *gnomic* wills, even if the abstraction of this descriptive principle (i.e., *gnomic* will) for the purposes of analysis may lead to the belief that it is in fact a constitutive aspect of human nature. Thus, it is as ontologically incoherent to suppose that Christ could "assume" a *gnomic* will as it is for him to assume one, and only one, *human* hypostasis. Rather, Christ's natural will (that is, the opposite of the *gnomic* will) is the model for the believer's Christification through *mimesis Christou*, but of a particular sort: the complete surrender of the volitional faculties to the Father ("yet not as I will, but as you [will]," Mt 26:39; cf. Lk 22:42).

Thus, chapter four ends on a controversial note that only escalates in chapter five. Maximos himself anticipated the reader's skeptical response to his call for the radical transcendence of the will in an act of passive surrender to the divine. And yet, because the Confessor firmly holds that no potentiality of the human substance, when actualized, can accomplish deification, humans necessarily undergo God's activity in themselves for deification. A problem arises here. If humans can *do* nothing to attain deification and therefore deification is altogether a gracious divine gift that—Maximos makes it unambiguously clear in *Opuscule 1*—is not the result of aretological meritocracy, what is the object of ascetic struggle? In effect, does not Maximos here foreshadow Calvinistic doctrines or at a minimum vaguely echo Augustinian teachings (though he was almost certainly unaware of these latter)?

It is precisely at this crossroads that the Aristotelian subtext of Maximos' eschatology must be underscored. The Confessor articulates what I call the "paradox of active passivity," which I argue is modeled on a key concept that Aristotle develops in *On the Soul*. In this treatise, the Stagirite speaks of the elevation of a passive subject to the state of an active agent. For Maximos, this phrase can signify the operation of the divine in human subjects who have rendered themselves receptive (rather than averse) to the divine energy. While the divine energy is not naturally their own, by their virtuous self-constitution they have rendered themselves capable of receiving it in a way appropriate to themselves (*ἀναλογικῶς*).

This point is crucial. With this maneuver, Maximos affirms humanity's inviolable self-determination—a self-determination that even the divine does not transgress. Simultaneously, he validates the unique character of each and every individual and the concomitant uniqueness of each individual's experience of the divine. Some, based on their self-configuration through virtue, will be able to undergo the divine energy, allowing it to be active in themselves when it operates through the

channels their virtue has carved on the surface of their moral self. The grace of deification, accordingly, operates in a way consistent with and through hypostatic particularity, as defined by the moral course of one's life and actions, and not irrespective of it. In effect, Maximus identifies, qualifiedly, the divine and human activity in deification: it belongs to God by nature, but to the human by participation; just as the action of burning is intrinsic to fire, iron heated in the forge manifests the same attributes as the fire wherein it participates because it is susceptible to the flames.

Note: All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Wherever possible, I have transliterated Greek, Syriac, and Arabic names, but thoroughgoing consistency is impossible. Some names have become sufficiently sedimented in the English language that to transliterate them would make the figure unrecognizable. Thus, Aristotle and not Aristoteles, John the Evangelist and not Ioannes or Yuhannon, Cappadocia and not Kappadokia, Constantinople and not Kontantinoupolis. Some names, however, receive both Greek and Latin spelling, and wherever possible, I have favored the original. Thus, Maximus and not Maximus, Nazianzos and not Nazianzus, Georgios Gemistos Plethon and not George Gemisthus Pletho. Perhaps a future project may be envisioned where non-Latin figures are again called by their own names and not those that their self-proclaimed heirs gave them as part of a larger scheme of cultural plundering and hierarchization, but sufficient battles lie ahead; this one must be fought a different day.

PART ONE: MAXIMOS' HISTORICAL-SOCIAL AND PERSONAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER ONE

SPECTERS OF ARISTOTLE: CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ARISTOTLE'S PHILOSOPHY

In critical vocabulary, the word precursor is indispensable, but one ought to attempt to purify it from any polemical or rivalrous connotation. The fact is that every writer creates his precursors. His labor modifies our conception of the past, as he is to modify that of the future. In this correlation, the identity or plurality of men does not matter.

—Jorge Luis Borges, “Kafka y sus precusores”

The works which philosophers of our time addressed to her bear witness to her love of learning, works concerning those writings of Aristotle on which commentaries had not been written until her time, but the explanation of which was transmitted orally in every kind of form . . .

—Georgios Tornikes, *Funerary Oration on Anna Komnene*

Introduction

On February 22, 1632¹⁸ the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando II de' Medici received the first printed copy of the *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo* (*A Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*) from his “most humble and devoted servant and vassal Galileo Galilei,”¹⁹ which set the Florentine’s tête-à-tête with ecclesiastical authorities in motion. The *Dialogo* compares the merits of the Copernican and Ptolemaic systems over the course of a four-day dispute arbitrated by a presumably neutral observer, Sagredo, named after Galileo’s friend Giovanni Francesco Sagredo. The contenders are Salviati, a philosopher from the Accademia dei Lincei, who advocates for the Copernican system, and Simplicio, whom a scholar has perceptively dubbed a “diehard but intelligent Aristotelian”²⁰ and whose burden it is to defend the Ptolemaic system. What is noteworthy for our present objectives about Galileo’s portrayal of Simplicio as a “diehard Aristotelian,” is that the historical figure he represents, Simplicios of Kilikia (c. 490–560), was the last *Platonist* of late antiquity. How could Galileo make such a mistake? Perhaps we may attribute his confusion of philosophical allegiances and outlook to his historical distance from Simplicios, then dead for over a millennium. More likely, however, is that Galileo knew of no real and significant distinction between a late ancient “Platonist” and a late ancient “Aristotelian.” After all, this radical distinction rests, I will argue, on a fiction that lay at the heart of the invention of a modern western European intellectual identity.

¹⁸ Gindikin, *Tales of Physicists and Mathematicians*, 62.

¹⁹ Galilei, *Dialogo*, 4.

²⁰ Baltussen, *Philosophy and Exegesis*, 3.

The belief that Plato and Aristotle founded two diametrically opposed philosophies that remained opposed for over two millennia requires no interminable footnoting to be taken for granted. This belief pervades the modern academic study of classical, late ancient, medieval, and renaissance cultural productions to such a degree that we may speak of a socially-sedimented commonplace of western intellectual discourse that has achieved the rank of Pierre Bourdieu's well-known *habitus*. By the nineteenth century this commonplace was already well ensconced in western culture. For instance, the famed English poet and essayist Samuel Taylor Coleridge claimed—without eliciting a contemporary negative riposte—that “Schools of real philosophy there are but two,—best named by the arch-philosopher of each, namely, Plato and Aristotle. Every man capable of philosophy at all (and there are not many such) is a born Platonist or a born Aristotelian.”²¹ He explains further: “I do not think it possible that any one born an Aristotelian can become a Platonist; and I am sure no born Platonist can ever change into an Aristotelian.”²² Coleridge's words here are not only significant for us because they signal an entrenched division that seemingly was taken for granted; his words are also noteworthy because they resort, with no apparent reason, to a biological metaphor to express the firmness or fixity of this dichotomy. One is “born” either a Platonist or an Aristotelian, just as much as one is born European or non-European. The metaphor may seem inane enough, particularly because contemporary culture has taken great strides in reclaiming “birth-as-x” as a symbol of empowerment and normalization of historically marginalized groups (e.g., in queer theory). Needless to say, these imaginative possibilities are far from Coleridge. On the contrary, I take it he meant to evoke an unchanging status by recourse to terminology that would have readily echoed with his audience, that is, biological terminology. This deliberate semantic choice requires further exposition, which will be resumed in the first section of this chapter.

Arthur Herman has recently (and for a more popular audience), articulated the dichotomy known to Coleridge on a dramatic cosmic-history stage. The dialectic of opposition between Plato and Aristotle emerges in his aptly-titled book, *The Cave and the Light: Plato versus Aristotle and the Struggle for the Soul of Western Civilization*. Toward the beginning of his work, he introduces the golden thread that weaves the study together: “For the next two thousand years Aristotle would become the father of modern science, logic, and technology. Plato, by contrast, is the spokesman for the theologian, the mystic, the poet, and the artist One shaped the contours of Christianity; the other, the ideas of the Enlightenment One inspired Europe to lift itself out of the Dark Ages; the other inspired the greatest artistic works of the Renaissance.”²³ He continues: “Seen in this light, the West's greatest thinkers, theologians, scientists, artists, writers, and even politicians have found themselves arrayed on one side or the other in a twenty-four-centuries-old battle between the ideas of Plato and Aristotle and the two paths to wisdom they represent.”²⁴ While this sweeping portrayal of the philosopher's role in western history can be disputed, what is again salient for us is Herman's metonymizing of Plato and Aristotle into dueling philosophical “sides” from whose (presumably autochthonous) discourse western intellectual civilization was birthed. Let us be unequivocal about what has happened here: like Coleridge, Herman has inhabited and colonized a foreign space with a hegemonic narrative that not only “Occidentalizes” history by tracing what is a fictive and teleological line between the Eleatics and the unavoidable outcome of western Enlightenment modernity, but implicitly “otherizes” and thus

²¹ Coleridge, “Notes on Hooker,” 33.

²² Coleridge, “Notes on Hooker,” 33 (see note of editor).

²³ Herman, *The Cave and the Light*, 6.

²⁴ Herman, *The Cave and the Light*, 14.

displaces from the arc of intellectual history those very thinkers whose agency made western European modernity possible. Perhaps this assessment is too harsh for a popular piece, but it is precisely the popular nature of the piece that makes it all the more nefarious.

The prejudices we have presented in sketch form above have palpably determined late ancient historiography and especially the reception of the classical and Hellenistic traditions by Grecophone Christians. We cannot consider all instances, but only that which is most relevant to our study. For that reason, we will attempt indirectly to detect the spectral presence of the aforementioned prejudices by looking to the systemic (conscious or unconscious) omission of early Christians' imaginative possibilities as they relate to Plato, Aristotle, and their mutual relationship. It appears that one of the most enduring assumptions in this regard is twofold: first, scholars of late ancient Christianity largely take for granted the irreconcilable nature of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophical projects; second, the scarcity of self-designated "Aristotelians" during late antiquity is taken as persuasive evidence that Peripatetic philosophy was negligible in the formation of a Christian intellectual identity. Even the few Christians who do express doxographic knowledge of Aristotle's works and figure express their criticism, dissatisfaction, or outright reject him altogether. George Karamanolis has recently, and with some misgivings, summed up the bulk of scholarship that paints precisely this picture: "early Christian thinkers (second to fourth century) were as a rule critical or even hostile to Aristotle. Unlike Plato, who is often strongly praised and frequently quoted by early Christians, Aristotle is rarely mentioned or cited, and when this happens, it usually serves a polemical aim: either Aristotle is taken to task for views that are considered to be at odds with the relevant Christian ones—mainly his views on the soul, providence, cosmology, or the contribution of external goods to happiness—or a Christian thinker is criticized for heresy, being charged with following Aristotle's doctrines."²⁵

Karamanolis grants that this description undoubtedly fits some early Christian authors, especially Tatianos the Assyrian and Eusebios of Caesarea, but suggests that it misrepresents the complexities at stake in the interplay of ideas during late antiquity. For example, he argues that Eusebios forcefully promoted the radical opposition between Plato and Aristotle as part of his larger project of anti-Hellenic propaganda.²⁶ By contrast, he demonstrates that thinkers like Clement of Alexandria, Nemesios of Emesa, and the Cappadocian brothers used Aristotle's philosophy in significant ways.²⁷ On Karamanolis' analysis, then, it is inaccurate to speak of a monolithic Christian reception of Aristotle's thought in late antiquity.

The bulk of scholarship on late ancient Christianity, however, has replicated the position that the Stagirite's philosophy was virtually inconsequential for Christians in this time frame. This tendency can be appreciated in the following examples. Gustave Bardy, following a thesis initially proposed by Jacques-François Denis in 1884, claimed that: "Origen will adopt more than anything, with regard to Aristotle, an attitude of defiance; he is not, in any case, familiar with his thought and he never regards him as his inspirer."²⁸ Henri Crouzel, Owen Chadwick, and Panayiotis Tzamalikos have followed this assessment without any substantial contradictions or corrections.²⁹ Eugène De Faye and Hal Koch,

²⁵ Karamanolis, "Early Christian Philosophers on Aristotle," in Falcon, ed., 460–1.

²⁶ Karamanolis, "Early Christian Philosophers on Aristotle," 462.

²⁷ Karamanolis, "Early Christian Philosophers on Aristotle," 464–470, 475–477.

²⁸ Bardy, *Origène*, 83. See Denis, *De la Philosophie d'Origène*, 16.

²⁹ See Crouzel, *Origène*, 208. See for a more expanded version *Origène et la Philosophie*. While Crouzel is correct in pointing out some of the aspects of Aristotelian philosophy that Origen rejects, not only does this presuppose that Origen is to that extent familiar with his philosophy, but Crouzel also overlooks rather positive mentions about other Aristotelian

perhaps milder in their dismissal of Aristotle, still deem his relevance for Origen to have been marginal, and indirect at that.³⁰ Other philosophically-minded early Christians like Gregory of Nyssa have likewise been approached without much attention for the various ways in which Aristotle may have informed his thought. For instance, Hans Boersma has recently sought to elucidate Gregory's theology of embodiment and virtue through ample references to both Platonic and Stoic philosophy; Aristotle's relevance for the monograph, however, is constrained to a single passing mention in a footnote.³¹ Boersma's approach is squarely situated in the interpretative tradition of Gregory's work promoted by Harold Cherniss' landmark monograph, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (1930).³² The few who have argued for the relevance of Aristotle's thought for the Nyssen—in particular for his dialectic, anthropology, and moral psychology—remain marginal and frequently unacknowledged voices.³³

The case of Maximos the Confessor is perhaps unique in the scholarship of Greek late antiquity, for at least four distinct interpretative “traditions” of his work have formed in the course of the past seventy years. In his entry on classical influences on Maximos' thought in the *Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, Marius Portaru classes these scholarly traditions as being of 1) an Aristotelian, 2) a (Neo)Platonic, 3) an Orthodox Christian, and 4) a philological persuasion. The first tradition has promoted the view that Maximos' cosmological framework is primarily Aristotelian and that his corpus can be meaningfully elucidated by recourse to the Stagirite's works.³⁴ This tradition, however, has been amply criticized by highly-regarded Maximian scholars, most notably Irénée Hausherr and Jean-Claude Larchet.³⁵ These two scholars have challenged what they consider an anachronistic, Neothomistic interpretation of Maximos' work that shares more commonalities with the Aristotle of the Latin Scholastics than with the learned monastic context of a seventh-century Roman. As a result, promoting Aristotle's relevance for Maximos' thought has become riskily associated with this cadre of scholars and their methodological pitfalls.

By contrast, other scholars have championed what Portaru refers to as a framework “of a neo-Platonic nature.”³⁶ What is curious about this tradition is that it inexplicably assumes that it must come *at the expense of* hermeneutical sensitivity for Aristotelian resonances in the Confessor's oeuvre. That is, one must *choose* whether to read Maximos as an “Aristotelian” or a “Neoplatonist.” This line of thought was promoted by Walther Völker (1964) and on Portaru's assessment has since been “decisively confirmed and developed by a great number of scholars.”³⁷ I find Portaru's assessment accurate—and

doctrines, especially noting that Aristotelianism corresponds to human needs and rationally accepts the value of good things in life more than any other system of philosophy.

Compare to *Treatise against Kelsos*, 1.10, pp. 102.18–104.20. See also Chadwick, “Origen,” 83–102, where Chadwick does not mention the Aristotelian elements at play in Origen's defense of the resurrection.

Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, 339.

³⁰ De Faye, *Origène*, 87; Koch, *Pronoia und Paidensis*, 205.

³¹ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 172.

³² E.g., Apostolopoulos, *Phaedo Christianus*; Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*; Konstantinou, *Die Tugendlehre*; Radde-Gallwitz, “Gregory of Nyssa on the Reciprocity of the Virtues,” 537–552; Siniosoglou, “*Plato Christianus*,” in Hummel; Ullmann, “Der logische und der theologische Sinn,” 150–171.

³³ See Zachhuber, *Human Nature*; Smith, *Passion and Paradise*; Salés, “*Can These Bones Live?*”

³⁴ E.g., von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie* and 2nd ed. *Kosmische Liturgie*; Doucet, “Vues récentes,” 267–302; Garrigues, “L'Énergie divine,” 272–296 and *Maxime le Confesseur*; Léthel, *Théologie de l'agonie du Christ*; Lévy, *Le Créé et l'incréé*; Piret, *Le Christ et la Trinité*; Prado, *Voluntad y naturaleza*; Renczes, *Agir de Dieu*; Riou, *Le monde et l'église*; Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*.

³⁵ See Hausherr, *Philautie*, 140–141; Larchet, *La divinisation*, 482–488, as well as his reviews of Renczes (2003) and Lévy (2006) in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 100/1 (2005), 185–187 and 103 (2008), 967–976.

³⁶ Portaru, “Classical Philosophical Influences: Aristotle and Plato,” in *OHMC* 133.

³⁷ Portaru, “Classical Philosophical Influences,” 133.

for that, unsettling.³⁸ The third and fourth interpretative traditions offer what Portaru defines as “theologically and philosophically neutral research” and a “balanced attitude to the details of his interaction with classical philosophers,” respectively.³⁹ Portaru himself espouses the view that a Platonic framework “is essentially helpful in giving an intellectual account of much, but surely not all, Christian thinking,” including Maximos’ own work.⁴⁰ So, it is hardly surprising that he closed his entry on Maximos’ use of classical sources thus: “I conclude that we cannot speak of any direct and significant influence of Aristotle on Maximus.”⁴¹

A general picture of scholarly assessments of Aristotle’s relevance for late ancient Greek Christians emerges from these examples. In their view, these Christian intellectuals chose the philosophy of Plato and his acolytes at the expense of Aristotle’s. They were either unfamiliar with the Peripatetic corpus and therefore did not appropriate it for their theological projects, or they were openly hostile to the Stagirite and treated with contumely those who viewed him positively. By contrast, Plato and “Neoplatonism” were ubiquitous in the intellectual culture of late antiquity and largely congenial to Christian intellectual goals. That the bulk of scholarship is inclined to interpret this time period in ways largely consistent with this characterization is, I take it, a well-known fact. In this regard Maximos’ specific case is unusual, since a cadre of scholars has advocated for Aristotle’s significance for his theological apparatus in the interest of casting him as a proto-Thomist. And while I concur with Hausherr and Larchet that this interpretative tradition is anachronistic, it is nonetheless noteworthy that Maximos’ writings would attract the attention of these scholars when other early Greek Christians did not.

This chapter is concerned with challenging the two-step assumptions overviewed above: that Plato and Aristotle represented opposed philosophical systems and that the latter had become negligible in late antiquity, particularly for Christians. The complexity of this objective calls for an interdisciplinary approach that avails itself of post- and decolonial theory, comparative philological analysis, and quantitative data analysis of digital humanities resources. This approach will allow us to outline the imaginative limits of the Confessor’s inherited interpretative traditions of classical sources in the interest of comprehending his intellectual milieu better. At present, it is difficult to know with precision the operative limits of his terminology, in part, I would propose, because the above-mentioned assumptions have veiled and distorted a remarkably complex cross-pollination of philosophical and theological ideas between Christians and non-Christians. For these reasons, this chapter argues that Maximos’ intellectual milieu should be reassessed in light of the following two claims that respond to each of the assumptions named above: first, that the pre-modern evidence for a radical opposition between Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy is surprisingly sparse, and second, that late antiquity—and especially the generation immediately before Maximos—was the single most productive pre-modern period of research on Aristotle in Greek.

1. Philosophical Essentialism, Intellectual Hybridity, and the Invention of Neoplatonism

³⁸ See, e.g., Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*; De Angelis, *Natura, persona, liberta*; Mondin, *L'uomo*; Kattan, *Verlieblichung und Synergie*; Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*; Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ*; Granados García, “Seréis como dioses,” 105–155; Zañartu, “Las naturalezas,” 21–55; Völker, *Maximus Confessor*; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*; Dalmais, “L’anthropologie spirituelle de saint Maxime le Confesseur,” 202–211, “L’oeuvre spirituelle de saint Maxime le Confesseur,” and “La doctrine ascétique,” 17–39; Savvidis, *Die Lehre*; Perl, “Methexis”; Jili, “The Doctrine of Theosis.”

³⁹ Portaru, “Classical Philosophical Influences,” 133.

⁴⁰ Portaru, “Classical Philosophical Influences,” 133.

⁴¹ Marius Portaru, “Classical Philosophical Influences: Aristotle and Plato,” in *OHMC* 144.

Coleridge's transposition of biological language to philosophical schools is symptomatic of a wider and largely unexamined phenomenon in western European historiography of late ancient philosophy. As we will see in brief, Coleridge's application of biological categories to intellectual history is neither an isolated nor an innocent instance. Rather, a cursory glance at nineteenth-century western European scholars of this philosophical time frame reveals an alarmingly high incidence of terminology otherwise found in legal and political documents regulating ethnic and cultural mixture in the context of colonial relations beyond the European mainland. Of course, this terminology had to be applied analogically and metaphorically, but this measure only complicates our task of identifying the colonial dimensions of this discourse and its impact on later scholarship. The result of the sustained application of what is at core colonial terminology to late ancient philosophy was the invention of a purportedly monolithic school of thought called "Neoplatonism" that never in fact existed. To be clear, I am contending that the western European invention of Neoplatonism in the nineteenth century was founded on colonial discursive strategies that determined the subsequent study of late ancient philosophies.

Recent scholarly trends in medieval Roman studies, and in eastern Christian studies more generally, have resorted to postcolonial analysis to expose historiographical assumptions about the non-western other.⁴² I find this welcome turn of events illuminating, particularly as it has uncovered an extension of colonial-era presuppositions about the "oriental" in historical and cultural studies of the Christian east, which have in turn yielded problematic portrayals of this geographical spread. Broadly, this section is a continuation of this trend, with the significant difference that it primarily draws on Hispanic postcolonial theorists that remain little known in western European and Anglo-American circles of early Christian studies, though we should note that they are often complementary to their Afro-Caribbean, Asian, and African counterparts and share similar concerns. The purpose of appealing to these theorists is to expose two specific colonial strategies that undergirded the invention of Neoplatonism: first, Orientalizing and Occidentalizing discourse, and, second, hybridity. To be more precise, I am especially concerned here with understanding the interpenetration of these two strategies in nineteenth-century western European scholarly representations of Neoplatonism. It appears to me that Orientalizing, Occidentalizing, and hybridity discourses functioned in parallel to create Neoplatonism; the two were never far from each other.

The first of these terms, "Orientalism," is commonly associated with the work of Edward Said by the same name; as is well known, other scholars subsequently developed the various dimensions of this discourse, including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. In *Orientalism*, Said broadly contends that western European representations of Orient were less a descriptive exercise of the cultures of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa than they were European political stratagems aimed at justifying the domination of ostensibly "inferior" peoples. Said's analysis is not constrained to academic discussions; it includes, for instance, a revealing critique of Joseph Conrad's literary work and thus points to a multidimensional cultural phenomenon. Although Said's work does not show knowledge of the earlier work of a number of Hispanic postcolonial (or proto-postcolonial) theorists, the similarity of his insights to theirs is striking and deserves attention, elsewhere, in its own right.

⁴² E.g., Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* and "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," 453–482; Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms," 917–931 and "Orientalist Variations," 1–15; Praver, *The Crusaders' Kingdom*; Johnson, "He Has Made the Dry Bones Live," 811–840; Henderson, "The Elephant in the Room," 125–135; Demacopoulos, "Croisades," 369–381; and Kaldellis, "Classical Scholarship," in Barber and Jenkins, 1–44.

The idea of a postcolonial condition and identity in Hispanic America began to be articulated rather early in the twentieth century and looked especially to economic and ethnic dimensions of colonialism. In this regard, one of the pioneering studies was Alfredo Colmo's *La revolución en la América Latina* (1933), which spoke specifically of either a "postcolonial" (*postcolonial*) or "independent" (*independiente*) conundrum for countries who had emancipated themselves from European powers, but especially from Spain.⁴³ In 1957, Leopoldo Zea published *América en la historia* (*America in History*, 1957), which went further than Colmo's work in that it explored discursive dimensions in the exercise of colonial power as both a mechanism of social control and a narrative of western European self-invention. In his study, the term "occidentalismo" is especially important. He uses it to describe a western European self-representative discourse that necessarily birthed its constitutive alterity, an alterity that it rapidly relegated to the margins.

In his analysis, it was altogether unsurprising that Latin America was consigned to the periphery;⁴⁴ what sparked his interest was the fact that Spain and Russia had ultimately been excluded from this process as well, in what he considered a somewhat ironic inversion of Hegelian dialectic that played out the visions of Marx and Engels in non-western-European European margins.⁴⁵ What matters about his study for us is that he posits the idea that Occidentalism functions by eliminating the "other" from what he calls the "presente de la historia" (present of history);⁴⁶ that is, Occidentalism makes itself possible by precluding the non-European other from a Hegelian self-realization in history to which the "Occidental" alone has access. The other is thus not just marginalized from history, but has no history, *is not* history, except inasmuch as it represents, mimics, or conforms to the Occidental by becoming it in order to attain historical being.

Santiago Gómez-Castro, who developed much of Zea's thought, elucidates this idea further in claiming that "The co-existence of diverse ways of producing and transmitting knowledge is eliminated because now all forms of human knowledge are ordered on an epistemological scale from the traditional to the modern, from barbarism to civilization, from the community to the individual, from the orient to occident . . . By way of this strategy . . . Europe acquires an epistemological hegemony over all other cultures of the world."⁴⁷ At the root of Castro-Gómez' observation is again Zea's concept of the "presente de la historia"; in Castro-Gómez' hands, this historical present takes on an additional dimension, since it does not just refer to the "present moment," so to speak, but rather, to the historical validity of a specific historical present that pretends it is not a historical present at all. He calls this idea "la hybris del punto cero," (the hubris of point zero): it is a fallacious abstraction from history that dehistoricizes and absolutizes itself by concealing its situationality and by "de-presenting" (*depresentar*) its point of view as no point of view at all. In short, it is a perspective pretending ontological and epistemological totality that glosses over its historical insufficiency through the suppression of its constitutive other.

This discourse of suppression was inseparable from the invention of racial purity and hybridity in a Hispanic colonial setting. After all, there must have been a way to regulate bodies according to specific parameters of social control. In Hispanic America, racial hybridity—or *mestizaje*—functioned as this tool of political, ideological, and identity disenfranchisement. In Colonial America, only *criollos*

⁴³ Colmo, *La revolución en la América Latina*, 244 and 307.

⁴⁴ See *América en la historia*, chapter 1, section 2, "América al margen de la historia."

⁴⁵ See *América en la historia*, chapters 5 and 6, "Rusia al margen de Occidente" and "España al margen de Occidente."

⁴⁶ See especially chapter 1, section 4 "América como utopía" for his elaboration of this concept.

⁴⁷ Gómez-Castro, *La hybris del punto cero*, 433.

and *peninsulares* (i.e., Spaniards born in America or in the Iberian Peninsula) could enjoy the full benefit of the law, including, especially, inheritance rights to property and titles. The remainder of the population was virtually reduced to legal or functional slavery through the system known as *encomiendas*. Accordingly, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, the priest who led the first independentist overture on September 15th/16th, 1810, abolished slavery in December of the same year and this measure remained at the forefront of every Mexican revised constitution since (1824, 1857, 1917). What was accomplished by law, however, could not so easily be shaken from the psychological constitution of the Mexican people. The problem of hybridity and race preoccupied twentieth century Mexican theorists, including José Vasconcelos (1882–1959), Samuel Ramos (1897–1959), Octavio Paz (1914–1998), and numerous others.

This latter in particular explored the psychological dimensions of coloniality in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) by analyzing the significance of an imposed biological hybridity founded on the systematic rape of the Mexican peoples between 1519 and 1810 and, just as important, on the social discourse that accompanied it. Especially important is his finding that biological hybridity is inextricably linked to a colonizing narrative of what Zea would later call an Occidentalizing nature. The objective of this narrative is to equate biological bodies of a certain type with a historical trajectory to which a “pure” body allows an access that is barred to those who are “mixed.” In this way, bodies can be narrativized into a historical trajectory through a mixed metaphor. Hybrids are not part of the unfolding Hegelian dialectic that undergirds history *simpliciter*, that is, they are not part of Occidentalism and thus, *are not history* at all. Here we see the function that the Occidentalist narrative has in the erasure of bodies from a history that pretends it is History, Hegel’s Absolute Spirit.

The foregoing findings allow us to discover a series of colonial prejudices and assumptions at work in nineteenth century historiography of late antiquity, particularly as concerns the invention of so-called “Neoplatonism.” Let us be clear: Neoplatonism never existed—or, what is more precise to say, Neoplatonism only began to exist at some point over the course of the nineteenth century as a discursive category that served colonial purposes in the invention of an Occidental identity.⁴⁸ It is curious, as we will see below, that Spanish and Russian historians were marginal during this time to the Occidentalist discourse that western European scholars infused into late antiquity.

In this regard, Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann’s *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1820) may be accounted one of the most influential texts, as it was also translated into English, Italian, and French and was widely known and cited by nineteenth-century scholars as far as Russia. Tennemann’s definition of Neoplatonism ensconces the prevalently negative attitude toward it that characterizes modern scholarship. In his words, Neoplatonism (*der neue Platonismus*) is “1) The decline of the true (*ächt*) Greek spirit, and the increasingly greater fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of the same with the oriental, 2) the growing orient-like tendency (*Hang*) toward rapture (*Schwärmerei*) under the pretext of divine revelation and the depreciation of Plato.”⁴⁹

The Marburg scholar’s word choice implies a series of culturalist and essentialist assumptions that pervaded his context. The *essential* character of this “Neoplatonism” is a hybrid of a decadent Greek

⁴⁸ E.g., Carus, *Nachgelassene Werke*, 268; Friedrich, *Grundriß einer Geschichte der Philosophie*, 190 and *Grundriß der Philologie*, 534; Tennemann, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 157; Chinchilla, *Anales históricos*, 21, 29, 33, 54; de Ráulica, *La razón filosófica*, 323; Díaz, *Historia de la literatura griega*, 296; Jourdain, *Nociones de filosofía*, 315–317; Gérando, *Histoire comparée*, 267; Hartpole Lecky, *History of European Morals*, 345–349; Zotov and Toll, *Настольный словарь*, 720; Polisadov, “Христианство и Неоплатонизм,” 81–118 and 179–277, here 226, 258.

⁴⁹ Tennemann, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 189–190.

spirit mixed with the inferior, superstitious, and seemingly irrational spirit of an unspecified Orient. One of Tennemann's most notable, albeit remarkably subtle, moves in this passage is to transpose physical language into what is by any of his contemporary definitions immaterial. One may ask: how do "spirits" (which are immaterial) "fuse" (an action that by definition implies the melting and mixture of two physical elements)? Tennemann has—ironically, given his cultural presuppositions about purity—mixed metaphors. These mixed metaphors, however, are a mechanism that bridges the (purportedly) physical dimensions of racial discourse with the conceptual dimensions of intellectual discourse, partly, as it serves an Occidentalizing discourse. In this way, he can cast Neoplatonism as a form of "intellectual hybrid" that like a "racial hybrid" is irreducibly inferior to the purer (i.e., European) form from which it degenerated by mingling with a lesser breed. His use of terms like "true" (*ächt*), "fusion" (*Verschmelzung*), and "rapture" (*Schwärmerei*) reflect exactly such assumptions. In particular, *Verschmelzung* and *Schwärmerei* are tellingly harsh terms: the prefix *ver-* often denotes a quality of corruption, diminishment, or movement away from the original possession or state (e.g., *Verfälschung*, *verwirren*, *verführen*, *vergessen*, *verkaufen*, *verformen*), while the standard German deprecatory ending *-erei* shows his condescension for the philosophical enterprise he describes here.

Tennemann's assessment was far from marginal. A few years later, Georg Ast underscored the familiar distinction between (Neo-)Platonism and Peripatetic thought, while implicitly endorsing Tennemann's juxtaposition of European rationalism against Oriental emotionalism. He writes: "Besides Neoplatonism, and in part as opposition, the sober Peripatetic philosophy preserved itself in its purity (*Reinheit*)."⁵⁰ Elements at work in Tennemann's *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie* emerge here again: Aristotelian thought is clearly demarcated as a "sober" (*nüchterne*) form of philosophy—and antithetical to (Neo-)Platonism; it is, on Ast's assessment, its sobriety that preserves its "purity" (*Reinheit*), a purity that presumably lends it its European character. Like Tennemann before him, Ast dismisses Neoplatonism as "bare mysticism" (*blosse Mystik*), which Ammonios Sakkas "transformed" (*umbildete*) when he "imported" (*übertrug*) "Mysticism as an oriental absorption (*Versunkenheit*) and enthusiasm into Greek philosophy."⁵¹ Ast's analysis consistently contrasts the sobriety or rationality of Aristotelian thought with the rapturous and emotional traits of an Orientalized Platonism.

The work of Friedrich August Carus also attests to this widespread attitude toward Neoplatonism and its lack of European purity due to the hybridity of its character. The section in his *Nachgelassene Werke: Geschichte der Psychologie* dedicated to late ancient philosophy goes by the telling title: "From Plato to Orientalism in European Philosophy or From the Original (*ursprünglichen*) and Pure (*reinen*) Platonism to the So-Called Neoplatonism." Like the two scholarly assessments already overviewed above, Carus here likewise contrasts an original and pure form of European, Platonic philosophy, with an Orientalized form of it that he manifestly holds in low esteem. His unflattering views of Neoplatonism in this section and elsewhere visibly stem from the intellectual hybridity he implicitly attributes to it.⁵²

A similar attitude pervaded scholarly assessments of "Neoplatonism" across western Europe. For instance, the Italian scholar Giovanni Campiglio, who was familiar with Tennemann's work,⁵³ likewise derided Neoplatonism as a philosophy that Plotinos "definitely founded on mysticism" (*la fondò definitivamente sul misticismo*)⁵⁴ and which Proklos united with "the most credulous superstition" (*la più*

⁵⁰ Ast, *Grundriß der Philologie*, 532.

⁵¹ Ast, *Grundriß der Philologie*, 531.

⁵² See Carus, *Nachgelassene Werke*, 372.

⁵³ Campiglio, *Storia dei progressi*, 8 and 48.

⁵⁴ Campiglio, *Storia dei progressi*, 152.

credula superstizione).⁵⁵ In this same work, he traced the transmission of Aristotle’s philosophy into the Arabic-speaking world and poignantly claimed that: “They [Arabs] did not so much as (*neppure*) know this philosopher [Aristotle]; for they received the corpus of his works through the fallacious (*fallace*) intermediary of Neoplatonism, and in inexact translations. Therefore, their Aristotle was an Aristotle, so to speak, reconciled with Plato, who must have pleased them, fomenting their natural disposition to contemplation and enthusiasm.”⁵⁶ Like the German scholars previously overviewed, Campiglio’s work demonstrates a set of recurring characteristics. Neoplatonism, in his analysis, is a degraded form of philosophy that has lost its original Platonic character. As he sees it, the influx of oriental credulities has not only hybridized its nature, but, indeed, has for that very reason precluded it from any significant role in the transmission of Aristotle’s philosophy. That is, Neoplatonism loses its role in Occidental history, a legacy that we can appreciate when reviewing most “introduction to the history of philosophy” courses in the west. Campiglio clearly thinks little of the idea of reconciling Plato and Aristotle, which again suggests his aversion to hybridity and reinforces the idea that their philosophies are diametrically opposed. This much is clear when he refers to “their Aristotle,” virtually, it would seem, as though he were a fiction. Finally, we should note his attribution of a “natural disposition” (*naturale disposizione*) to “contemplation” and “enthusiasm” to the Arab people: these stereotypes echo the prejudices already identified in the work of the German scholars overviewed above. Let us note that Campiglio’s views are not an isolated instance in nineteenth-century Italian scholarly attitudes to this subject matter.⁵⁷

Further instances of nineteenth-century scholarship on Neoplatonism could be examined in detail, but a clear pattern emerges from the cases thus far considered: they jettison the “purity” and rationality of the European against the irrational hybridity of Neoplatonism, whose chief fault is to have allowed an (often unelaborated—and likely imagined) Oriental character into its intellectual formation. It bears mentioning that these scholars either entirely elided or downplayed the fact, already recognized by late ancient Platonists like Porphyrios,⁵⁸ that Aristotle was regarded as the most valuable interpreter of Plato and an inseparable part of the late Platonic curriculum. It is tempting to attribute this significant omission to an effort to dissociate Aristotle—widely recognized as the father of western European rationalism—from Neoplatonism, tarnished, as it ostensibly was, by its hybrid nature and “emotionalism.” And yet, there existed contemporaneous alternatives in formulating Neoplatonism’s relationship to ideals beyond the Greco-Roman pale that veered away from colonial discourse. In this regard, Russian treatments of Neoplatonism point to a different socio-cultural frame of reference. Indeed, perhaps their most salient feature is their insistence on the Greek character of Neoplatonic philosophy, even while recognizing the impact that eastern ideas had on it. In this, Russian scholars staked their own counterclaims to the right of inheriting Classical antiquity through their Orthodox identity, which they associated with the medieval Roman Empire, of which they believed they were the direct descendants.

For example, Vasilii Polisadov explained that: “Without Alexandrian philosophy [i.e., Alexandrian Neoplatonism], Greek philosophy would have been nothing but a book without an ending.

⁵⁵ Campiglio, *Storia dei progressi*, 157.

⁵⁶ G. Campiglio, *Storia dei progressi*, 183.

⁵⁷ E.g., Dandolo, “Neoplatonismo,” 334–344; Mastropasqua, “Corso di Letteratura Greca e Latina,” 364–387; Bobba, *Storia della filosofia*, 71–76.

⁵⁸ Porphyrios writes about his teacher, Plotinos: Ἐμμέμκται δ’ ἐν τοῖς συγγράμμασι καὶ τὰ Στωικὰ λανθάνοντα δόγματα καὶ τὰ Περιπατητικὰ. *Vita Plotinii*, 14.4.

Neoplatonism (Неоплатонизмъ) was the last and indeed the closing word (послѣднимъ и при томъ окончательнымъ словомъ) of the philosophical works of Thales, Анахагорас, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and Zeno. Even if it [Alexandrian philosophy] was animated with a new spirit, even if the influence of the east (Востока) and the times . . . vigorously impacted its teachings (могущественно коснулось ея учений), it was nonetheless (тѣмъ не менѣе) Greek philosophy.”⁵⁹ In his description, Polissadov differs from the foregoing western European assessments of Neoplatonism in two meaningful regards and perhaps in opposition to Tennemann’s and other Europeans’ theses, with which he, too, was acquainted.⁶⁰ First, although he defends a predictable “Greek essentialism” of Neoplatonism, he nevertheless regards this last stage of Greek philosophy as an uninterrupted continuation of the Eleatic and Attic forebears. Second, while he acknowledges that some eastern ideas made their way into Neoplatonic thought, he employs no recognizable biological language to do so (e.g., коснулось—impacted, touched) and decidedly did not consider this influx to have altered the intellectual value or Greek integrity of Neoplatonic philosophy as his western European counterparts had. He does not use the western colonial term “Orientalism” (ориентализмъ) to contextualize Neoplatonism, but opts, instead, to employ the relatively neutral Russian term восток (east).

For our objective in this chapter, the western European trends overviewed above hint at three important points. First, Aristotle seems to have been largely precluded from careful consideration in the intellectual formation of Neoplatonism and, by extension, from that of early Christianity. Second, the modern scholarly construction of Neoplatonism largely associates it with an “Oriental” character that infused the otherwise respectable philosophy of Plato with a tendency toward “enthusiasm” and “contemplation” that conferred upon it its “mystical” aspects. This philosophy, needless to say, was not “purely” European. Third, Neoplatonism was reified into a monolithic philosophical-mystical amalgamation that brushes over its significant points of internal difference, philosophical preferences, and varied hermeneutical strategies. While it would be unfair to characterize contemporary scholarship as unqualifiedly sharing these three early modern points, there are, *mutatis mutandis*, significant points of similarity and continuity between them. In what follows, we will examine and assess the first and third point in particular by turning to the last great philosophical debate that took place in the Roman Empire on the eve of the Italian Renaissance. The second point, I take it, is *prima facie* highly problematic and needs no extended elaboration here.

2. Plato and Aristotle at the Twilight of the Roman Empire

In 1439, the borders of the Roman Empire dangerously swayed under internal administrative inadequacies and external geopolitical machinations that were accentuated by the meeting of the fateful Unionist Council at Ferrara-Florence. That same year, Georgios Gemistos Plethon (ca. 1355–1454) delivered a series of highly controversial lectures in Florence that he published immediately thereafter under the title *On Aristotle’s Differences from Plato* (Περὶ ὧν Ἀριστοτέλης πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαφέρεται=*On Differences*).⁶¹ This work sparked the last major philosophical debate in the Empire. As

⁵⁹ V. Polissadov, “Христианство и Неоплатонизмъ,” 100.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., page 96, n. 28 for Tennemann; see also page 101, n. 32 for Vacherot.

⁶¹ For recent scholarship on Plethon, see Michalopoulos, “George Gemistos Pletho and his Legacy,” 448–459; Hladky, *The Philosophy of Gemistos Pletho*; Fink, “Pletho’s Criticism of Aristotle’s Virtues,” 483–497; Trovato, “Il giorno della morte

the title indicates, Plethon set out to underscore Aristotle's differences from his teacher, but his treatise was not an innocent exercise in comparative philosophical philology. Plethon was concerned with demonstrating Plato's superiority over Aristotle, as well as his greater congeniality with Christianity. Given the date of composition and his Florence lectures,⁶² it is difficult not to interpret it as a reactionary response to what he perceived to be a (Thomistic-Aristotelian) Latin encroachment on Greek theology. The upshot of this work was an exaggeration of Greek Christianity's indebtedness to the Academy as its idiosyncratically-differentiating characteristic. As such, Plethon may have been responsible for setting in motion the now common separation of the Christian confessional divide into "Latin Aristotelians" and "Greek Platonists," even if he himself could certainly not have foreseen this consequence.

Plethon's premises predictably struck the majority of his learned contemporaries as tendentious and problematic. Five years later, the future bishop of Ottoman-occupied Constantinople, Georgios Gennadios Scholarios (ca. 1400–1472), responded with *Against Plethon's Difficulties Regarding Aristotle* (Κατὰ τῶν Πλήθωνος ἀποριῶν ἐπ' Ἀριστοτέλει=*Against Plethon*).⁶³ In this rather involved reply, Scholarios challenged some of Plethon's central theses, but did his best to avoid conceding the validity of Plethon's sharp juxtaposition of Plato and Aristotle. A number of intellectuals joined the fray in the wake of Scholarios' *Against Plethon*: Matthaios Kamariotes, Theodoros Gazes, Andronikos Kallistos, and Georgios Trapezountios largely took Scholarios' side, while Plethon found some qualified support in his students Michael Apostoles and Cardinal Basilios Bessarion.⁶⁴

This dispute will be relevant for our purposes for several reasons. For one, it will put in sharp relief the striking dearth of sources in Greek that attested to the belief that Plato and Aristotle were as diametrically opposed as is now taken for granted. Also, it will show that even Plethon himself did not strictly espouse the foregoing view. Rather, Karamanolis has described his assessment of Aristotle in *On Differences* as "a degraded Platonist who preserves a confused picture of the Platonic heritage."⁶⁵ In other words, Plethon was not strictly arguing that Plato and Aristotle were the founders of two competing philosophical ideologies; rather, he held that the latter was simply a flawed *Platonist* exegete of his master's thought. But perhaps most importantly, this dispute exhibits the widespread consensus among late medieval Roman scholars (regardless of whether they preferred Aristotle or Plato) that Plato and Aristotle had promoted two largely congenial and often complementary philosophies.

di Pletone, 163–174; de Garay, "Reception of Proclus in Pletho and Ficino," in García-Gasco and González, 175–82; Mavroudi, "Pletho as Subversive," in Angelov and Saxby, 177–203; Monfasani, "Gemistos Pletho" in Brownlee and Gondicas, 19–34. Special thanks to Matt Briel for providing me with these sources.

⁶² See Siniossoglou, *Radical Platonism*, 6.

⁶³ For further reference see: Scholarios and the context of this dispute, see Benakis, "Ἡ παρουσία τοῦ Θωμᾶ Ἀκινάτη στό Βυζάντιο" in Demetrios 2002, 627–640; Buda, "Influsso del Tomismo a Bisanzio nel secolo XIV," 318–331; Delacroix-Besnier, "Conversions constantinopolitaines au XIVe siècle," 715–761, *Les Dominicains*, and "Manuel Calécas," 151–164 in Speet and Wirmer, 827–882. See also Eszer, "Giorgio-Gennadio Scholarios e S. Tommaso d'Aquino"; Karpozilos, "St. Thomas and the Byzantine East (De essentia et operatione)" 129–147; Livanos, *Greek Tradition*; Moutsopolous, "L'Hellénisation du Thomisme au XIVe siècle," 131–136 and "Thomisme et Aristotélisme à Byzance," 301–310; Papadopoulos, *Ἑλληνικαὶ μεταφράσεις θωμιστικῶν ἔργων* and "Thomas in Byzanz," 274–304; Podskalsky, "Die Rezeption der thomistischen Theologie," 305–323; van Rossum, "Palamism and Church Tradition." Special thanks to Matt Briel for providing me with these sources.

⁶⁴ For further reference see: Monfasani, *George of Trebizond and Papers on Rhetoric X*, Jerez, *Retórica y artes de memoria* and "Oratoria e historiografía in Iglesias Zoido, 175–198; Martin, *Subverting Aristotle*, especially 40–43; Vast, *Le cardinal Bessarion*.

⁶⁵ Karamanolis, "Plato and Aristotle," 260.

Scholarios' *Against Plethon* was meticulous enough to elicit a more carefully-studied argument from Plethon in his next philosophical round, *Against Scholarios*, penned some five years after Scholarios' riposte. This second work was intended to undermine Aristotle's credentials by divesting him from the elaborate Christian garb in which centuries of his Greek and Latin Christian interpreters had robed him. Ironically, Plethon's success in removing their interpretative fabric was a pyrrhic victory, for he simply substituted a positive Christian appraisal of Aristotle for a negative one, that of Eusebios of Caesarea, to be exact. It is possible that Plethon was already familiar with Eusebios' works before *Against Scholarios* (for example, the title of *On Differences* may be an indirect reference to a line in Eusebios that urges "let us observe in the mind in how many other things Aristotle differs from Plato"⁶⁶ and there are other minor similarities, such as a section on merology⁶⁷), but he seems to have availed himself of the Caesarean polemicist in earnest only as he crafted his reply to Scholarios.

Plethon scoured the textual evidence that could afford him arguments in favor of his position; he did not find much. All the evidence points to his indebtedness to Eusebios of Caesarea's *On the Preparation for the Gospel*, to which he must have had first-hand access. Numerous passages confirm this suspicion, such as this brief excerpt originally from Plato's *Timaios* 29d7–e3 that is reproduced in both texts:

Eusebios, <i>On the Preparation for the Gospel</i>	Plethon, <i>Against Scholarios</i>
Λέγωμεν δὴ δι' ἥντινα αἰτίαν γένεσιν καὶ τὸ πᾶν τόδε ὁ ξυριστὰς ξυνέστησεν. ἀγαθὸς ἦν· ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος. τούτου δὲ ἐκτὸς ὧν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ (11.21.2.3–6)	λέγωμεν δὴ δι' ἥν αἰτίαν γένεσιν καὶ τὸ πᾶν τόδε ὁ ξυριστὰς ξυνέστησεν. ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος· τούτου δ' ἐκτὸς ὧν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια αὐτῷ (10.55–59)

While both Eusebios and Plethon identify Plato as the source, both authors' versions minimally, but significantly, differ from those handed down in Plato's recensions. This excerpt can be found quoted only in a few other sources: the spurious *On Fate* attributed to Ploutarchos (573b11–c4), Theodoretos' *The Cure of Greek Maladies* (4.33.1–2), and Simplikios' *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* (CAG 9, 43:9–10; CAG 10, 1360:31–33). An orthographical difference in the texts has made the original source identifiable: Plato's *Timaios* reads: συριστὰς συνέστησεν; pseudo-Ploutarchos's and Simplikios' versions read: ξυριστὰς συνέστησεν; Theodoretos' version reads: ξυριστὰς ξυνεστήσατο. Only two extant versions in the Greek corpus read ξυριστὰς ξυνέστησεν: Eusebios' and Plethon's. While we could speculate further on the transmission history of these citations, it is only salient for our purposes to

⁶⁶ πρόσχωμεν τὸν νοῦν ἐν ὅσοις ἄλλοις διαφέρεσθαι τῷ Πλάτωνι τὸν Ἀριστοτέλην. Eusebios of Kaisareia, *On the Preparation for the Gospel*, 15.7.7.11–12.

⁶⁷ The possible similarity can be seen in this parallel comparison of the two texts:

Eusebios, <i>Apostolic Preaching</i> , 12.52.22.6	Plethon, <i>On Differences</i> , 3.35–36
μέρος μὴν ἕνεκα ὅλου καὶ οὐχὶ ὅλον μέρος ἕνεκα ἀπεργάζεται (. . . the part indeed is for the sake of the whole and the whole is not brought about for the sake of the part)	ἕως ἂν μὴ μέρος τοῦ ὅλου, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὅλον τοῦ μέρος μεῖζον ἢ (. . . lest the part be not greater than the whole, but the whole than the part)

note that Plethon must have copied this quote directly from an available version of Eusebios' text that had this specific—and, we must underline, unusual—spelling and only modified the passage slightly to fit his syntactical order and rhetorical flourishes. This passage is not an isolated instance, which indicates that Plethon was reading the Classical source material in tandem with the most influential Christian popularizer of Plato's and Aristotle's adversarial relationship, Eusebios of Caesarea.⁶⁸

Plethon's extensive, perhaps exclusive, reliance on Eusebios' text suggests that he only had access to a limited proverbial storehouse of anti-Aristotelian ammunition, which leads me to the following conclusions. First, previous instances where a Christian's intimate association with Aristotle resulted in ecclesiastical condemnation, such as the case of Ioannes Italos and Michael of Ephesos some four centuries prior, had not become part of Greek collective memory by the fifteenth century so that he could readily invoke it and thus bolster his claims. Second, the sources that promoted a radical distinction between Aristotle and Plato had either not survived or had not garnered the sustained attention that would have rendered them a curricular *topos* in philosophical training during the medieval Roman Empire. Indeed, it appears that exactly the opposite was true: the scholarly consensus as late as the fifteenth century—much to Plethon's and Apostoles' chagrin—was that Plato and Aristotle agreed on most matters and often complemented each other's ideas.

Scholarios had made precisely such a point in his *Against Plethon*, referring to “the ancients” (οἱ ἀρχαῖοι), such as Porphyrios, Syrianos, and Simplikios, as his witnesses to the fact that Plato and Aristotle were largely of one accord or otherwise supplemented each other's philosophical projects.⁶⁹ Indeed, he goes so far as to call into question Plethon's belief in a unified or monolithic tradition of “Platonists” (οἱ περὶ Πλάτωνα),⁷⁰ arguing that his adversary was advocating for a specific interpretation of Plato, namely, that of Proklos Diadochos.⁷¹ In his reply to Scholarios, Plethon tendentiously reported that it had been “Simplikios alone” (Σιμπλικίος μόνος) who believed that Aristotle and Plato agreed on most matters.⁷² Thus, to favor Aristotle over Plato was on Plethon's account a betrayal of the tradition of “the ancients.” “But,” as Karamanolis interjects, “such a claim is historically a gross oversimplification. Scholarios will justifiably point out that many ancients preferred Aristotle to Plato, like the Peripatetics, for instance, but, more significantly, that many Platonists in antiquity had a great respect for Aristotle Indeed, the majority of the Platonist commentators in late antiquity were devoted students of Aristotle, as they maintained that Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy are quite compatible and rather complementary.”⁷³ Karamanolis unambiguously concludes: “Simplicius was not an exception but rather a typical case among late ancient Platonists.”⁷⁴

The continuation of Plethon's mission fell to his student, Michael Apostoles. Scholarios' ally, Theodoros of Gazes, had written an examination and criticism of Plethon's exposition of οὐσία

⁶⁸ See e.g., *On the Preparation for the Gospel* 11.32.3.2–3/*Against Scholarios* 10.48–49; *On the Preparation for the Gospel* 12.27.4.4/*Against Scholarios* 27.39, 43; *On the Preparation for the Gospel* 15.12.1.4–15.12.2.1/*Against Scholarios* 31.75; *On the Preparation for the Gospel* 15.22.51.5 – 7/*Against Scholarios* 29.14–15, etc.

⁶⁹ See *Contra Plethonem*, 3.1–34. A case in point is Simplikios' *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*: “I think it is also necessary for one not to look only at the letter of those things uttered by Plato to determine a discord between the philosophers [i.e., Plato and Aristotle], but, looking at the sense (νοῦν), to seek their concord on most subjects.” (δεῖ δὲ οἶμαι καὶ τῶν πρὸς Πλάτωνα λεγομένων αὐτῷ μὴ πρὸς τὴν λέξιν ἀποβλέποντα μόνον διαφωνίαν τῶν φιλοσόφων καταψηφίζεσθαι, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸν νοῦν ἀφορῶντα τὴν ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις συμφωνίαν αὐτῶν ἀνιχνεύειν. In *Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, CAG 8, p. 7.29–32.)

⁷⁰ Georgios Gemistos Plethon, *Contra Scholarios* 26.60, 27.87, 29.88.

⁷¹ *Letter to the Princess of the Peloponnese*, *Opera* 4, p. 153.23–24. See Karamanolis, “Plethon and Scholarios,” 262.

⁷² *Contra Scholarios* 1.20–2.12.

⁷³ Karamanolis, “Plethon and Scholarios on Aristotle,” in Ierodiakonou, 261–262.

⁷⁴ Karamanolis, “Plethon and Scholarios on Aristotle,” in Ierodiakonou, 261–262.

(substance) in Aristotle by the title *In Reply to Plethon, On Behalf of Aristotle* (Πρὸς Πλήθωνα ὑπὲρ Ἀριστοτέλους), which prompted Apostoles' *In Reply to the Defenses on Behalf of Aristotle Concerning Substance against Plethon of Theodoros of Gazes* (Πρὸς τὰς ὑπὲρ Ἀριστοτέλους περὶ οὐσίας κατὰ Πλήθωνος Θεωδῶρου τοῦ Γαζῆ ἀντιλήψεις=*Against Gazes*), a treatise that he addressed to Bessarion. In *Against Gazes*, Apostoles noted that Attikos, Plotinos, and Porphyrios had vehemently attacked Aristotle, particularly his doctrine of the soul as the entelechy or actuality (ἐντελέχεια) of the body and mentioned various other points of alleged disagreement between Plato and Aristotle.⁷⁵ What is telling about Apostoles' criticism, however, is that like Plethon, its debt to Eusebios' *On the Preparation for the Gospel* is readily and unsurprisingly apparent. Following are some instances of his direct borrowing from Eusebios, a borrowing, we should note, that he curiously never attributes to his original source, even if he elsewhere lets on to his first-hand knowledge of the fourth-century historian and polemicist.⁷⁶

Eusebios, <i>On the Preparation for the Gospel</i>	Apostoles, <i>Against Gazes</i>
ὡς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὄρκια πιστά οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν, οὕτως οὐκ ἔστι Πλάτωνι καὶ Ἀριστοτέλει φιλία (15.4.21.1–3)	καὶ ὡσπερ οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὄρκια πιστά, οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν, οὕτως οὐδ' ἔστι Πλάτωνι καὶ Ἀριστοτέλει πρὸς ἀλλήλω φιλία (2.3.9–11)
ὁ μὲν γὰρ μετασχὼν καὶ ἐφικόμενος αὐτῆς πάντως εὐδαίμων, ὁ δὲ ἀπολειφθεὶς καὶ ἀδυνατήσας θεωρὸς γενέσθαι πάντως ἄμοιρος εὐδαιμονίας καταλείπεται (15.13.2.3–15.13.3.1)	ὁ <μὲν> μετασχὼν τε καὶ ἐφικόμενος, πάντως εὐδαίμων, ὁ δ' ἀποληφθεὶς καὶ ἀδυνατήσας θεωρὸς γενέσθαι εὐδαιμονίας ἄμοιρος καταλείπεται (3.6.12–13)
φησι καὶ τὴν τούτων νόησιν καὶ τὴν σοφίαν εἶναι καὶ τὴν ἐπιστήμην, δι' ἧς τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τέλος καὶ ἡ μακαριστὴ βιωτὴ παραγίνεται (15.13.5.13–14).	νόησιν φήσας σοφίαν εἶναι καὶ ἐπιστήμην, δι' ἧς τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τέλος καὶ ἡ μακαριστὴ βιωτὴ παραγίνεται (3.6.17–18).

I have here bolded identical words found across both texts. The first of these passages stands out especially for both its ingenuity and extreme position on the relationship between Aristotle and Plato: “For just as there are no trustworthy agreements between lions and men, or as wolves and sheep have no like-minded thought (ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν), in this way there is no congeniality (φιλία) between Plato and Aristotle.” Eusebios had adapted Achilles’ oft-quoted aphoristic reply to Hektor’s request for funerary rites for the vanquished of their duel (*Iliad* 22.247–264); presumably, he did so to strengthen the cultural resonance this phrase would have in order to accentuate the disagreement between the philosophical pair by founding it on one of the greatest adversarial relationships known to Greek literature. By directly borrowing an identical turn of phrase, Apostoles likely aimed at the same goal. Further examples could be offered, but it would seem that the most salient anti-Aristotelian passages that Apostoles employed were originally penned in the fourth century and as part of a sophisticated and relentless anti-Hellene rhetorical campaign. But what Plethon’s and Apostoles’ borrowings likewise show is that the material available for them to make their case was disappointingly thin. Thus,

⁷⁵ Apostoles, *Ad Theodori Gazae*, 3.6.3–9.

⁷⁶ See Karamanolis, “Plethon and Scholarios on Aristotle,” in Ierodiakonou, 265. Karamanolis has also claimed Apostoles’ direct dependence on Eusebios’ text. For Apostoles’ reference to Eusebios and his *Ecclesiastical History* by name, see *Ep.* 105.4.

their knowledge of the few instances where the disagreement between Plato and Aristotle had come into sharper focus was mediated, almost certainly, through a single polemical source.

A closer look at the sources to which Apostoles refers (Attikos, Plotinos, and Porphyrios)⁷⁷ as critical of Aristotle, would have likely tempered his polemical tone, for of these three Platonists, only Attikos was notably hostile to Aristotle, a position, we should note, that was shared by very few other Platonists, perhaps only by Noumenios of Apameia.⁷⁸ While Apostoles is correct in noting that all three of these Platonists were critical of Peripatetic psychology, and specifically of the belief that the soul is the entelechy of the body, his tone and approach are meant to give the impression that this was just one of many late ancient Platonic criticisms of the Stagirite. But Plotinos' criticism of Aristotle is largely constrained precisely to psychology,⁷⁹ whereas he otherwise is generous to Aristotle and even appropriated large swaths of his thought, as Blumenthal has convincingly demonstrated.⁸⁰ No other than Porphyrios, Plotinos' own disciple, unambiguously declared (positively, we should add) of his teacher that "in his collected works are mixed both the elusive Stoic doctrines and the Peripatetic."⁸¹

Porphyrios, in turn, was known to the Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, and Latin traditions as the commentator on Aristotle par excellence and as the author of one of the most copied and translated texts in the premodern era, the *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* (or the *Introduction*/Εἰσαγωγή). Unsurprisingly, twenty-five manuscripts in various recensions of the Greek text are still extant—more, by comparison, than the thirteen manuscripts that directly or indirectly attest to Maximos' greatest work, *On Difficulties* (or *The Ambigua*). The text was likewise translated into Syriac early on under the title ܩܘܪܬܘܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܬܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܪܬܘܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܬܘܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܬܘܢܐ (The *Eisagoge of Porphyrios on Five Categories*), such that approximately in 645 Athanasios of Balad, a member of the highly prolific Syrian school of Qenneshrin, already deemed a revision necessary for further study of Aristotle at that school; this fact also points to the prevalence of Aristotle's philosophy outside exclusively Greek-speaking geographical limits.⁸² Two other Syriac translations are preserved, one in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France as *Parisinus Syriacus* 161 and one in the Biblioteca Escorial de Madrid as *Códice* 652. In the following century, the Persian Rōzbih pūr-i Dādōē, better known as Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allah Rūzbih ibn Dādūya ibn al-Muqaffa translated the *Introduction* into Arabic on the basis of a Syriac text, giving it the Arabicized title derived from the Greek, اساغوجي, which subsequently received numerous commentaries, such as Abū al-Faraj 'Abd Allah Ibn al-Ṭayyib's in the eleventh century.⁸³ Toward the beginning of the tenth century, the text was again translated from Syriac by Abū 'Uṣṣman al-Dimašqī with the more extensive title of اساغوجي لفر فر يوس الصوري.⁸⁴ Two Armenian manuscripts, *Parisini Armeniani* 105 and 106 are extant that also include a translation of Pseudo-David's late sixth-century Greek commentary on the *Introduction*. Finally, the *Introduction* entered the Latin world just over a century after its composition when Marius Victorinus translated it in full, though this translation has only survived in small fragments from Boethius' own rendition of the text, the *Porphyrii Isagoge et in Aristotelis Categoriae commentarium*,

⁷⁷ See Apostoles, *Against Gazes*, 3.6.7–9.

⁷⁸ See Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?*, 29 and 197–199.

⁷⁹ *En.* 4.7.8⁵.16–19 and *En.* 4.7.8⁵.43–44.

⁸⁰ See Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology*, 135.

⁸¹ Ἐμμέμικται δ' ἐν τοῖς συγγράμμασι καὶ τὰ Στωικὰ λανθάνοντα δόγματα καὶ τὰ Περιπατητικὰ. *Vita Plotini*, 14.4.

⁸² See Brock, "The Earliest Syriac Translation of Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, I Edition," 316–366 and "Some Notes on the Syriac Translation of Porphyry's *Eisagoge*," 41–50.

⁸³ See *Ibn al-Ṭayyib's Commentary on Porphyry's Eisagoge: Arabic Text*.

⁸⁴ See *Isāghūjī li-Furfuriyūs al-Ṣūrī naql Abi 'Uṣṣman al-Dimašqī*, 67–94.

completed in the sixth century. In brief, Porphyry's *Introduction* was a remarkably famous work that spanned numerous geographical spaces, languages, cultures, and religions.

The reason this is especially significant for our purposes is that this famed companion to Aristotle's *Categories* states in its preface to Chrysaorios that one must understand the *Categories* as an essential step in approaching the Peripatetic's teaching and the assignment of definitions. Porphyrios' telling assumption here, which would have colored the subsequent reception of Aristotle and his relationship to the Platonic school, is that his (Platonist) readers were in fact interested in understanding Aristotle's work and teachings. In light of this evidence, it would appear that in the fifteenth century Apostoles was recreating a polemicized version of Platonic-Aristotelian rivalry that never existed with the furor he ascribed to it.

Finally, Bessarion took up Plato's case in this ongoing fifteenth-century debate. Although the cardinal believed that Plato was Aristotle's philosophical superior and that his teachings were more compatible with Christianity, he rescinded the sharp juxtaposition that Plethon and Apostoles had taken over from Eusebios. Indeed, as he notes in the beginning of his *First Examination of the Blasphemies against Plato*, it is his express goal to strive for a certain even-handedness in his treatment of the subject matter he considers; we should note, in fairness to him, that he did remarkably well in that undertaking.⁸⁵ The negative views that Scholarios, but especially his intellectual confreres, had expressed about Plato had struck the cardinal as unfair and required correction;⁸⁶ he did not, however, correspond their vitriol. In this regard, Craig Martin has observed that "Bessarion was more interested in defending Plato and his accord with Christianity than in attacking Aristotle"⁸⁷; and that is precisely how the *First Examination of the Blasphemies against Plato* reads. Absent from the treatise is the critical attitude toward Aristotle that Plethon and Apostoles had exhibited, as is also the radicalization of their incompatibility and irreconcilable disagreement. Rather, the tone of the apology on Plato's behalf is highly reminiscent in its attitude toward Aristotle of the late ancient Platonic commentaries on the Peripatetic corpus.

Bessarion approached this subject matter thus because he found limited historical precedent among the "wise exegetes" for the alleged conflict of the two philosophers. On the contrary, he underscores that the bulk of their relevant texts were concerned with evidencing the concord (συμφωνία) of Aristotle and Plato.⁸⁸ In this spirit, he validates how his adversaries rightly exalt Aristotle, "for the man is worthy of great repute" (μεγάλης γὰρ εὐφημίας ἄξιος ὁ ἀνὴρ), but censures how they scoff at Plato as if he were pariah (ἐξ ἁμαξῶν).⁸⁹ What is significant about Bessarion's position is that he implicitly undermines the validity of Plethon's and Apostoles' disjunctive premise, even if he agreed with them about Plato's superiority and greater congeniality with Christian doctrine. Put differently, as late as the fifteenth century, the suggestion that Plato and Aristotle were mortal philosophical adversaries was not only met with considerable resistance, but was also regarded as a largely contrafactual fabrication with sparse historical precedent. In this light, the modern radicalization of the disagreements between Plato and Aristotle has popularized and standardized what was a marginal late ancient Christian polemical tradition that rarely, if ever, formed part of medieval Roman philosophical curricula. As I

⁸⁵ *First Examination*, 1.1.1.1–1.1.3.24.

⁸⁶ *In calumniatorem Platonis*, 1.1.1.30–36.

⁸⁷ Martin, *Subverting Aristotle*, 41.

⁸⁸ See Bessarion, *In calumniatorem Platonis*, 2.11.1.12–19.

⁸⁹ *In calumniatorem Platonis*, 1.1.2.12–14.

have argued in the preceding section, this modern move can be partially attributed to colonialist assumptions that bled into academic discourse.

3. A Quantitative-Analytical Approach to Late Antiquity as the Greek Golden Age in the Study of Aristotle

In light of the foregoing sections, it seems necessary to reconsider Aristotle's role in the formation of late ancient intellectual identities by offering a counternarrative that accords him a more prominent seat at the table. To that end, this section demonstrates that late antiquity was the most productive period in the study of Aristotle's philosophy in pre-modern Greek and that this fact is hardly unremarkable given the widespread interest in Plato. I have argued briefly that the assumption that Aristotle did not figure in the picture during this time can be in large part attributed to the colonial prejudices of modern historiography and the belief that the philosophical pair were antithetical rivals. By challenging these presuppositions, it is possible to obtain a different appreciation of the late ancient philosophical-theological landscape. Particularly, two features stand out and will guide the following analysis. First, regardless of whether his name is mentioned in a positive, neutral, or negative context, Aristotle was referred to by name with greater frequency in late antiquity than at any other time in the history of pre-modern Greek—at one point, in the sixth century, significantly more often than Plato. Second, his fate was tied to Plato's. In other words, the study of Aristotle went hand-in-hand with the study of Plato.

Given the vast amount of data—as well as its internal complexity—that must be analyzed in order to support these claims, an interdisciplinary approach to the evidence that offers a compound, multi-dimensional image of late ancient intellectual history, its transmission, and its transformations seems justified. Specifically, we will resort to quantitative data analysis (or statistical data analysis) in order to offer a necessarily broad outline of the reception of Aristotle in Greek between the first and fifteenth centuries before transitioning in chapters three to five to a qualitative philological, philosophical, and theological analysis that will position Aristotle's philosophy in dialectics with the internal logic of Maximus' thought. The idea, in brief, is to offer a general picture of Aristotle's reception between the first and fifteenth centuries in Greek. Comparisons to other philosophers, but especially Plato, will be included where appropriate.

For these goals, the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) is the single most important database. While we must note that the TLG is somewhat incomplete and to that extent flawed, both because recent editions of texts have not yet been uploaded and, more significantly, because what texts *have* survived and are represented in the database are in various ways accidents of history, the TLG nevertheless constitutes the most comprehensive repository of the pre-modern Greek corpus; it includes, according to the platform's website, “more than 110 million words from over 10,000 works associated with 4,000 authors.”⁹⁰ As such, the conclusions that can be drawn from analyzing its data will be as statistically conclusive as will ever be possible for contemporary researchers, barring some remarkable (and certainly welcome) discovery of texts that are lost or unknown. Nevertheless, statistical analysis cannot be put on hold in the hopes of such a discovery. Moreover, it would be difficult for a discovery to be of such magnitude that it would substantially alter the following statistics.

⁹⁰ *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/tlg.php>, accessed 03/25/2017.

A good indicator for whether a philosopher had drawn attention during a specific time frame is the number of mentions of the philosopher’s name during that interval. Clearly, this parameter cannot—and is not meant to—offer a comprehensive and exhaustive account of the interplay of ideas in pre-modern societies or even the way in which a philosopher’s ideas and works might have been used; it can, however, offer a broad, but often telling, outline of the changes in priorities or of the availability of leisure and financial subsidies necessary for the production of philosophical and theological works from century to century. These fluctuations, in turn, invite closer and more nuanced analysis through the resources of qualitative analysis, to be performed hereafter. To that end, this section investigates a series of variable datasets for the three most mentioned philosophers in pre-modern Greek between the first and fifteenth centuries: Plato, Aristotle, and Chrysippos.⁹¹

3.1. Plato and Aristotle: Statistically Correlated Variables?

Chart A is the most general chart in this section, since its parameters remain rather broad. This chart graphs the number of mentions of the lemmas “Χρύσιππος” (Chrysippos), “Ἀριστοτέλης” (Aristotle), and “Πλάτων” (Plato) between the first and fifteenth centuries in the TLG corpus. The lemmas included here and in the following charts comprise all case-derivative forms (e.g., Πλάτωνος, Ἀριστοτέλει, Χρύσιππον, etc.), but not morphologically-dependent terms (e.g., Πλατωνικός, Ἀριστοτελικῶς, etc.). Chrysippos will function, where applicable, as a control variable.⁹²

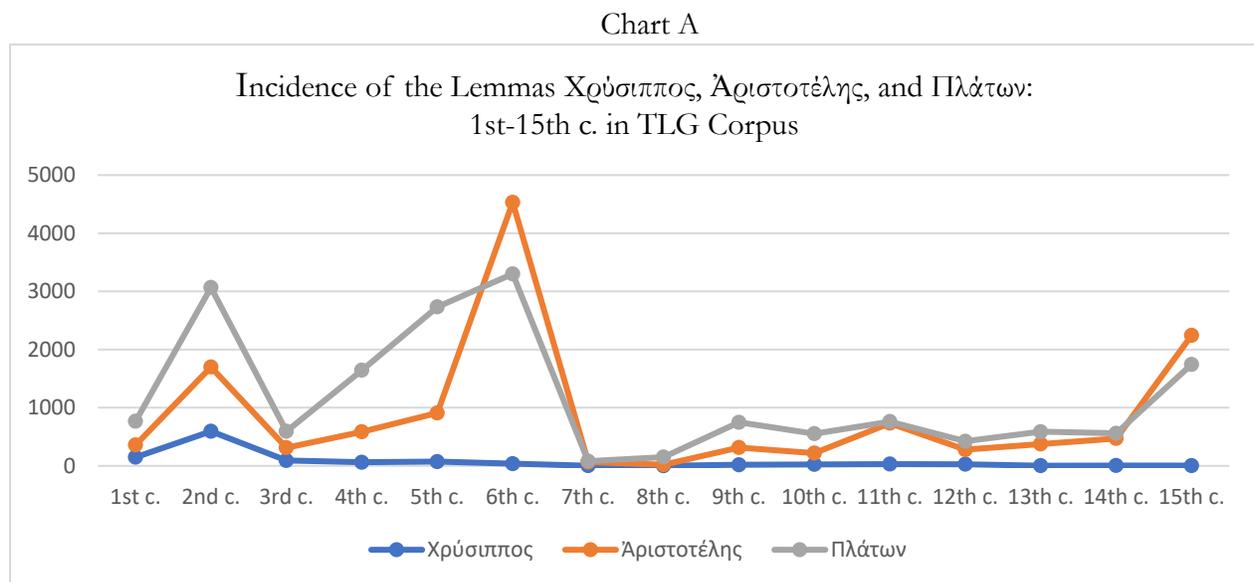


Chart A shows that in nearly every century the incidence of Aristotle’s and Plato’s names evidences a strong correlation. In other words, if Plato’s name rises, so does Aristotle’s; if it falls, so does the Peripatetic’s. For example, between the first and second centuries, Plato went from 767 to 3,067 mentions, approximately a 299% increase; the incidence of Aristotle’s name likewise spiked from 359 to 1700, approximately a 374% increase. In the following century, Plato’s name fell from 3,067

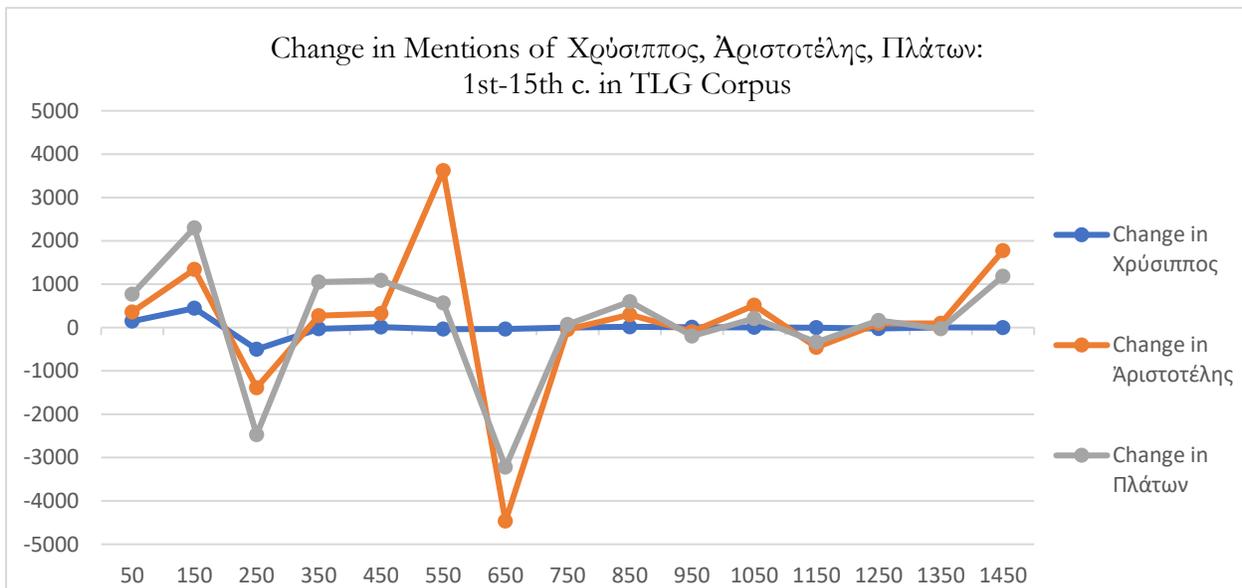
⁹¹ Although the name Ζήνων (Zenon) registers a higher number of incidences in the TLG, after the 5th century, the vast majority of these refers to the Emperor Zenon (425–491), not the philosopher and thus lowers the total number of mentions beneath that of Chrysippos.

⁹² This data taken down 03/29/2017. Modifications from the main dataset presented on the TLG have been implemented to adjust for long range works and/or authors, varia, incerta, etc.

mentions to 595, a drop of approximately 81%. In that same time frame, Aristotle’s name dropped from 1,700 to 312, a decrease of approximately 82%. For the next three centuries, their names register consistent gains, both reaching their all-time high in the sixth century (Plato: 3,301; Aristotle: 4,532), before taking a stark, but predictable, plummet of 97.55% (Plato) and 98.5% (Aristotle) in the seventh. Between the seventh and eighth centuries, for the first and only time, Plato registers minimal gain while Aristotle decreases further. But for the following seven centuries the philosophical pair would again rise and fall correlatively. For instance, between the eighth and ninth century Plato registers an increase of 396%, Aristotle an increase of 1,480% over his all-time low; in the following century, both fall by 26.2% and 30.4%, respectively. During the first century of the Komnenian Renaissance (eleventh century), they pick up a 37.6% (Plato) and 233.4% (Aristotle) gain, but drop again in the second century of the academic revival by 44.3% and 62%, respectively. Thereafter they again grow similarly and consistently, registering a major spike in the fifteenth century over the previous century of approximately 212% and 376%, respectively.

The negative and positive (or differential) correlation described above can be represented by plotting whether a philosopher’s name received as great an increase in mentions as the century before, or registered a loss of mentions relative to the century prior. Here we must use the century’s midpoints for the temporal axis and, again, Chrysippos as a control variable. Chart B plots these results:

Chart B

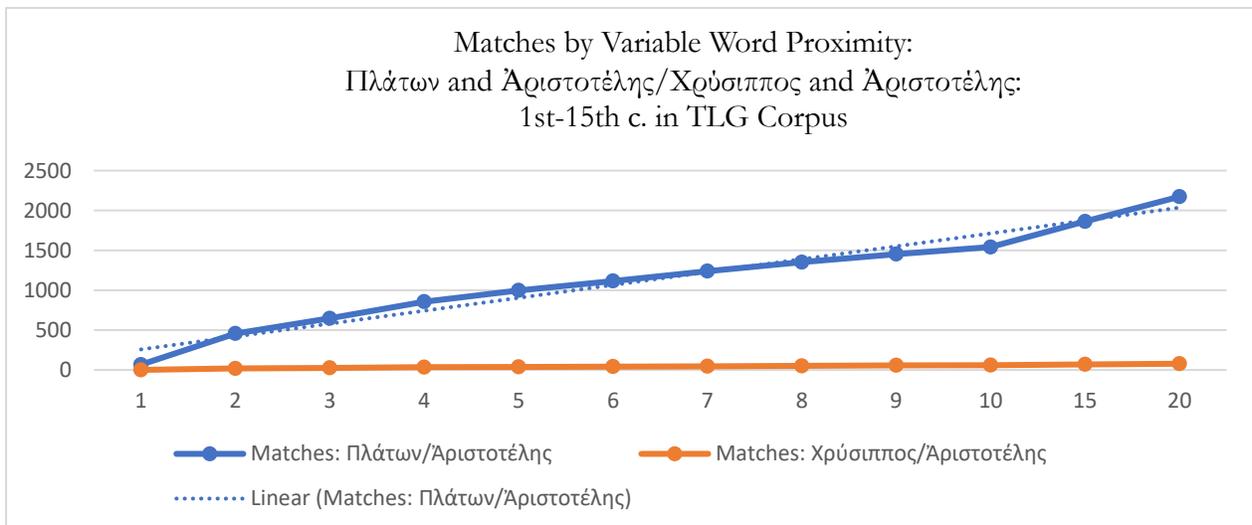


What this chart displays is that an increase in mentions of Plato’s name can consistently predict a gain in mentions of Aristotle’s. Likewise, a drop in mentions of the one can also predict a drop in mentions of the other. What this chart shows particularly well is that their statistical changes follow each other on the positive and negative axes. It is especially important to underscore what the chart plots, since the time frame between 350 and 550 might give the wrong impression that Plato is losing mentions, while Aristotle is gaining them. In effect, during this time frame they both registered gains, but Plato did so at a lower rate than Aristotle from century to century. For example, between 350 and 450 Plato gained an additional 1,088 mentions (relative to the 1,050 between 250 and 350—which is why the two points on the graph are so close to each other), but between 450 and 550 he only gained

568, which appears in the graph as a downturn in gains relative to the previous century’s gains. That is, he gained approximately half as many mentions between 450 and 550 as he did between 350 and 450—but he registered gains. These gains are collective, for which reason from 250 to 550 Plato gained a total of 2,706 mentions over a base of the 595 mentions he had in the third century. Thus, when added together (595+1,050+1,088+568), his total number of mentions in the sixth-century registers his all-time high of 3,301 mentions. In brief, Plato and Aristotle follow each other on the positive and negative sides of the axis, dipping into negative numbers in years like 250, 650, 950, and 1150, but pushing into positive numbers in years like 150, 350, 550, 850, 1050, and 1450. By comparison, the incidence of the control variable “Χρῦσιππος” remains largely steady across the centuries, registering some correlation only between the second and fourth centuries. While the pattern is not entirely perfect or symmetrical, it nevertheless suggests a strong correlation between Plato’s and Aristotle’s fortunes.

We may attribute this outcome to the fact that Plato and Aristotle were often either discussed in tandem or that it was a widespread late ancient scholarly convention to turn to the one in order to understand the other better, as the previous section discussed. More precisely, it was most probable that a Platonist would turn to the Stagirite’s corpus or later commentaries and opinions on it to elucidate the thought of Plato. So, if the fifteenth-century debate overviewed above is a representative predictor, an interpretation of this data that avoids the unnecessary multiplication of explanatory factors is that Aristotle and Plato were mutually-conditioning variables, although we should add that it was more likely that Aristotle’s fortunes depended on Plato’s. This correlation becomes clearer by searching for how many times and how many words apart Plato’s and Aristotle’s names appear. To obtain this data, we searched for the combination of two lemmas: Πλάτων and Ἀριστοτέλης and Χρῦσιππος and Ἀριστοτέλης; the latter again functions as the control variable. Likewise, we increased the number of words that separated the first term from the second, first ranging from 1 to 10 words apart, as well as 15 and 20 words apart.

Chart C



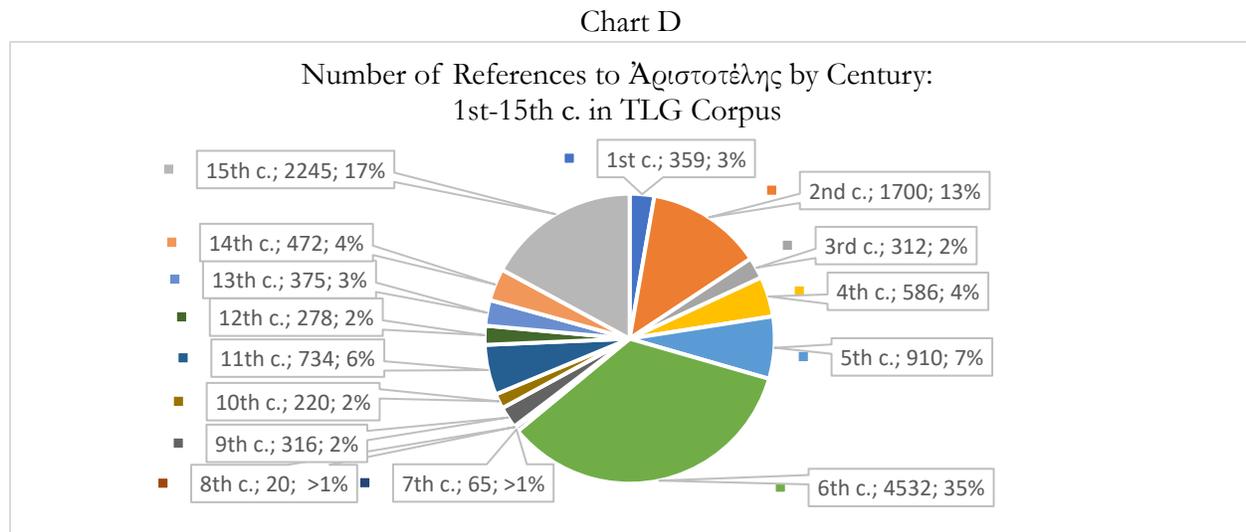
This chart shows that the number of matches predictably increases as the search parameter broadens. However, we found that the data became skewed, as based on the trend line (dotted, blue), between the parameters of 10 and 15 words apart because of an overlap or reduplication of search

results. We can attribute the noticeable rise in matches between 10 and 15 to a doubling of matches using one of the two terms already counted in another match. For example, the term “Aristotle” may appear six words before the term “Plato” and again a second time twelve words after; in this case, a single instance of Plato’s name would yield two matches with the term “Aristotle,” and thus give an overestimation of the data proximity. The average overlap under the parameter of fifteen words between lemmas was approximately 5%,⁹³ which distorts the data trend and is therefore precluded from analysis here. So, although we graph the matches under the search parameters of 15 and 20 words between lemmas, these only function as limits and not part of the data we will comment on.

What matters for us about Chart C is that the correlation we found in Charts A and B is not simply coincidental. Authors were in effect naming both philosophers in close proximity to each other, such that nearly 12% (1,541/11.74%) of the total mentions of Aristotle’s name between the first and fifteenth centuries (13,124) was ten or less words apart from Plato’s. That may not seem like a particularly high percentage, but we should consider the following two points. First, the search parameters are already highly specific, which makes a twelve percent match rate truly rather remarkable. Second, the control variable only has 60 matches out of 13,124 possibilities at the most generous search range (10 words apart), that is, 0.46%. In other words, Aristotle’s name was about twenty-five times more likely to appear within ten words of Plato’s than the next philosopher mentioned most frequently by name in the pre-modern Greek corpus. Put differently, about one out of every eight times that Aristotle’s name is mentioned, within ten or fewer words Plato’s name is also. These findings lend some credence to Scholarios’ and Bessarion’s observations above regarding the treatment of the philosophical pair by “the ancients.”

3.2. Aristotle through the Centuries

Chart D nuances the statistics in chart A further by ordering the number of references to Aristotle according to the century when they were written.

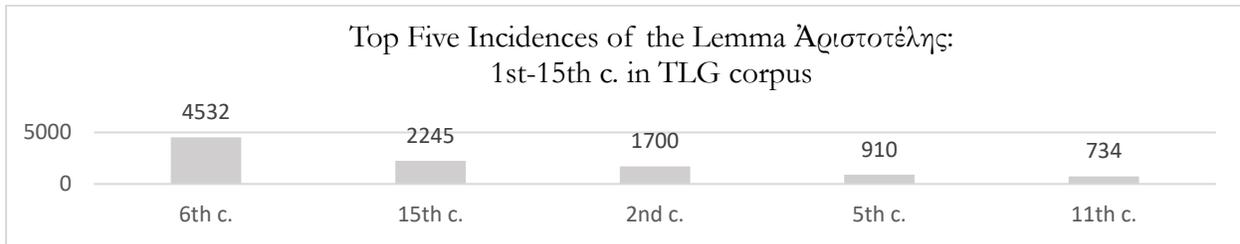


⁹³ From a sample of 100 matches, four to five, on average, overlapped with previously counted terms. E.g., Origen, *Against Kelsos*, 2.12.21–29 and Diogenes Laertios, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 4.67.14–15, 5.1.3–5, 10.8.6; also for Diogenes Laertios, *Lives of Philosophers*, 3.109.6–10 overlaps with a previously counted match at sixteen words, indicating that such instances continue to increase as the distance between terms is broader.

The sixth century shows by far the highest incidence of references to Aristotle by name than any other century (4,532/35%) and during this century Aristotle outpaced Plato by over one thousand references (see Chart A). The century with the next highest incidence of mentions, the fifteenth century (2,245/17%), represents less than half the number of the sixth. By another take, there were vastly more references to Aristotle—nearly twice as many—by name in the sixth century (4,523/35%) than in the subsequent eight centuries (seventh to fourteenth) combined (2,480/20%). Put differently, more than one of every three named references to Aristotle in Greek between the first and fifteenth centuries was written in the sixth century. Given the subject matter of this project, it seems salient to note that Maximos would have received his early philosophical formation toward the end of the sixth century (ca. 585–600), that is, some fifteen and twenty-five years, respectively, after the deaths of the two authors who referenced Aristotle most in the Greek language, Simplikios of Kilikia, a Platonist (d. 560; 2,268 references) and Ioannes Philoponos, a Christian (d. 570; 1,069 references).

In total, late antiquity penned nearly two-thirds of all references to Aristotle by name (8,464/64.5%), although these centuries only represent about a third of the time span in view here. If we focus on the early Christian period, that is, the second to the fourth century by Karamanolis' definition, it is still the case that Aristotle's name registers more significantly on the chart than in virtually any other period outside late antiquity, the fifteenth century excluded. For example, the second century marks the high point of references to Aristotle in the early Christian period (1,700 mentions) and is the third highest century in total references to Aristotle, after the sixth and fifteenth centuries. By comparison, the Komnenian Renaissance (11th–12th c.), and its intellectual-cultural revival beyond Constantinopolitan walls, falls considerably short of the third century alone, with a combined total, for both centuries, of 1,012 references. This period was populated by such eminent figures as Ioannes Italos, Michael Psellos, Eustathios of Thessaloniki, Ioannes Tzetzes, and, of course, Anna Komnene, who gathered around her a circle of scholars—one of whom mentioned in his funerary oration on the Roman princess that her scholarly zeal had caused the brightness of the eyesight of his friend from Ephesos (i.e., Michael of Ephesos) to burn down just as the candles he employed to scour ancient commentaries on Aristotle in her service—that included Michael of Ephesos, Eustratios of Nikaia, and Georgios Tornikes. And yet, the third and fourth centuries combined registered a comparable number of incidences of Aristotle's name (898) as the Komnenian Renaissance (1,012), marked by a difference of 114 mentions or just over 11%. Although I do not wish to put too fine a point on the matter, it is indicative of the intellectual-cultural prevalence of Aristotle in the early Christian period of late antiquity if its total number of references to Aristotle between the second and fourth centuries is more than twice (2,598 vs. 1,012) that of a period dubbed a "renaissance" in the study of Peripatetic philosophy. In brief, if we organize the top five centuries in descending order from highest to lowest incidences of Aristotle's name, three of them (sixth, second, fifth) belong to late antiquity, and the other two (eleventh and fifteenth) made direct reference to those who were active in these centuries (e.g., Attikos, Proklos Diadochos, Syrianos, Simplikios). This hierarchy is depicted in chart E:

Chart E

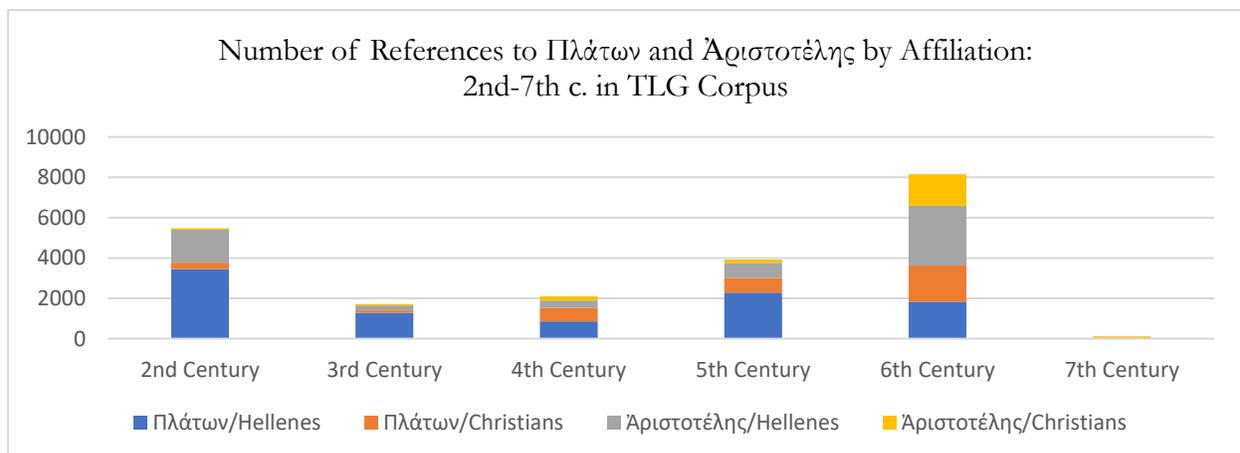


The foregoing statistics, of course, only furnish a blurry picture that can be sharpened by further breakdown of the data. It would be impractically unwieldy, however, and in many ways irrelevant, to do so for the fifteen centuries thus far considered. Therefore, for now we will handle the period between the second and seventh centuries, since it is more immediately salient for our objectives. Moreover, the distinction between “Hellenes” and “Christians,” on which the following graphs rely, is a moot point after the seventh century.

3.3. Plato and Aristotle: A Closer Look among Hellenes and Christians

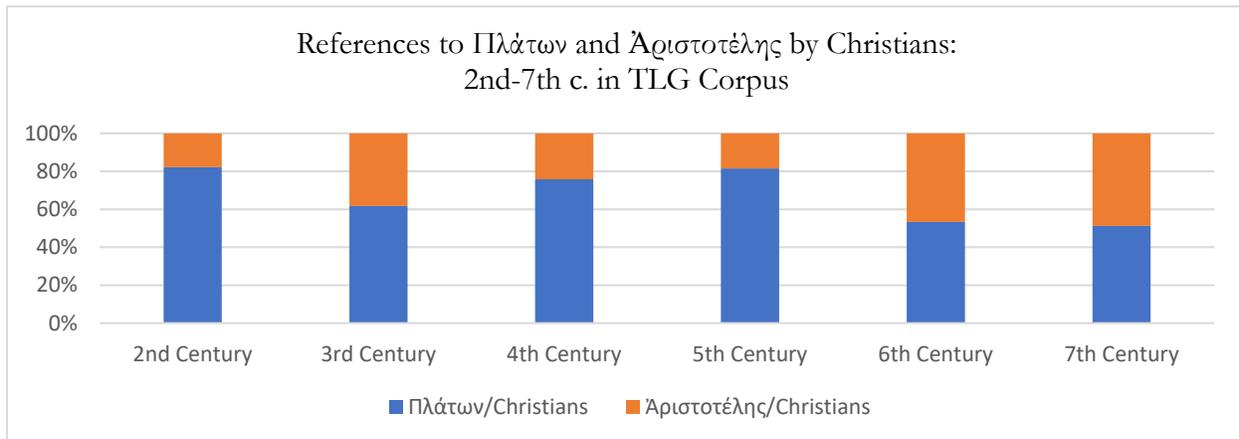
In the foregoing sections, we have challenged the belief that Christians were hardly familiar with Aristotle’s thought or that if they were, that they were extremely critical or dismissive of his work. While I agree that these assessments are no doubt true about some Christian authors, I would argue that these critical receptions only contributed a handful of tesserae to an already kaleidoscopic transmission history of his philosophy among Christians. Before we can turn to a more detailed philological and philosophical account of this reception, we should first contextualize the works that will form part of that analysis. This contextualization can be well served by examining how widely Christians wrote about Aristotle relative to both their Hellenic counterparts and relative to how often they wrote about Plato. This data can be graphed by dividing the authors between the second and seventh century into “Christians” and “Hellenes” and tallying the number of references that each group makes to both philosophers. The point is to determine whether and how often Aristotle was referred to by either Christians or Hellenes, and how he compared to Plato across the same two groups. Anonymous texts, the affiliation of whose author was unknown or undeterminable, have been omitted from the dataset:

Chart F



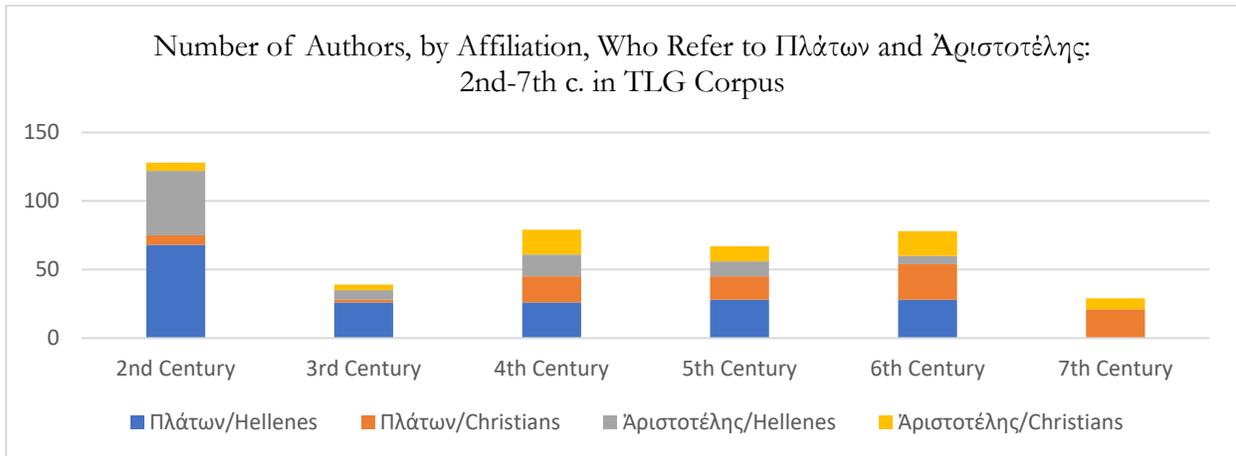
Certain features of this chart are significant for our purposes. First, it is clear that Hellenes contribute by an ample margin the bulk of references to both Plato and Aristotle, even in the fourth and sixth centuries, where Christians come closer than in other centuries. Second, in every century the number of Christian mentions of Plato ranges between substantially higher (e.g., 2nd c.: Aristotle: 68 mentions, Plato 314; 4th c.: Aristotle: 212, Plato 666; 5th c.: Aristotle: 165, Plato 727) and marginally higher (e.g., 3rd c.: Aristotle: 72, Plato 116; 6th c.: Aristotle: 1,566, Plato: 1,789; 7th c.: Aristotle: 57, Plato: 60) than the number of Christian mentions of Aristotle. It is likely that this margin, particularly during the early Christian period, has given the impression that Aristotle had little significance for the intellectual identity formation of late ancient Christianity. This margin of differences can be seen by representing only Christian references to Aristotle and Plato on the chart in a stacked, 100% column graph, as in Chart G:

Chart G



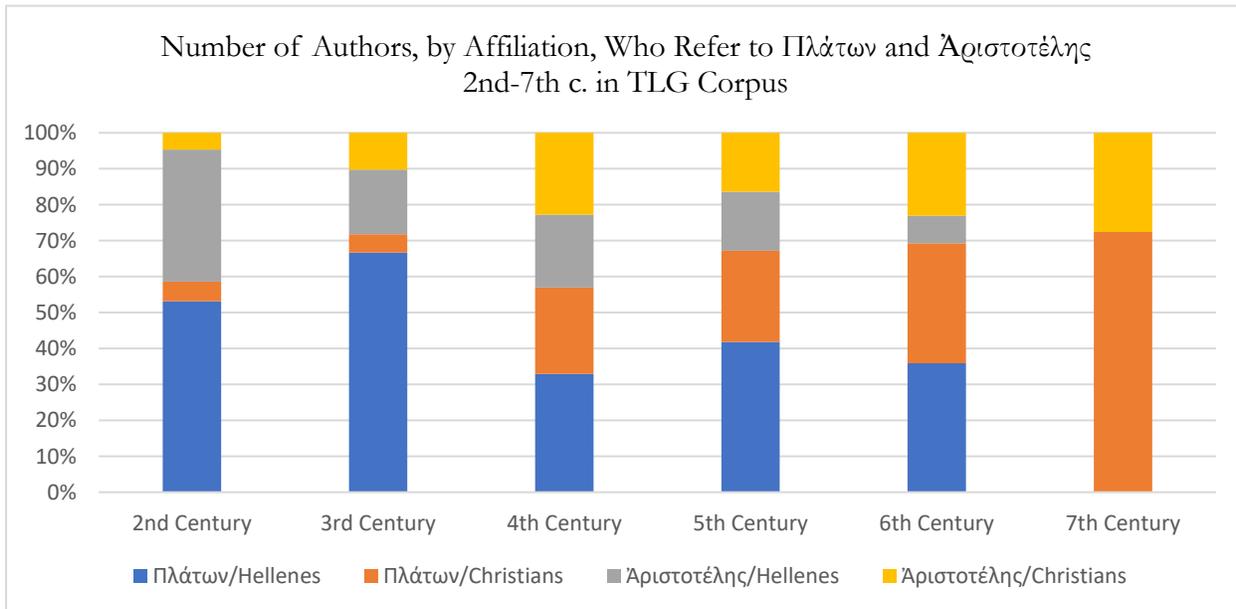
Half of these centuries (second, fourth, fifth) register a higher Christian mention of Plato than Aristotle as measured by references to his name; the other half (third, sixth, seventh) registers only marginal differences. However, we should note that even at the lowest points, in the second and fifth centuries, Aristotle's name still visibly figures on the chart, making up about 20% of the total number of references in the time period. This percentage is not insignificant if we consider that, by comparison, between the second and seventh century, Chrysippos received less than a combined total of 100 references by Christians, nearly eighty percent of which (73 out of 92) were by the pens of just two authors, Eusebios, a polemicist (23), and Ioannes Stobaios, an anthologist (50). Moreover, we should underscore that Maximus lived between 580 and 662, which is to say, during the time period on the graph that evidences the lowest differential in mentions of Aristotle's and Plato's names. Finally, we must highlight that this data only offers a partial view of the intellectual dynamics for this time frame, given that it only takes one factor into consideration, that is, the number of mentions of the philosophical pair. Equally important is the number of authors that refer to the two philosophers. Thus, Chart H traces the number of authors by affiliation that refer to Plato and Aristotle between the second and seventh century:

Chart H



What is clearly visible from Chart H is the outstanding number of authors, both Christian and Hellene—although mostly Hellene—who refer to Aristotle and Plato in the second century. Likewise, Plato among the Hellenes consistently counts the largest number of authors from the second through the sixth century. But what is perhaps striking about this chart is the statistical similarity between Christian authors who refer to Plato and Christian authors who refer to Aristotle. This similarity can be exhibited better in a stacked 100% bar graph, as in Chart I:

Chart I:



As with Aristotle in Chart F, the second century registers rather low for Christians and highest for Hellenes; in the third century, Christian authors drop further, but register consistently higher numbers in the subsequent centuries, sometimes coming within close range of Hellene authors. If we compare the numbers of both charts, two points stand out in particular. First, the number of authors, either Christian or Hellene, who refer to Plato is generally higher than that of those who mention Aristotle. Second, this observation should be qualified by noting that the gap between Christians and Hellenes who mention Plato is significantly higher than that between Christians and Hellenes who mention

Aristotle. Thus, we should underscore that the total number of authors who refer to Plato is higher than that of authors who refer to Aristotle, but that the substantial difference in that margin is largely made up by Hellenes, not Christians. Put differently, Christians and Hellenes refer to the Stagirite in similar numbers, but Hellenes consistently register a higher—sometimes substantially higher—number of authors who mention Plato by name than Christians.

What Chart I might suggest is that the number of Christian authors who refer to Plato is not significantly different than the number of Christian authors who refer to Aristotle. While in virtually every century all three categories—Plato among Christians, Aristotle among Hellenes, and Aristotle among Christians—trail Plato among Hellenes, what is significant, given our subject matter, is that Christian interest in Aristotle and Plato, as measured by number of authors who refer to the philosophical pair, does not statistically diverge as radically as scholarship may lead one to believe. The difference between Christian mentions of the one and the other can be seen more clearly in Chart J, which excludes Hellene authors:

Chart J

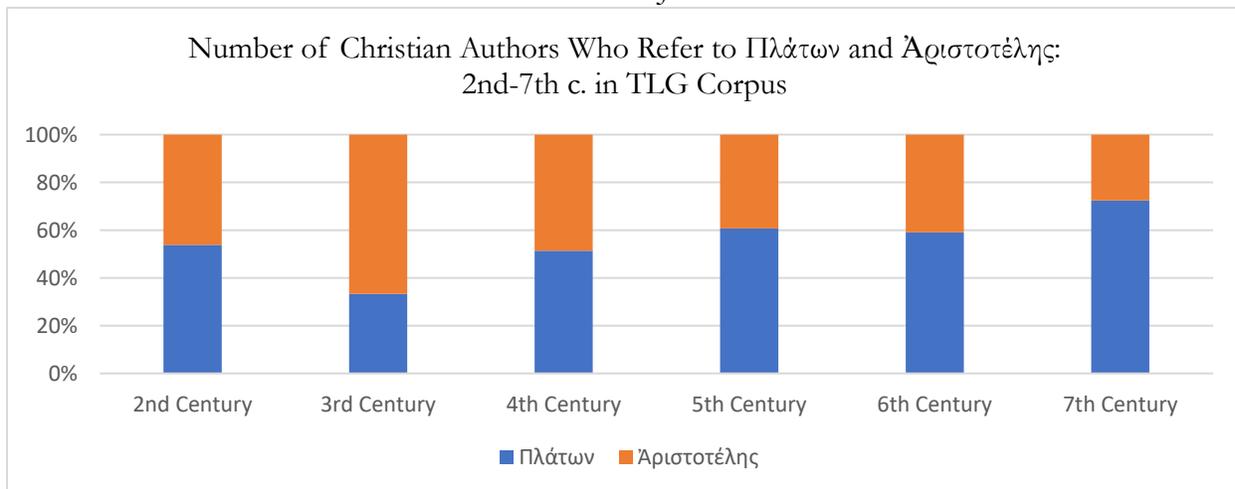


Chart J offers a second point of reference for the significance of Plato and Aristotle in late ancient Christian intellectual identity formation, a point that might suggest that Plato’s relevance for Christians in this time frame has been overstated—perhaps, and this is significant, at the expense of Aristotle’s. And the crux of the problem is precisely this: that Plato’s significance has been emphasized *at the expense of Aristotle’s*. I would like to suggest an alternative possibility: Aristotle and Plato often garnered similar levels of interest from Christians and this fact is hardly surprising because the two philosophers were two sides of the same coin. Thus, if late antiquity was the golden age in the study of Aristotle, it was because that was also the golden age in the study of Plato: these two facts are not mutually exclusive, but, more likely, predictable on the basis of the datasets analyzed in this section. Finally, we should note that this alternative possibility for which I have argued seems consistent with the findings of the previous section and resonates especially well with the theses of scholars like Bessarion and Scholarios, which we briefly overviewed in the previous section.

The discussion in this section has been admittedly general, but not for that reason insignificant. The data analyzed here, although lacking further nuance, offers a large-scale vision of Hellene and Christian interest in Plato and Aristotle as measured by the mention of their names. There remains, of course, more to be done, but it seemed necessary to me to offer a broad image of which we should

not lose sight even after we've turned our attention to the minutiae of Maximos' background materials, texts, and his historical sources, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

MAXIMOS OF ALEXANDRIA: AN UNREAD LIFE OF MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR

*Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
Success in circuit lies*

—Emily Dickinson, *Poem 1263*

Introduction

Maximos the Confessor was forty-six years old when he began writing his first known work in 626 and already possessed the thorough knowledge of philosophy and theology that would enable him to compose the lion's share of his theological oeuvre in the following eight years.⁹⁴ His correspondence, often intimate and personal, with some of the most powerful functionaries and bureaucrats of the Roman Empire also suggests enviable and longstanding connections in the major cities of the Empire and especially in Alexandria and Constantinople. It is thus remarkable that no text by his hand before 626 exists, that no imperial record can so much as hint at his background, and that none of his friends or correspondents disclose any direct information that could enhance our knowledge about his birth, childhood, education, or geographical movements during the first half of his life. This lack of circumstantial evidence is aggravated by what appear to be two radically contradictory biographical traditions concerning his early life, one transmitted in Greek, the other in Syriac.

The consensus for the past millennium has held that in 580 Maximos was born from Christian aristocratic parents in Constantinople, where he received an elite education; at thirty he became the chief of imperial records under Herakleios, he abandoned civil service to enter a monastery across the Bosphorus three years later, and assumed a central position in the struggle against imperial-driven Monenergism and Monothelitism, which resulted in the mutilation of his right hand and tongue and, on August 13th, 662, in his death at the military fortress named Schemarion near the shore of the Black Sea in Lazica (modern-day Georgia).

This basic sketch of his life derives from a Greek hagiographical tradition extant in three recensions, as well as a complex of ancient *passiones*, letters, and other documents from which these *Lives* were culled.⁹⁵ With the exception of passing references to his birth in a Palestinian village in a few late medieval Syriac chronicles, there was no apparent reason to question the Greek accounts; after all, nearly all the circumstantial evidence seemed to corroborate this outline of his life. Maximos was a regular correspondent with eminent Imperial figures, including Georgios the ἑπαρχος (prefect) of Africa,⁹⁶ Petros, the στρατηγός (general) of Numidia who was later dispatched to Alexandria,⁹⁷

⁹⁴ See Jankowiak and Booth, "An Annotated Date-List," in *OHMC*, 28–46.

⁹⁵ For more extensive commentary on the three recensions, as well as their relationship to other passion narratives and sources for Maximos' life see Allen, "Life and Times," in *OHMC*, 10–14. See also Neill, "The Lives of Pope Martin I," 91–109 and "The Greek Life of Maximus the Confessor (BHG 1234)," 46–53.

⁹⁶ *Ep.* 1 (PG 91:364A–392B).

⁹⁷ *Ep.* 13 and 14 (PG 91:509B–533A and 533B–543C); *opusc.* 12 (PG 91:141A–146A).

Konstantinos, a σακελλάριος (secretary of the treasury),⁹⁸ and Ioannes, an imperial κουβικουλάριος (chamberlain) at Constantinople. Maximos' correspondence with high-profile figures and implication with relatives of the emperor himself would of course be unremarkable quotidian fare for a member of the aristocracy.⁹⁹ The hagiographical claims about his private and outstanding tutoring can be seen reflected in his writings, which earned him the epithets of “the philosopher”¹⁰⁰ and “most holy monk, philosopher, martyr, confessor and great teacher of the church”¹⁰¹ in subsequent centuries. Anna Komnene even remarked that the “philosopher and martyr Maximos” and the “altogether contemplative and intellectual character (τὸ πάνυ θεωρητικὸν τε καὶ νοερὸν) of the man, precipitates, as they say, dizziness for those who read [him] (ἄλιγγον παρέχεται τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσιν).”¹⁰² Her observation is significant in light of her claims about her thorough grasp of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy in the proemium to the *Alexiad*.¹⁰³

Past scholars have assumed that the intellectual stature he acquired could only be accomplished by one nurtured at the capital.¹⁰⁴ His unusually precise knowledge of aristocratic insignias has also been identified as evidence for his well-to-do provenance.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the third Greek recension (henceforth *GL3*) claims that the Emperor Konstans II Pogonatos referred to Maximos as “our forebear” (ἡμῶν προγονικός) and requested that two patricians in full regalia escort him to the capital, where he was to stand trial.¹⁰⁶ Such a gesture would likely only be extended to members of aristocratic extraction. The biographical account in *GL3*, although perhaps stylized and “unabashedly hagiographic,”¹⁰⁷ seemed a trustworthy narrative inasmuch as it readily accounted for all of this evidence by situating Maximos among the Roman elite.

On the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Ukrainian scholar Sergei Leontevich Epifanovich raised the first concerns about the Greek recensions by challenging M. D. Muretov's scholarship on Maximos' life, as well as the significance of their Old Georgian translations as presented by the prolific Georgian scholar Korneli Kekelidze.¹⁰⁸ Epifanovich's works became inaccessible in the aftermath of the Soviet takeover and have only recently reentered scholarly discussions.¹⁰⁹ In 1967 Wolfgang Lackner made a major breakthrough when he demonstrated the extensive reliance of the infancy narrative of *GL3* on one of the versions of the *Life of Theodoros Stoudites*.¹¹⁰ Although his discovery cast doubt on the accuracy of some of the events recounted in *GL3*, it did not affect its overall trustworthiness or status among scholars. 1973 marked the tipping point, when Sebastian Brock published a transcription of the Syriac manuscript known as BM Add. 7192, folios 72b–78b, including

⁹⁸ *Ep.* 5 and 24/43 (PG 91:420C–424C and 608B–613A/637B–641C).

⁹⁹ *Ep.* 2, 3, 4, 10, 12, 27, 44–5 (PG 91:392D–408B, 408C–412C, 413A–420C, 449A–453A, 460A–509B, 617B–620C, 641D–648C, 648D–649C).

¹⁰⁰ John of Damascus, *imag.* 2.65.1.

¹⁰¹ Synkellos, *Ecloga chronographica*, 382:3–5.

¹⁰² *Alexiad*, 5.9.3.8–14.

¹⁰³ *Alexiad*, proemium, 1.2.4–9.

¹⁰⁴ Larchet, *La divinisation*, 10–12. See also Salés, *St. Maximus the Confessor*, 16 and Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 147.

¹⁰⁵ *Ambig.* 32.4, Constas, 357 n. 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Disputatio Byziae* 9, Allen and Neil, 106.

¹⁰⁷ Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 25.

¹⁰⁸ Epifanovich, *Материалы*, VI; see by the same author, *Преподобный Максим Исповедник*.

¹⁰⁹ See Benevich, “Maximos' Heritage in Russia and Ukraine,” in *ОИМС*, 460–479.

¹¹⁰ See Lackner, “Zur Quellen und Datierung der Maximosvita,” 285–316.

a vivid translation accompanied by his characteristically insightful and thorough notes, under the title “An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor” (henceforth *SL*).¹¹¹

SL seems on its face to tell a completely different infancy story than *GL3*. It recounts the scandalous tale of a certain MSKY (ܡܫܟܝܐ, most likely Moschion), the illegitimate offspring of a Samaritan merchant and a Persian slave girl who was born in the village of Ḥeṣṣin in the Palestinian Golan. He lost his father to dropsy at nine and his mother to a lethal fall from a pomegranate tree at ten, while his siblings died from freak accidents, including a vicious camel’s mauling. He was raised by a certain Pantoleon, “wicked and Origenist,” who renamed him Maximos (ܡܫܟܝܡܘܣ) during his time at the monastery of the Palaia Lavra (St. Chariton) in honor of his nephew’s son, who had died earlier. The account (inexplicably) picks up again some four decades later and retells how Sophronios of Jerusalem fell—perhaps literally—under Maximos’ spell of heretical teachings. Thereafter, the antihero spearheaded the Dyothelite charge against the imperial doctrines of Monenergism and Monothelitism that urgently sought to pacify and reintegrate disenchanting non-Chalcedonian factions through the revision of Christological definitions. As a result of Maximos’ heresy and impudence, the author of *SL* intimates, God rained down his wrath on the Roman Empire in the form of the Islamic conquests that followed on the heels of Herakleios’ armistice with Sassanian Persia. When the rebel was finally captured, he was confined to a female monastery—for shame, no doubt—but the manuscript breaks off before the end. Nevertheless, the author, a Syrian hierarch called George (perhaps Gregory) of Resh’aina, who claims he knew Maximos personally, must have heard about his ignominious demise, given the title of his work: *A Tale Concerning the Wicked Maximos of Palestine, Who Blasphemed against His Creator and Had His Tongue Cut Out*.

Once brought to light, this work received a range of scholarly responses. Given some of its outlandish claims and its virulently hostile tone, numerous scholars simply disregarded the *SL* as the incensed and fabricated ravings of an adversary;¹¹² others have weighed its merits, but have nevertheless come out in favor of the Greek accounts;¹¹³ yet others have underscored the merits of the Syriac *Life*, particularly the fact that a birth in Palestine, as the Syriac *Life* claims, would make sense of Maximos’ seemingly long friendship with Sophronios of Jerusalem¹¹⁴ and of some of his theological sensitivities against a “revived” Origenism.¹¹⁵ No work, however, has done as much as Phil Booth’s *Crisis of Empire* to vindicate the veracity of *SL* and to undermine the legitimacy of *GL3* and its purported infancy narrative.¹¹⁶ After his careful analysis of the data, he concludes that *SL* “inspires confidence both in its closeness to events and in its intersection on various incidental points of detail with other sources of the period.”¹¹⁷

The jury, however, is still split concerning *SL*, as Pauline Allen has accurately noted: “The Syriac *Life* of Maximus has tended to polarize scholars, meeting with both negativity and unqualified

¹¹¹ Brock, “An Early Syriac Life,” 299–346.

¹¹² Constatas, *On Difficulties*, vii, for example, makes no mention of the biographical challenges raised by the *SL*. In fairness, however, the introduction to the text is allotted a very tight word limit that can be spent on other, more certain and illuminating, matters that have greater bearing on the work at hand. See also Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ*, 65; Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome*, 79.

¹¹³ See *Maximus the Confessor*, trans. A. Louth, 5–6.

¹¹⁴ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 6.

¹¹⁵ Argarate, *Diálogo ascético*, 38–39.

¹¹⁶ See Booth’s reconstruction of the unfolding scholarly divide on the question of *SL* and *GL3* in *Crisis of Empire*, 143–155.

¹¹⁷ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 148.

acceptance.”¹¹⁸ Perhaps what compounds this scholarly debate in particular is the fact that the infancy narratives of both *GLβ* and *SL* can readily account for significant moments of Maximos’ career, while simultaneously being deeply problematic. *SL* would explain Maximos’ apparently longstanding friendship with Sophronios better, and his relation to the circle of the Eukratades (Sophronios and Ioannes Moschos) mentioned in epistolary exchanges.¹¹⁹ *GLβ*, on the other hand, offers a plausible and rather simple reason for which Maximos regularly corresponded with the Roman elite, was familiar with aristocratic insignias, and was exceptionally schooled: he was an aristocrat. But both accounts have major drawbacks. On the one hand, the infancy narrative of *GLβ* (henceforth *GLβi*) presents an array of problems because it is little more than a stylistically sophisticated plagiarism. On the other hand, despite Booth’s claims that *SL* “inspires confidence,” the account’s hostile tone already predisposes one to be circumspect about its claims and especially those surrounding Maximos’ origins.

The result is that we have reached a scholarly stalemate concerning Maximos’ early years. I believe this scholarly stalemate exists because of an imbalanced analysis of the sources. Let me be clear: articles, chapters, and conference presentations have done much to erode the credibility of *GLβi*’s infancy account; but the infancy account of *SL* (henceforth *SLi*) has received no literary-analytical treatment. In other words, this stalemate stands on an imbalanced assessment of the infancy sources. This chapter aims at upsetting this stalemate through a two-step argument. First, it is high time *SLi* receives the literary analysis it deserves. I will argue that such an analysis demonstrates that *SLi* is as much a literary fabrication as *GLβi*. My conclusion is that both *SLi* and *GLβi* are not reliable sources of information for Maximos’ early years. This conclusion leads to the second step of the argument. Once Palestine and Constantinople are removed from the picture—indeed, once we have no bias in favor of or against any particular place of origin—what can we say about his upbringing? I will propose that the least problematic answer to this question and the one that accounts for the most data available is that Maximos was an upper-class youth who hailed from or extendedly resided in Alexandria. These findings fit in with the larger picture of this study by requiring a reevaluation of his thought, sources, and semantic range of his terminology in light of the lively study of Aristotle that we know took place in Alexandria during the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries. In other words, this chapter offers an unprecedented reconstruction of his background that has never before been considered in the recreation of his intellectual trajectory.¹²⁰ These findings will inform and direct our subsequent study of his works.

1. Syriac Literary Background

SL is a cultural production whose literary and social context scholars have left largely untouched. By the time of Aphrahat the Persian Sage (270–345)—that is, some three centuries before the composition of *SL*, Syriac was already a language adorned by rich literary figures and rhetorical devices. This fact is surely germane to any contemporary scholar of Syriac literature, but the fact should be stated here at the outset to evince any ambiguity. These stylistic complements have been amply

¹¹⁸ Pauline Allen, “Lives and Times,” in *OHMC*, 13. Parenthetical references to scholars who hold such views have been left out.

¹¹⁹ See Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 149.

¹²⁰ The closest any scholar has come to this position is Boudignon’s “Maxime le Confesseur.” His study, however, does not attempt to reconstruct his intellectual trajectory; rather, it is designed to illumine the puzzling network of connections that Maximos had in Alexandria.

studied, not only in Aphrahat, about whose stylistic means an entire monograph has been written,¹²¹ but in numerous other Syriac writers, such as Ephrem of Nisibis (306–373),¹²² Balai of Qennešrin (5th c.),¹²³ the long-lived Mar Aba II of Kaškar (641–751),¹²⁴ and Antony of Tagrit (9th c.), who even wrote a manual on rhetorical style.¹²⁵ In this way, earlier prejudices about Syriac writers’ lack of taste for oratory¹²⁶ have been gradually replaced with a fascination for their ample appropriation of Greek stylistic devices and the development of their own idiosyncratic literary and linguistic forms.¹²⁷ John Watt notes in this regard that: “The Syrians could well have found rhetoric useful in a number of ways. Certainly, they had little occasion or incentive to employ secular panegyric, but they did wish to praise the saints and celebrate the feasts of the church, persuade or dissuade their congregations, defend their theological heroes, and accuse or vituperate heretics.”¹²⁸ In light of Watt’s observations, it would be unremarkable for a learned Syrian hierarch to resort to rhetorical devices in order to “vituperate heretics” like Maximos.¹²⁹

To comprehend the internal structures at play in *SL*, it seems necessary to provide a thick description of the Syriac literary background, both as it developed and, more specifically, as it stood around the time of *SL*’s composition. As Watt mentioned above, Syriac frequently availed itself of rich rhetorical and linguistic means to undertake protracted character assassinations. Most scholars of late antiquity will no doubt be familiar with Gregory of Nazianzos’ scathing invective (στηλιτευτικός) against Emperor Julian, but around the same time Ephrem of Nisibis penned an equally antipathetic text, the *Hymns against Julian*, that drew extensively on the rhetorical tradition to lambast the Apostate’s memory. Ephrem often interwove rhetoric with intertextuality in order to fold his audience into familiar Biblical narratives and dramatize contemporary events. Thus, for example, the Syrian deacon employs the Biblical metaphor of the wheat and the tares from Matthew 13:24–30 to contrast his congregation (the wheat, or perseverant Christians) with Julian (the tare, or apostate).¹³⁰ By paralleling current events in this way with well-known Scriptural stories, Ephrem could imply the moral of the story by signaling the end of the tares: they are separated from the wheat and burned in the fire. This rhetorical spin inflected the tone of the poetic account by proleptically foreshadowing the antihero’s demise. This device, in turn, invited the reader to interpret the actions of the protagonist as building tension leading gradually toward his cathartic doom.

Ephrem draws especial attention to the moment of victory over the pagan Julian by recreating a step-by-step vivid episode where he poked fun at the Emperor’s cadaver: “I went, my brethren, to the bier of the defiled one/and I stood tall over it and derided his paganism/I said: Is this the one who exalted himself/against the Living Name and forgot that he is dust?”¹³¹ Ephrem’s subtle use of intertextuality, “exalted himself” (Matthew 23:12, Luke 14:11) and “dust” (Genesis 2:7), puts Scriptural

¹²¹ Häfeli, *Stilmittel*. See additionally Woźniak, “Aphrahats Metapherverständnis,” in Drijvers, Lavenant, Molenberg, and Reinink, 275–288.

¹²² Yousif, “Les formes littéraires,” 83–92.

¹²³ Phenix, *The Sermons on Joseph*.

¹²⁴ Reinink, “Rhetorik in der Homilie,” 307–316.

¹²⁵ *The Fifth Book of the Rhetoric of Antony of Tagrit*, CSCO 480:317–326.

¹²⁶ Duval, *La littérature syriaque*, 3rd ed., 10.

¹²⁷ See in this regard Hidary, “The Agonistic Bavli: Greco-Roman Rhetoric in Sasanian Persia,” in Secunda and Fine, 137–164 and *Syriac Polemics*, Bekkum, Drijvers, and Klugkist, eds.

¹²⁸ Watt, “Syriac Rhetorical Theory,” in Fortenbaugh and Mirhady, 244.

¹²⁹ For further details on this figure see Brock, “Early Syriac Life,” 332–336.

¹³⁰ *Hymns against Julian*, 1.4 and 2.10–11. ed. Edmund Beck. CSCO 174 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1957), 72 and 77–78.

¹³¹ *Hymns against Julian*, 3.4 (CSCO 174:82).

perspective on Julian’s self-exaltation through a few, well-placed words. Ephrem continues his rhetorical barrage as he looks down at his vanquished foe: “This is his magnificence and this his pride/This is his majesty and this his chariot/This is soil that is rotten.”¹³² Here the shorter third verse continues the five-fold anaphora of the near demonstrative pronoun ܐܝܢܐ (this) to build rhythm and symmetry, only to be broken by the shocking stop with the staccato line that mirrors in its terseness Ephrem’s gloating over the Emperor’s corpse: he is rotting soil. The bishop of Nisibis builds additional layers on these stylistic devices through a sarcastic tone that inveighs against Julian’s presumption. He declares the Emperor’s body—the quasi-divine vessel wherein Imperial power resided—his “magnificence,” “pride,” and “majesty” with readily detectable sarcasm and makes fun of his defunct state by calling the funerary bier his “chariot,” thus mocking the Emperor’s inability to stand.

Ephrem goes further by contrasting divine and earthly authority as he compares Julian’s prostrate posture on his “chariot” (the funerary bier) with an anthropomorphic God, who stands erect, thundering from a kingly chariot in his full glory.¹³³ The third hymn underscores these contrasts between earthly and divine power further through the jocular refrain, which would have been repeated a total of seventeen times to drive home its point: “Glory to the One who clothed his cadaver in shame” (ܩܘܪܒܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܠܗ ܕܡܘܬܐ).¹³⁴ Although further stylistic devices in Ephrem’s *Hymns against Julian* and elsewhere could be studied, I offer these as representative examples of commonplace literary figures and rhetorical tones that stocked the stylistic arsenal with which Syriac writers often armed themselves against their ideological and political adversaries. Another feature of Ephrem’s passages considered above is his use of Scriptural intertextuality. He applied images from the Bible to the internal context of his works in order to texture their spiritual dimensions and to establish a perceptible resonance between the audience and the present. We will see these strategies again at play in *SL*; and while we must allow for significant changes in the literary use, application, and resonance that stylistic devices had among Syriac-speaking audiences in subsequent centuries, it should be clear from what follows that they nevertheless continued to develop a rich literary tradition in numerous genres after the time of Ephrem. We should also note that Ephrem became to aspiring Syrian literati the stylistic template that Gregory of Nazianzos became to Greek-speaking Romans.

Given the temporal gap between Ephrem and George of Resh’aina, we should offer a more precise idea of where Syriac literature stood around the time of *SL*’s composition. *SL* was necessarily written after Maximos’ death in 662, since the title includes a reference to his tongue’s excision, which was followed by his death a few months later. Also, Sebastian Brock is certain that BM Add. 7192 is a copy from no later than the beginning of the eighth century.¹³⁵ So, it seems reasonable to suppose that the time of *SL*’s composition can be narrowed down to a window between 662 and ca. 700. This later date, however, is almost certainly too late because George claims that he was a disciple of Sophronios (d. 638), that he personally knew Maximos (*SL* 5–6), and that he was a bishop with two of his own disciples by 636 (*SL* 11). Assuming that a bishop should be at least thirty years old, George would likely have been born no earlier than the turn of the century. If so, by 662 he would have already been

¹³² *Hymns against Julian*, 3.5 (CSCO 174:82).

¹³³ 3.17 (CSCO 174:85).

¹³⁴ 3.1 (CSCO 174:81).

¹³⁵ Brock, “Early Syriac Life,” 300.

A similar device can be found in the famous Chaldean account of Mar Qardag̃. After another similar exhortation to the faithful regarding the man’s exemplary deeds, the account turns to his birthplace and lineage: “So, saint Mar Qardag̃ was from a great people, from the folk of the kingdom of the Assyrians. His father was from the famed lineage of the house of Nimrod, and his mother from the famed lineage of the house of Sennacherib.”¹⁴² Again, as the hagiography proceeds, the greatness of his character is set up by his ancestry and birthplace; in his case, however, the two lineages will later serve to subvert the symbols of power and authority in Sassanian Persia after he becomes a Christian.¹⁴³ It seems that there was some degree of reader expectation for the details concerning the protagonist’s birth and lineage across the centuries, areas, and languages of Christian hagiographic literature. For example, Michael Al-Sim’ānī expresses tangible anxiety at his initial failure to find information about John of Damascus’ origin.¹⁴⁴ We can understand, then, why the hagiographer of *GL3* may have been inclined to invent something with which his sources had failed to provide him.

Birthplace and lineage could also serve hostile purposes in late ancient biographical accounts. A famous and amusing example can be found in Tertullian’s *Against Marcion*. After describing the horrid climate of Pontus, the sexual promiscuity and savagery of its people (complete with references to cannibalism), and the women’s performance of their house chores with battle axes, he adds: “But nothing is so barbaric or dismal (*triste*) about Pontus as the fact that Marcion was born there.”¹⁴⁵ Here we can see that Marcion’s birthplace does not just serve as a biographical incidental; rather, it parallels his character. *SL* similarly deploys toponymy as a parallel to prosopography. According to George, Maximos was born in Ḥeṣḥin (ܚܫܝܢ), which was a small village not far from the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee in the Palestinian Golan. But the root of this village’s name, ܚܫܝܢ, can also double as a literary figure. The root ܚܫܝܢ is associated with boldness, insolence, and shamelessness.¹⁴⁶ It would indeed be a fortuitous coincidence that Maximos was born in a village the name of which coincides with the character traits the author ascribes to him later in the narrative (*SL* 6, 9, 18, 21, 25–6).

There is more to the opening sentence. As we had seen in Ephrem’s *Hymns against Julian* above, George resorts to the loaded metaphor of the Biblical tare to introduce his antihero (*SL* 1). By opening the work with an implied comparison between Maximos and the metaphor for apostasy, he draws attention to the steps that lead to the antihero’s demise and, simultaneously, foreshadows his betrayal of the Church. In this way, George sets the tone not only for his assessment of Maximos’ character, but for the literary resourcefulness he will subsequently deploy. We may conclude with some certainty that the opening sentence is concerned with painting an unambiguous portrait of Maximos’ moral persona. If so, George’s objective is to tell us *who* Maximos is, not *where* he was “actually” born. And while one may fairly interject that these two points are not mutually exclusive, it is equally fair to respond that only the former is reasonably demonstrable. It should also be noted that the latter point would have been hard to contest for two reasons. First, George would have been writing about events nearly a century past and in the aftermath of the deaths, executions, or exiles of all of the Confessor’s

¹⁴² *The Tale of the Heroics of Mar Qardag̃*, Bedjan, ed., 443.

¹⁴³ For further analysis of the subversive nature of this narrative see Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardag̃*, 141–63.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Al-Sam’ānī, *Biographie de Saint Jean Damascène*, Bacha, ed., 6–7.

¹⁴⁵ Tertullian, *adv. Marc.* 1.1.4, Evans, ed. and trans, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 154.

political and ecclesiastical allies.¹⁴⁷ Second, even if some of his confreres were still alive, none of them, to our knowledge, would have the linguistic prerequisite to dispute an account composed in Syriac.

Rather, the historical trajectory and reception of Maximos' figure suggests that exaggeration upon exaggeration was to be his fate. For instance, while *SL* refers to the excision of his tongue and *GL*¹⁴⁸ and other sources¹⁴⁹ add the amputation of his right hand, sources farther removed in time operate under the same assumption that George likely made: one may embellish one's tale once those who knew the man are gone. In this vein, the Syriac *Chronicle* of Michael the Great (1126–1199) and the *Anonymous Chronicle to 1234* both refer to the excision of his tongue and the amputation of his right hand, but dramatize the punishment by including his left hand as well.¹⁵⁰ To take matters further, Muḥammad ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya (1292–1350), the most famed student of the great Muslim polemicist Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah (1263–1328), informs us that not only was the Confessor's tongue excised and both hands amputated, but throws in both his feet for good measure: فأمر به قسطا
فقطعت يده ورجلاه، ونزع لسانه.¹⁵¹ What these later additions suggest is a correlation between fancifulness and distance from events. The same is likely true concerning Maximos' purported birth in Palestine.

Finally, Ḥeṣṣfin may also be a subtle satire of a major city near an important body of water, such as Alexandria. Like most satires, it would invert facts for comedy's sake: the Mediterranean replaced with a minute body of water (the Sea of Galilee), one of the empire's important cities with an unknown village (Ḥeṣṣfin).¹⁵² As we will see, a satire in these proportions would not be inconsistent with other clearer instances in *SLi* that we consider in following sections. What this discussion of Ḥeṣṣfin indicates is that Maximos' birthplace in *SLi* is a prosopographical, not a biographical, device; the two should not be uncritically identified.

George continues the opening sentence by attributing Maximos' birth in Ḥeṣṣfin to the fact that his Father was a Samaritan from Šikhar. Christians may have recognized this place from the pericope of the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (John 4:5–42). Of course, a Samaritan may well hail from Šikhar, one of the Samaritan districts, but that, again, does not seem to be the point. The trilateral root that forms the name **حكح** suggests as much, since it readily lends itself to prosopographical senses that fit well with what we later find out about Maximos' father. The root may refer to disgrace, shame, or

¹⁴⁷ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 149 claims that George could not have displaced Maximos' entire monastic career before an "informed audience." But this claim occludes the fact that this "informed audience" (possibly Ioannes the Almsgiver †610, Ioannes Moschos †619, Sophronios of Jerusalem †638, Pope Martin †655, Anastasios his disciple †662, Anastasios the Apokrisarios †666, etc.) was dead or at best in exile and did not know Syriac.

¹⁴⁸ *Life of Maximus*, (Allen and Neil 176:1733–1735).

¹⁴⁹ See *Theodori Spudaei Hypomnesticon*, 152. Theophanes the Confessor, *Theophani Confessoris Chronographia*, 351:19–20; Georgios the Monk, *Georgii monachi chronicon*, 717:16–17; and Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, *De insidiis in Excerpta*, 3:186:13–14.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Rabo, *Chronicle* 9.9 in *Chronique de Michel le syrien*, 4:426 and *Anonymous Chronicle to 1234*, CSCO 109:264–67. See also Brock, "Early Syriac Life," 340 and Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 144. Note that their accounts are derived from a certain She'mun of Qennešrin, about whom very little is known. Whether during his time the reference to the amputation of both his hands was already known or was a later invention cannot be ascertained.

¹⁵¹ See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidayat al-ḥayārā fī ajnibat al-Yabūd wa-'l-Našārā*, ed. 'Uthmān Jum'ā Dumayriyya, 422. The text reads: ثم كان لهم مجمع تاسع في أيام معاوية بن أبي سفيان تلاحنوا فيه، وذلك أنه كان برومية راهب فتيس يقال له، مقسلس، وله تلميذان فجاء إلى قسطا الوالي فوبخه على فئح مذهبه وشناعة كفره. فأمر به قسطا فقطعت يده ورجلاه، ونزع لسانه. Although Maximos' name is here oddly spelled مقسلس, where a yā' should stand in the place of lām, (most likely an innocent typesetting error), it is certain the reference is to him, since the time frame is the rule of Mu'āwiyah ibn 'Abī Ṣufyān (r. 661–680) and the amputation of his tongue and right hand is distinctive, as is the mention of his two disciples.

¹⁵² That Ḥeṣṣfin was utterly obscure, even to Syrians, is demonstrated in the corruption of spelling of the name in later Chronicles, like the *Chronicle* of Michael Rabo and *The Anonymous Chronicle to 1234*. See Brock, "Early Syriac Life," 338.

Chaldean (ܐܒܢܐ) and can be found in 1 Peter 2:8 (“A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense/λίθος προσκόμματος καὶ πέτρα σκανδάλου”).¹⁵⁷ The allusion to 1 Peter 2:8 is hard to miss because ܐܒܢܐ is a hapax legomenon in the Syriac Bible. Coincidence here is implausible. The idea is to add a further layer to Abno’s persona, this time, that of stumbling and scandal.

Unsurprisingly, stumbling and scandal is precisely what Abno’s high-run passions in Tiberias bring about. Predictably, the Persian slave girl becomes pregnant; when Abno’s fellow Samaritans find out, they offer him an ultimatum for fear that they will be laughed at: “Either give us this woman while she is pregnant in order to burn her to divert this scandal (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) from us and from our people, or we will make you an outcast from our community” (*SL* 2). This pericope reintroduces Biblical intertextuality, this time from an episode in Genesis 38:23–24 between Judah and Tamar: “Judah replied: ‘Let her keep the things as her own, otherwise we will be laughed at . . . About three months later Judah was told, ‘Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover, she is pregnant as a result of whoredom.’ And Judah said, ‘Bring her out, and let her be burned’” (NRSV). The parallels between the two stories are hard to overlook. Perhaps at this point, the Syriac reader may have begun to raise a proverbial eyebrow.

George may have sensed that proverbial eyebrow and sought to preempt or encourage it—depending on whether one had caught on to his drift—by continuing this string of puns. For this reason, he adds that he has it on the reliable eye witness account of a priest called “MRTUR” (ܡܪܬܘܪ) that everything he has recounted occurred precisely as he says (*SL* 5). This moment is amusing, because he calls his witness “Witness.” Further, when Abno and the now-emancipated Persian girl flee, they ignominiously make their way to Ḥeṣṣin (i.e., shamelessness) and avoid punishment through the man in command of the region, a certain “GND” (ܓܢܕ). The letters here are an abbreviated form of Gennadios, which is a less-than-subtle reference to those of elite extraction.

We should stop to take stock of *SLi* so far. At this stage it may appear clear that a literary analysis, while illuminating of the internal stylistic, intertextual, and rhetorical devices of the text, also suggests—if not more—that *SLi* is little more than an inventive fabrication; its details cannot be trusted for similar reasons as those for which *GLβi* has been dismissed. But all good literature is good precisely because it retains some form of connection to a reality that it critiques, reflects, or distorts for various reason. *SLi*, I will argue following, is no different inasmuch as it counterintuitively points to the wealthy status of Maximos’ parents, which in turn allows us to draw further conclusions about the Confessor’s formation.

3. Dropsy, Pomegranates, and Satirical Reversals

Like birth, lineage, and names, the manner of characters’ deaths often discloses key aspects about their moral personae. The death of Maximos’ parents in *SL* seems to follow this general rule. According to *SL*, Abno died when Maximos was nine years old due to the “accumulation of the waters” (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ), Syriac’s descriptive name for dropsy. Dropsy was a well-known and often lethal disease whose chief symptom was edematous tissue in various parts of the body, including the face, arms, and legs, which gave the afflicted a bloated appearance. Hippokrates references the condition

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *Thesaurus syriacus*, 17.

or the patient around eighty times,¹⁵⁸ Aristotle mentions it repeatedly,¹⁵⁹ Diokles' fragments 112, 117, and 183 speak about the disease with considerable expertise,¹⁶⁰ it shows up in Galen's writings nearly fifty times,¹⁶¹ and myriad further references could be added to these. The disease was clearly ubiquitous in antiquity and was cause for major concern—according to Theophanes the Confessor, it even claimed the life of Emperor Herakleios.¹⁶² But like most diseases in antiquity, dropsy was not just a medical matter.

In common with a long Biblical tradition, George shows a disposition to interpret tragedies and diseases as divine punishments (*SL* 18, 20, 23). Some well-known Scriptural examples are King Asa's feet impairment (2 Chr 16:12), the paralytic man whom Jesus first forgives and then heals (Mark 2:1–12), and the barrage of plagues brought on against the worshipers of Antichrist by the seals, trumps, and cups in the book of Revelation (Rev 6:1–14, 8:6–9:21, 16:2–21). The sentiment was just as prevalent among non-Christian Greeks. Apollo brought plagues, Zeus blindness, Athena mental impairments.¹⁶³ Needless to say, Christians in later centuries also frequently interpreted diseases in theological ways. Maximos himself took the disease of King Asa of Judah mentioned above as his laxity in the pursuit of virtue late in his life.¹⁶⁴ Predictably, Ephrem of Nisibis attributes Julian's early death to divine intervention to curb the pagan's evil designs for the Church.¹⁶⁵ Thus, if George intended for a disease to signify more than a medical condition, he would simply be a product of his time and culture, not an isolated exception.

Dropsy had a rather rich narrative function across a range of literary genres. One of the most salient examples, and one which George would have undoubtedly known, is Jesus' healing of a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1–14). The pericope tells that Jesus entered the house of a leading Pharisee (τινος τῶν ἀρχόντων τῶν Φαρισαίων) and before him there was a man with dropsy. After he asked whether it was permissible to heal on the Sabbath and was answered with silence, he cured the man and dismissed him. The disease in this specific context has drawn some scholarly attention. In his commentary on the gospel of Luke, Joel Green notes that: “Also known in antiquity is the metaphorical use of ‘dropsy’ as a label for money-lovers, the greedy, the rapacious—that is, for persons who share the very condition for which the Pharisees are indicted in the Gospel of Luke.”¹⁶⁶ He continues: “The presence of the dropsical man, according to this reading, would constitute a vivid parable of Jesus' socially elite, Pharisaical table companions.”¹⁶⁷ The connection between dropsy and wealth that Green proposes can be bolstered by considering what follows the healing of the dropsy. Once Jesus has dismissed him, he delivers a sermon against social pretension and class distinction. The man with dropsy thereby

¹⁵⁸ E.g.: *Aër* 4:33; 7:18; 10:23; 10:52; *Prog.* 8:1; 8:8; *Aph.* 7:75:1; *Hum.* 18:9. Citations follow section and line in *Oeuvres complètes d'Hippocrate*, ed. É. Littré, 2 vols. (Paris: Baillière, 1839).

¹⁵⁹ E.g., *HA* 587a6; 638b17; *Pr.* 887a23.

¹⁶⁰ E.g., 112.1, 2, 8, 17, 18; 117.11; 183a.90.

¹⁶¹ E.g., *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 8.6.24.3 in *Galen: On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, ed. P H. De Lacy, *Corpus medicorum Graecorum* 5.4.1.2.1–2; *De symptomatum differentiis liber* 7.81.2; 2.213.4 and *De difficultate respirationis libri* 7.935.16 in *Claudii Galeni opera omnia* 7.

¹⁶² *Theophanis Chronographia*, 341:12–13 or AM 6132, AD 639/40.

¹⁶³ *Iliad* 1.456; 6.193; *Odyssey* 20.345–50, respectively. For these references and further discussion, see Vlahogiannis, “‘Curing’ Disability” in King, 180–187.

¹⁶⁴ *Cap. theol* 2.68 (PG 91:1156B).

¹⁶⁵ *Hymns against Julian* 3.2–3 (CSCO 174:81–82).

¹⁶⁶ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 547.

¹⁶⁷ Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 547.

functioned as a visual representation, perhaps a synecdoche,¹⁶⁸ of the moral affliction of Jesus' hosts: love of riches. This pericope indicates that by Jesus' time, dropsy could be pressed into the metaphorical service of a diatribe against the wealthy, social elites.

This metaphorical application of dropsy to the social elites seems to have been rather widespread. In the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea delivered a sermon on Psalm 14 directed against those who lend money with interest. In that sermon, he spoke of the various evils associated with lending and borrowing at interest, particularly the insatiability that it creates among those who wish to retain the appearance of elite class. In a telling passage, he drew an explicit comparison between such men and dropsies (ὕδερῶντες), who only seem to be obese, but are in fact afflicted with a different disease than their appearance would suggest.¹⁶⁹ Not long after, Basil's erstwhile friend, Gregory of Nazianzos, made a similar reference in a passage that commented on Lazarus' poverty.¹⁷⁰ In the fifth century, the compiler of ancient wisdom Ioannes Stobaios reproduced another entry on dropsy functioning as a metaphor: "Diogenes compared money-lovers to dropsies: for the latter, even when they are full of fluid desire drink, and the money-lovers, even when they are full (πλήρεις) of money desire more, but both to their perdition."¹⁷¹ Here again we find dropsy employed in parallel with the higher echelons of society, or "money-lovers", one of the most common epithets ascribed to them.¹⁷² Stobaios makes this connection between class and dropsy more explicit elsewhere in the *Anthology*.¹⁷³ Thus, when George tells us that Maximos' father died of dropsy, it is quite possible that he is bearing indirect witness to his lofty social status. This possibility deserves further investigation.

According to *SLi*, Abno was a merchant, but this class does not seem to fit the picture for affluence that anyone would stereotypically ridicule. Merchants in the Roman Empire did not rise to financial prominence until the Palaiologean period and even then, their affluence was short-lived. Thus, it is very unlikely that George would have considered a merchant and financial wealth coterminous. While merchants certainly did not belong to the lowest echelons of Roman society, like sharecroppers, the available evidence from the sixth and seventh centuries indicates that they would have also not been wealthy enough to be considered well-to-do, since their own station depended in large part on the good graces of the urban elites.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, there is considerable data that points to the difficulty they had in gaining a foothold on the trade market against their easternmost Persian competitors, who had come to some prominence as a result of increased trade securities sanctioned and underwritten by the Sassanian state that were not reciprocated by the Roman bureaucracy.¹⁷⁵

Rather, it seems to me that the picture of the wealthy merchant derives largely from the late medieval rise of Venetian and Genoese traders. But such a rise in the merchant class was ephemeral

¹⁶⁸ See Häfeli, *Stilmittel*, 84.

¹⁶⁹ Basil of Caesarea, *Second Homily on Psalm 14*, PG 29:276D.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory of Nazianzos, *De seipso et ad eos qui ipsum cathedram Constantinopolitanam affectare dicebant* (PG 36:280A).

¹⁷¹ *Anth.* 3.10.45, in *Ioannis Stobaei anthologium*, ed. O. Hense and C. Wachsmuth, 5 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1958).

¹⁷² See, for example John Chrysostom, *ep. pop. CP* (PG 49:40A–D); Prokopios of Gaza, *Comm. in Isa.* (PG 87/2.2528AB); Olympiodoros, *Ecl.* (PG 93.548D). Theodore the Studite, *Ep.* 11:109–11, in *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, ed. G. Fatouros, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Series Berolinensis 31* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992).

¹⁷³ *Anth.* 31c.84.16–19.

¹⁷⁴ See Kaplan, "The Producing Population," in Haldon, 158–161. There were, of course, exceptions, as mentioned by Kaplan here; by his example, there seems to be one case of a silk-trader in the tenth century who became wealthy enough through his work to become a landowner; but the fact that this story is a rare occurrence would suggest that labeling a merchant as a wealthy person would have not likely been a stereotype.

¹⁷⁵ See Daryae, "Bazaars, Merchants, and Trade in Late Antique Iran," 401–409.

in the Roman Empire and only took place as late as the era of the Palaiologoi, as Michael Kaplan has described:

Between the two <classes (i.e., aristocrats and wage-earners)>, there emerges in the sources of the Palaeologue period, in the fourteenth century, a category of people qualified as *mesoi*, intermediaries between the rich (who were most often aristocrats), and the small artisans and shopkeepers. These were merchants and manufacturers of a certain degree of wealth, but without obtaining the level of the aristocrats, as is demonstrated in the “Dialogue between the rich and the poor” of Alexios Makrembolites. This new stratification in the urban population lasted only a short time: from the end of the fourteenth century, the aristocracy invested extensively in urban affairs and the *mesoi* disappeared.¹⁷⁶

Thus, even when merchants in the Roman Empire did come to some considerable financial assets, they were manifestly not considered members of the social elite, but something of a middle class. Rather, the earlier one goes away from the Palaiologean dynasty, the clearer it becomes that merchants were on no account a characteristically affluent class. For example, by the tenth century the merchant class earned only an average of 18 *nomisma* per year to the nobility’s average of 350 or the large landowner’s 25; by comparison, a low-ranking member of the military ranks would earn 6.5 *nomisma* per year and the poorest in the Empire, the tenant, an average of 3.5 *nomisma* per year, as this chart for the Roman Empire ca. the year 1000 shows:¹⁷⁷

Social group	Percentage of population	Per capita income (in <i>nomisma</i> per annum)	Income in terms of per capita mean
Tenants	37	3.5	0.56
Farmers	52	3.8	0.61
Large landowners	1	25	4.02
<i>Rural</i>	90	3.91	0.63
Urban ‘marginals’	2	3.5	0.56
Workers	3	6	0.97
Traders, skilled craftsmen	3.5	18	2.90
Army	1	6.5	1.05
<i>Urban excluding nobility</i>	9.5	9.9	1.60
Nobility	0.5	350	56.31
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>6.22</i>	<i>1</i>

Notes: Nobility includes civil and military nobility. The average household size estimated at 4.3 (see Lefort, 2002).

¹⁷⁶ Kaplan, “The Producing Population,” 162.

¹⁷⁷ Milanović, Lindert, and Williamson, *Measuring Ancient Inequality*, 45–46.

Thus, earning slightly more than twice the salary of a low-rank soldier, like the *κοντουβέρνιον* (*contubernium*),¹⁷⁸ would hardly lend itself to humorous remarks about wealth.

But this chart details tenth-century income, not seventh-century income; perhaps things were different then? It appears not, though merchants were assigned stereotypical roles in seventh-century hagiographies and other literary creations, as Gilbert Dagron has shown. He concludes that: “While, by tradition, commerce and artisanal activity continued to rank low in the social hierarchy, it is nonetheless essential to note the important position of artisans-merchants throughout the hagiography of the seventh century.”¹⁷⁹ In his excellent study, Dagron highlights the prominence of merchants in hagiography (and other literary forms), much as Abno in *SL*. He also points, however, to their lack of affluence. Therefore, we can conclude that George would not have considered a merchant a proper target of satire for excessive wealth. Fortunately, we know that very few in the Roman Empire could be considered exceptionally wealthy—wealthy enough, at any rate, that that particular feature stood out to others. Accordingly, we may reasonably suppose that—if dropsy is meant as a jab at Maximos’ provenance from affluence—the Confessor had come from not modest assets.

Further confirmation of this theory is folded into the account of Maximos’ mother. We have already seen that she was a Persian slave girl who belonged to a Jew by the name of Zadoq. Additionally, we are told that her name was ŠNDH (𐭪𐭥𐭩), which is otherwise unattested, but for convenience we will call her Šendeh. After Maximos, she also birthed a son and daughter, took the baptismal name of Mary, and a year after her husband’s death she fell from a pomegranate tree and died. Most of these details require some explication.

Šendeh’s baptismal name of Mary is very likely a literary trope aimed at imitating the widespread practice for Zoroastrian converts to take on that name at baptism. For example, in the same decade that Maximos’ mother would purportedly have been baptized, the two most distinguished Persian converts from Zoroastrianism also took on the name Mary. The first was Hazārwi, the sister of the famed George of Izla (formerly Mihrmāgušnasp).¹⁸⁰ The second was Golindouch who became widely known as Mary the Persian Martyr.¹⁸¹ These stories are known to have circulated widely. Hazārwi’s story in particular would have likely been known to someone from Resh’aina (modern-day Rās al-‘Ayn/رأس العين), given the city’s close geographical proximity to the events of the *Life of George of Izla* and given its importance as a major center of learning and culture in the region. George could have well cast her conversion to Christianity and baptismal name in the mold of these earlier and rather famous accounts. Another equally likely possibility is that George plagiarized various aspects of the ignominious birth of Maximos from the *Life of Theodoros of Sykeon* (6th c.). Theodoros was born of an inn courtesan named Mary as the result of a “one-night stand,” to borrow Louth’s technical phrase, with a man of some status and connections to the Imperial court called Kosmas (*Life of Theodoros of Sykeon* 3).¹⁸² Either of these options is possible and they need not be mutually exclusive. Whatever the case may be, these literary connections suggest further the fictional inventiveness of *SLi* and the

¹⁷⁸ See Emperor Leo VI, *The Tactica of Leo VI*, 4.42.1–3.

¹⁷⁹ Dagron, “The Urban Economy,” in Laou, 416.

¹⁸⁰ Babai the Great, *Life of Mar George of Izla*, 13 (Bedjan, 2:443–4).

¹⁸¹ Βίος και πολιτεία, ἤγγουν ἄθλησις καὶ διὰ Χριστὸν ἀγῶνες τῆς ἀγίας ὀσιομάρτυς Γολινδοῦχ, τῆς ἐν τῷ ἀγίῳ βαπτίσματι μετανομασθείσης Μαρίας, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ανάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας* 4 (1898): 149–79.

¹⁸² Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 6.

historical implausibility of the details it recounts. This much becomes explicit in the case of Mary's death.

Like dropsy, the pomegranate tree from which Mary fell is a subtle hint at her elite provenance. Pomegranates figured extensively in ancient, late ancient, and early medieval exegetical history, wherein they virtually always function as symbols of wealth and high class. The phenomenon truly spans centuries, massive geographical expanses, and languages. For instance, in the Hebraic literary yield, Deuteronomy 8:8 refers to the pomegranates in the "Promised Land" as a sign of its agricultural richness, while Abraham marvels at them in the land of Canaan (Jubilees 13:6). Pomegranates also adorned ritually significant objects, including Aaron's robe (Exodus 28:33; compare with Ephrem of Nisibis' commentary¹⁸³) and the capitals at the top of the pillars of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7:18), which specifically attracted the Babylonians' attention as they sacked Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:17, Jer 52:22–3). Additionally, a Jewish tradition rumored that Solomon's coronet was modeled after the crown of the pomegranate tree, which would have hinted at its royal symbology.¹⁸⁴ Aramaic/Syriac texts likewise offer the pomegranate an unfailingly lavish presentation, including the well-known story of *Ahiqar* (6th c. B.C.E.) on one historical end and the *Cause of all Causes* (11th–12th c. C.E.) on the other.¹⁸⁵ In the Qur'an, the pomegranate tree (رمان) is one of the trees of Paradise (55:66–69), an elegant sign of God's artistry (6:99), and a symbol of extravagance and wealth (6:141). The Greek tradition had similarly associated pomegranates with the wealth of the land¹⁸⁶ and had personified their beauty,¹⁸⁷ had cast them in gold and silver as symbols of abundance and wealth,¹⁸⁸ had represented them as desirable objects of foreign extravagance,¹⁸⁹ and under certain conditions in the oneiric tradition signaled impending financial prosperity.¹⁹⁰

But the pomegranate's symbolic aspect did not remain epiphenomenal; rather, it drew some of the sharpest exegetical gazes of late antiquity. Philo of Alexandria offers the sternest caution against interpreting trees as just trees. In *On Noah's Second Planting*, he explicitly discourages seeing trees (including the pomegranate) as no more than roots, trunks, and branches, and urges to interpret the human conditions they represent.¹⁹¹ Perhaps following his directive, later Christians often drew pomegranate trees into social inequality analogies. Notable among them was John Chrysostom, who praised the usefulness of the olive tree and derided the hedonistic purpose of the pomegranate, which only served the dainty pleasures of the upper classes.¹⁹² Cyril of Alexandria echoes this sentiment, drawing a direct connection between the pomegranate and riches.¹⁹³ The well-attested medical use of the pomegranate, observed by the physician Aetios of Amida (d. 575), underscores the prohibitive

¹⁸³ Ephrem of Nisibis, *Commentary on Exodus*, ESOO:230C.

¹⁸⁴ See Frankel and Teutsch, *Encyclopedia*, 128–9.

¹⁸⁵ See *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, ed. and trans. A. Cowley, 218:165–6; *Das Buch von der Erkenntnis*, ed. Kayser, 69, 102, and 248. Bar'ebroyo, *Gregorii Bar-Haebraei chronicon syriacum*, ed. P. Bedjan, 233. Perhaps unusual in this case is the use of the wild pomegranate in the *Martyrum Jonae, Brichiesu, Zebinae, Lazari, Maruthae, Narsētis, Eliae, Maharis, Habibi, Sabae, and Scembaitae* in *Acta sanctorum martyrum orientalium et occidentalium*, ed. S. E. Assemani, 1:217–8; see also *Martyrum sanctorum Stratonicæ et Seleuci Cyzici* (Assemani 2:83).

¹⁸⁶ Homer, *Iliad* 7.115, *Odyssey* 11.589.

¹⁸⁷ Aesop, *Fable* 233, versions 2 and 3, in *Corpus fabularum Aesopicarum*, ed. A. Hausrath.

¹⁸⁸ Herodotos, *Hist.*, in *Hérodote. Histoires*, 7:41:7–12.

¹⁸⁹ Theophrastos, *Historia plantarum* 2.2.7.6–7.

¹⁹⁰ Achmet, *Achmetis oneirocriticon*, 198.6–27.

¹⁹¹ Philo, *De plant.* 28–34 and *De op. mun.* 43.1–6.

¹⁹² *Hom. in act.* (PG 60:162CD) and *Hom. in Phil.* (PG 62.206CD).

¹⁹³ *Os.–Mal.* in *Sancti patris nostril Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini in xii prophetas*, 2:495:12–16.

cost of the fruit (not unlike today), which he recommends be prepared along with *other* expensive ingredients in order to drive its price up even more for the wealthiest.¹⁹⁴ Similar medical uses of the fruit would have been available to Syrians through translations of Galen.¹⁹⁵ As we approach the seventh century, Ioannes Klimakos offers the following striking analogy: “Haughtiness (ὕπερηφανία) is a pomegranate rotten from within, but externally resplendent in its beauty.”¹⁹⁶ Even under the questionable interpretation that he is not drawing a direct symbolic parallel between haughtiness and pomegranates, he still employs this tree from among all others as a sign of opulence. The foregoing evidence suggests that despite the positive or negative judgment cast on them, pomegranates were widely considered symbols of wealth and high class across significant time periods in the Mediterranean basin.

The name of the pomegranate in Syriac, especially the range of puns it could have invoked, only contributes to its mystique as a symbol of the upper classes. The word for pomegranate, ܪܒܘܐܝ, could easily be confused or associated with numerous other words derived from its trilateral root, ܪܘܐܝ, which J. Payne Smith defines as “to be or become high.”¹⁹⁷ This trilateral form, and virtually all of its derivatives, have to do with exaltation, loftiness, height, and similar senses in this semantic range. Thus, J. Payne Smith defines ܪܒܘܐܝ as “lofty” or “sublime”¹⁹⁸ and ܪܒܘܐܝܐ as “high estate,” “exaltation” or “great dignity.”¹⁹⁹ Additionally, one of the several variants for Roman, ܪܒܘܐܝ, was a homograph of pomegranate tree; another variant, ܪܒܘܐܝܐ, would have been hardly distinguishable due to the confusability of the medial nun and yudh. The pomegranate, then, could function not only as a figure for wealth and class, but linguistically also lent itself to numerous possibilities for puns that its symbolism did little to discourage.

Therefore, when we read that Maximos’ mother died “by means of a fall from a pomegranate tree” (ܪܒܘܐܝܐ ܗܘܐ ܪܒܘܐܝܐܐ), it is appropriate to explore the imaginative limits such a phrase could convey. In one sense, this death could simply be a ridiculous way to die for comedic effect—like Maximos’ brother, who was mauled to death by “the vicious camel of some Easterners” (*SL* 4); but falling from a pomegranate is an extremely unlikely way to die. Pomegranates, especially cultivated pomegranates, are closer in size and shape to a bush or shrub than a tree; their branches cannot support human weight past the rather low stump of the trunk and are covered with thorns throughout to deflect any adventurous climbers. Far more probable is the symbolic nature of the episode. The connection of the words “fall from a pomegranate tree (ܪܒܘܐܝܐ)” readily evokes several Biblical passages, but especially Luke 14:11 (compare with Matt 23:12): ܘܟܠ ܗܘ ܗܘ ܕܢܘܨܐ ܘܢܘܨܐ ܘܢܘܨܐ (‘‘for anyone who exalts himself will be brought low’’; emphasis mine). To be clear, these are the concluding words of the passage we previously referenced wherein Jesus heals a man with dropsy and after which he inveighs against social elitism. Coincidence stretches credibility here. The point, I take it, is to splice Maximos’ parents into a Biblical pericope that simultaneously discloses and condemns their financial privilege: ‘‘those who exalt themselves will be laid low and those who lay themselves low will be exalted’’ (Luke 14:11). Indirectly, then, *SLi* could—ironically, no doubt—point to Maximos’ wealthy extraction, just as *GL3i*. The difference between the two accounts, then, may be less substantial than has been

¹⁹⁴ Aetios of Amida, *Iatricorum liber viii* 47.9–16.

¹⁹⁵ See Merx, ‘‘Proben der syrischen Übersetzung,’’ 237–305.

¹⁹⁶ Ioannes Klimakos, *The Ladder*, 23 (PG 88.969BC).

¹⁹⁷ Smith, *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 534.

¹⁹⁸ Smith, *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 535.

¹⁹⁹ Smith, *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 535.

thought. While *SLi* is an intentional but satirical denunciation of the Confessor’s wealthy provenance, *GL3i* is perhaps an educated guess about his available financial means.

Further, if a satirical reversal is indeed at play here—and there is much evidence to suggest this—it is then evident why George would have cast Maximos’ mother as a Persian slave girl. Portraying her as: a) a Persian, b) a Zoroastrian (by implication), and c) a slave girl would satirically invert: a) a Roman, b) a Christian, c) and a wealthy *matrona*. This satirical reversal could be similar to the one we earlier suggested with regard to Heṣṣin; it could have also implicated Maximos with the stereotype of “Chaldean” (i.e., Persian) magic and sorcery, although we must explore this option in closer detail later. Likewise, the term “Persian” (ܦܪܫܝܢ/ܦܪܫܝܢ) shared a string of comical or even negative associations with the Syriac root ܦܫܝܢ, which in J. P. Smith’s *Compendious Syriac Dictionary* can mean “to strip naked,” “unmask,” “put to shame” in the *parel* form of the verb, in passive participle “unseemly” or “shameful,” and in *ethpali* form “to be made known openly” or “come into bad repute.”²⁰⁰ Again, the semantic range of the term conveniently maps onto her persona in the narrative. Yet again, this evidence strengthens the case for a literary reading of the text, but, simultaneously, for skepticism concerning any of its points of fact.

Finally, there remains Šendeh’s name. The final ܢ at the end of her name most likely represents an attempt to “Persianize” what is otherwise a universally negative term in Syriac. The trilateral root ܫܢܢ generally means “to torture”, “to afflict” or in certain contexts “to vex” or “to oppress”. It unilaterally appears, from the translations of 2 and 4 Maccabees to the *Chronicle* of Bar‘ebroyo and everywhere in between, in contexts where tyrannical authorities or foreigners inflict severe punishments on subject populations. It is one of the most common roots in 4 Maccabees, appearing nearly five dozen times²⁰¹ and is amply represented in 2 Maccabees.²⁰² In these cases, the most direct sense is physical torture. But the term can also convey political and social oppression, as is the case in Nehemiah 5:15 (ܫܢܢ ܩܘܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܦܪܫܝܢܐ). It is in this way also that Ephrem of Nisibis uses the root (ܦܫܝܢܐ) to speak of the foreign oppressors under which Judah will suffer according to the prophecy of Micah.²⁰³ Ephrem did not hesitate, however, to apply the same term to his contemporary precarious political situation²⁰⁴ and was ready to transpose similar cases of oppression, such as that of the Israelites under the Philistines, to his present.²⁰⁵ The term could be used just as much with reference to ecclesiastical opprobrium, as in the *Chronicle of Edessa*, written not long before the *Syriac Life*.²⁰⁶ We had already studied the eponymic significance of four other characters in the story (Zadoq, Abno, Martyrios, and Gennadios), so there is little reason to doubt that George would have also chosen a name for Maximos’ mother that mirrored her persona. Given the foregoing analyses of her husband’s death, of her death, and the likely inversion of her origin and status, it is very possible that her name was yet another veiled reference to her position in the (oppressive) Roman elite.

In sum, the foregoing literary and linguistic analyses suggest that George inverted the social status of Maximos’ parents for satirical effect. The comedic aspect would only make sense if they did indeed belong to the higher echelons of society. Thus, while the narrative seems on its face to present a rather

²⁰⁰ Smith, *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 463: entry on ܦܫܝܢ.

²⁰¹ 4 Macc 1:11, 4:26, 5:6, 5:32, 6:1, 6:5, 6:9–11, 6:30, 7:2, 7:4, etc.

²⁰² 2 Macc 7:1, 7:8, 7:13, 7:16, 7:42, 8:17, etc.

²⁰³ See *Commentary on Micah*, ESOO 2:275D.

²⁰⁴ See *Carmina nisibena* 2.65 in *S. Ephrem syri Carmina nisibena*, 5.

²⁰⁵ See *Commentary on 2 Samuel* in (ESO 1:406C).

²⁰⁶ *Chronicle of Edessa* 1:413.

different version of Maximos' parents' social standing than that offered in *GL3i*, the collective evidence analyzed here seems to point to the perhaps counterintuitive conclusion that they hailed from the Roman elite. In other words, the coherence of George's satirical inversions can be accounted for most simply by presupposing that Maximos' parents were Romans of sufficient financial means to incur a cleverly veiled assault on their status.

4. Motives

The literary and linguistic examination offered above has shown that *SLi* mounts a rather sophisticated, multi-layered assault on Maximos' persona. Sebastian Brock has noted with regard to *SL*: "Although the writer of the Life is an opponent of Maximus' dyothelete theology and cannot resist here and there inserting and opprobrious epithet, his narrative is on the whole remarkably matter of fact, having none of the usual characteristics of Lives of archheretics."²⁰⁷ Brock's description of *SL* is on the whole no doubt accurate. But I would wish to add that some further nuance is now necessary. While *SL* may not be a typical life of an archheretic, that fact hardly discounts other literary dimensions of the work, including those we have already covered. To be clear about my position, these dimensions have ultimately convinced me that there is precious little—if anything at all—in *SLi* that deserves credence.

So, we are left asking why someone would undertake such a complex character assassination. True, some of George's antipathy may be attributed to his dogmatic disagreement with the Confessor's Dyothelite Christology; but I do not think this fact can account for the personal tone and seemingly targeted derision of the text on its own. I will propose that the key lies in George's and Maximos' relation to Sophronios of Jerusalem. Once cast in this light, a few final tidbits of *SLi* that we have not yet considered make sense: Maximos' half-Samaritan extraction and his father's baptismal name of Theonas.

I am inclined to attribute the personally-incensed tone of *SL*, to be blunt, to a classic case of (peer?) jealousy. George of Resh'aina claims he was Sophronios' pupil while Maximos, too, was present (*SL* 6).²⁰⁸ He writes: "For I many times (ܐܬܝܢܝ ܫܠܝܢܝܢ) encountered this one [i.e., Maximos] full of deplorable things, both in <his> disputes and in <his> sophistic discourses; in fact, he was full of lethal conceit and his tongue was swift in replies that are deceitful; indeed (ܘܢܝܢܝܢ), Sophronios used to praise him, this Maximos, as 'one who has a lofty mind' (ܦܪܝܢܝܢܝܢ ܠܗ ܦܥܝܢܝܢ)" (*SL* 6). What is particularly salient for our purposes is that George dwells on Maximos' infuriatingly sophisticated grasp of the dialectical arts. Here the phrase "in disputes and in sophistic discourses" (ܘܦܢܝܢܝܢ ܘܦܢܝܢܝܢ) (ܘܦܢܝܢܝܢ ܘܦܢܝܢܝܢ) is almost certainly "Christian vernacular" for the seemingly deceitful application of the Aristotelian syllogistic to dialectic in theological discourse. This intimate and personal, albeit upset, vignette provides a unique witness to someone's perception of Maximos' proficiency in the dialectical arts that echoes similar accusations often leveled at those with thorough instruction in the *organon* and its commentary tradition. This passage is also remarkable in that it implies through the habitual past tense and the phrase "many times" (ܐܬܝܢܝܢ) that the time of Maximos' and George's acquaintance was not brief. If so, George has likely pointed at the most probable source

²⁰⁷ Brock, "An Early Syriac Life," 300.

²⁰⁸ See Brock, "Early Syriac Life," 300 for commentary. Maximos himself intimates that he considered Sophronios his teacher in *Letter* 13, where he considers him "father and teacher, lord *abba* Sophronios" (PG 91:533A).

for his information on Maximos' life: the Confessor himself. For it would not be unlikely, nor even unusual, for those engaged long-term in a small circle of discipleship, such as that which surrounded Sophronios, to be familiar with each other's backgrounds—and perhaps in this same setting to develop profound animosity for the other.

The period here referenced must have been in the early 630s, a time during which we know Maximos petitioned Sophronios to take him under his protection again, according to *Letter 8*.²⁰⁹ George also intimates that he himself was at the council on Cyprus in 636, already ordained a bishop²¹⁰ and with two of his own disciples in attendance (*SL 11*). It was before this time, then, that Maximos had captivated the future bishop of Jerusalem's attention, who must have praised him openly to the Syrian's chagrin. The quotation, presumably by Sophronios, "one who has a lofty mind" (ܐܘܢܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ, *ܐܘܢܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ*), is here likely reintroduced sarcastically and as a double entendre. George draws unusual attention to the critical sense of the pronouncement through a direct quotation particle (ܐܘܢܗܘܢܐ), consonance (on ܥ and ܝ) and assonance (of *hboso* and *zqopho*—"i" and "o").²¹¹ By a different rendition, then, this phrase could be taken to mean Maximos' "prideful mind."

A further personal motivation for the account's vitriol could be George's disappointment that his beloved teacher Sophronios sided with the Dyenergists, for whom he expresses tangible contempt (*SL 9*). In this regard, *SL* could be taken as his effort to exculpate his teacher from heresy. His defense, however, is peculiar. He lays the blame at Maximos' feet, reiterating twice in the space of a few lines that it was by his deceit (ܐܘܢܗܘܢܐ) that the bishop of Jerusalem "was taken captive" (ܐܘܢܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ) by the Confessor's error.²¹² The root of the word George chose to describe Maximos' "deceit" (ܐܘܢܗܘܢܐ) has Biblical parallels in the following passages: John 7:12, Acts 8:9, Galatians 6:3, Colossians 2:4, and James 1:26. Only two of these passages, John 7:12 and Acts 8:9, have a clearly transitive sense, as in this account. John 7:12 is likely not in view, since Jesus is the hypothetical "deceiver" in question in that passage. This leaves us with a possible allusion to Acts 8:9—the introit of Simon Magus. George seems to have linked both passages linguistically and conceptually: Maximos, like Simon Magus is known for his deceit (*SL*: ܐܘܢܗܘܢܐ/Acts: ܐܘܢܗܘܢܐ); like Simon Magus, he is a Samaritan by lineage. George casts Maximos as the sower of heresy and deceit (*SL 18–20, 25*) and likely draws an intentional parallel between him and Simon, who were both defeated by the apostolic authority in the East (*SL 16–20*) and thereafter journey to Rome to continue their malfesance (*SL 20*).

The subtle indications of Maximos' sorcery may be hinted at further through the name his father took on at baptism: Theonas. His name could be an allusion to the famed fourth-century sorcerer-turned-Christian Theonas of Nikomedia, about whom George could have learned through none other than Sophronios himself.²¹³ Less likely, though perhaps still in view, is his mother's Persian heritage. Persians, especially those with Chaldean roots, had long been associated with sorcery and magic. Babai the Great's *Acts of Saint George of Iṣṣla*, written soon before the composition of the Syriac *Life*, makes

²⁰⁹ PG 91:445A. See also Jankowiak and Booth, "A New Date-List," 40–41.

²¹⁰ For further information on this council see Jankowiak's doctoral dissertation, "Essai d'histoire," 146–149. See also Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 239.

²¹¹ Compare to Häfeli, *Stilmittel*, 35 and 75–6.

²¹² See also *SL 25–6*.

²¹³ See *Typikon menaion*, 5.174; *Synaxarion*, 4.5.1–3, 12–14; *The Passion of Saints Theopemptos and Theonas of the Imperial Meonologion*, 102–113; Halkin, "Les martyrs," 152–155. See also Sophronios of Jerusalem, *The Miracles of Saints Kyros and Ioannes*, 15–16 in *Los thaumata de Sofronio*.

this connection unambiguously explicit with reference to one Ḥenana.²¹⁴ Whatever the case, the invective motivations of *SL* appear to be interwoven with Maximos' and George's relation to the future bishop of Jerusalem and the nefarious influence George believed the former had on his erstwhile teacher. In this way, George's extensive and sophisticated fabrication of Maximos' early years, as well as the targeted nature of his satirical diatribe, become apparent. Booth has noted in this regard that "the account of Maximos's ignoble origins is perhaps intended as a slur."²¹⁵ But in light of the foregoing data, it seems that more was at play than just a slur—although it certainly was also that. The infancy narrative offered the backdrop to Maximos' sorcerous abilities for the purpose of exculpating the theological error of George's former teacher.

5. Conclusion: Maximos of Alexandria

In his carefully researched and convincingly argued defense of the Syriac account's usefulness for reconstructing key moments of Maximos' career, Phil Booth concluded: "It therefore seems quite clear that the account of Maximos's origins contained in the Greek *Life* is a fabrication, a medieval attempt to sanitize a controversial figure who would in fact prove a persistent thorn in the Constantinopolitan side."²¹⁶ Careful consideration of the available textual witnesses to the Greek reception of Maximos' figure suggest, however, that Booth's claim that *GL3* is an "attempt to sanitize" Maximos is unfounded. If so, the question of the author's motivations behind adapting the *Life of Theodoros Stoudites* to fit Maximos' career remains open and will be addressed shortly. Virtually every extant reference to Maximos in Greek between his death and the composition of *GL3* is accompanied by positive epithets, most of them reserved for saints. These include, in chronological order:

- "Maximos Confessor" (Germanos I)²¹⁷
- "Maximos, philosopher and Confessor" (John of Damascus)²¹⁸
- "Maximos the holiest monk and philosophical martyr and Confessor and great teacher of the Church" (Georgios Synkellos)²¹⁹
- "Maximos the wisest and Confessor"; "Confessor and martyr" (Theophanes the Confessor)²²⁰
- "The great Confessor of piety Maximos" (Nikephoros I)²²¹
- "The great Confessor Maximos; Maximos the wisest and Confessor" (Georgios the Monk)²²²
- "Maximos the monk and Confessor among the saints" (Photios I of Constantinople)²²³
- "Our holy father Maximos the Confessor" (*Typikon menaion*)²²⁴
- "Maximos the Confessor" (Konstantinos VII Porphyrogenitos)²²⁵

²¹⁴ Babai refers to a certain Ḥenana as "the heretic, Chaldean and Origenist" in *Acts of Saint George* (Bedjan 2:495–96). Compare to George's reference to Maximos' teacher, Pantoleon, "wicked and Origenist" (*SL* 7).

²¹⁵ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 148.

²¹⁶ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 148.

²¹⁷ *Narratio de haeresibus et synodis ad Anthimium diaconum* (PG 98:37A).

²¹⁸ *imag.* 2.65.1.

²¹⁹ *Ecloga chronographica*, p. 382:2–4.

²²⁰ *Chronographia*, 351:19–23.

²²¹ *Refutatio et eversio definitionis* 50.2.

²²² *Chronicon*, 690:15; 717:16–17.

²²³ *Bibliotheca*, 192A, 154b2–3.

²²⁴ Month 12, (Mateos 368:4–5).

²²⁵ *De insidiis*, 186:13–14.

These epithets represent a unilaterally positive appraisal of the Confessor and show no ambivalence about his status as a champion of orthodoxy and a man of great personal piety.

Thus, we must ask: from what exactly did the author of *GL3* seek to “sanitize” Maximos? Does Booth’s conclusion somehow assume that the author was familiar with *SL* or some version thereof?²²⁶ Such an assumption would be untenable, first, because of the extreme rarity of Syriac texts translated or transmitted into the Greek microcosm and second, because *SL* has only survived in a single, incomplete, and adulterated manuscript.²²⁷ This last point indicates that *SL* never enjoyed, even in its native environs, as widespread appeal as the Greek *Lives*, for which there are forty extant manuscripts.²²⁸ Moreover, there is no mention in any Greek or Latin source of Maximos’ Palestinian provenance or ignominious birth to a Samaritan and Persian. Therefore, it seems sounder to suppose that the author’s choice of Theodoros Stoudites’ *Life* served a different purpose than “sanitizing” a man whom three centuries of Christian thinkers unambiguously held in high esteem. Rather, the compiler’s choice of a similar infancy as Stoudites’ may be attributed to two non-mutually-exclusive alternatives. First, simply to honor Maximos in the best way he knew: to give him a similar early career as that of his monastery’s patron saint. Second, because such a career—as was believed for a millennium—made sense of the Confessor’s sophisticated philosophical education and correspondence with powerful figures. Thus, although I concur that *GL3*’s infancy narrative is in a historical sense a “fabrication,” it can hardly be considered a “sanitation” of the saint’s reputation or a haphazard choice of unpremeditated plagiarism.

Booth continues: “The *Life* of George of Resh’aina, in contrast, inspires confidence both in its closeness to events and in its intersection on various incidental points of detail with other sources of the period.” On the one hand, Booth is correct in pointing out that *SL*’s later events can be verified through “other sources of the period.” But the same is true of the vast majority of *GL3*. Additionally, it is a logical reach to claim that *SLi* is credible just because later parts of *SL* can be independently corroborated, if that is what Booth intends. Again, the same would have to be said of *GL3*. On the other hand, my personal view is that Booth goes too far in claiming that *SL* “inspires confidence.” First, no source exists that can corroborate any detail about the first ten years of Maximos’ life as recounted by *SLi*. Second, as I have argued in the foregoing sections, *SLi* is as literarily inventive as *GL3*, which disinclines me to believe everything George tells us. We are thus left with little more from *SLi* than the claim that Maximos, somehow, was born and raised in Palestine. Frankly, that is not much to go on, despite Booth’s protestations to the contrary.

In brief, while *GL3i* has—perhaps rightly—been discredited as an inventive literary artifice, the foregoing analysis suggests that *SLi* should share its fate. I would conclude, then, that *SLi* should be placed alongside *GL3i* as an unreliable witness to Maximos’ early years. That does not mean, however, that *SLi* or *GL3i* have no historical value, since through their literary craft some possible conclusions can be made, such as Maximos’ likely provenance from the higher echelons of Roman society. Certainly, this point can be disputed and it cannot be proven beyond doubt, but it is not implausible

²²⁶ Booth may be inclined to this possibility given his seemingly approving appraisal of Roosen’s suggestion that a so-called *Urpasio* may have been responding to *SL*. See Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 146, particularly n. 23.

²²⁷ See Brock, “An Early Syriac Life,” 301. The words “wicked” and “blasphemed” appear to have been etched out of the title, modifying it to read: “A Tale Concerning . . . Maximos of Palestine, . . . against His Creator and Had His Tongue Cut Out.”

²²⁸ See Neil and Allen, *The Life of Maximus*, 26–31 and Neil, “The Greek *Life*,” 47. *GL1* has nine manuscripts, *GL2* has twelve, and *GL3* has nineteen.

nor even improbable. What matters more about our analysis, however, is that *SLi* should join the ranks of unreliable witnesses to Maximos' infancy. Accordingly, the case for a Palestinian origin must rely on more than the doubtful claims of George of Resh'aina that he was born in Palestine; the same is true of the proponents of his Constantinopolitan origin. I would argue that this levelling move ultimately gets us closer to knowing something about the Confessor's earlier years, even if much of his youth will remain unclear.

Once the playing field is leveled in this way and all options are considered on the merits that extant circumstantial evidence affords them, it appears clear to me that neither the Palestinian nor Constantinopolitan origin accounts are as plausible as what I will call Maximos' "Alexandrian origin." The case for Palestine appears to me weaker even than the case for Constantinople. With the exception of a letter or two to a Palestinian resident (and Sophronios of Jerusalem at that!) and the nebulous argument that Maximos had some "Origenist" sensitivities that are supposed to have been revived in Palestine in the sixth and seventh centuries, no other circumstantial evidence readily links him to a Palestinian environment. The Constantinopolitan origin account, for its part, relies on Maximos' correspondence with Constantinopolitans like Ioannes the chamberlain and, perhaps, Konstantinos the treasurer, but, again, this evidence is sparse.

I would argue, instead, that an Alexandrian origin enjoys the most support from extant sources. While Christian Boudignon (see below) has already noted Maximos' significant correspondence with Alexandrians, I believe that we are now in a better position to make a more forceful case than him for his Alexandrian origin. Before we begin, I would like to be clear that by "Alexandrian origin" I primarily envision not his birthplace (since this is simply impossible to demonstrate and ultimately inconsequential for our study), but his early (ca. teenage years to his forties) multi-social networks and especially his educational background. According to this sketch, he would have likely studied under the Alexandrian philosophers active at the time, especially David (see below), would have made connections on various levels of the city, rather than with a niche group, as was the case with his Constantinopolitan correspondents, and would have likely even encountered Ioannes Moschos and Sophronios (the Eukratades) at Alexandria and not Palestine, as Booth believes.

We know that the Eukratades had spent time in Alexandria and had befriended Ioannes the Almsgiver there. Ioannes Moschos also intimates that they visited with Stephanos of Alexandria,²²⁹ a philosopher purportedly later called to Constantinople to further the study of Aristotelian sciences at the capital. If Maximos was already at Alexandria at this time, he would have been in his mid-twenties when he met Sophronios, which would make good sense of his frequent references to him as his teacher. This teacher-disciple relationship would be harder to believe if, as *SL* recounts, Maximos and Sophronios only came together (it seems, for the first time) in the 630s, a few years before Sophronios' death.

These contentions have ample support from the extant circumstantial evidence. Paul Blowers, for his part, has already felt a tug to suggest that Maximos may have spent some time in Alexandria in the company of Sophronios and Ioannes Moschos.²³⁰ Boudignon, for his part, has astutely observed that most of Maximos' correspondence with high-ranking officials gravitated toward Alexandria and was far from casual.²³¹ We should add that the Confessor's epistolary exchanges with Alexandria do not

²²⁹ See Ioannes Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow* 77, PG 87.3:D.

²³⁰ E.g., Blowers, *Jesus Christ*, 35–38.

²³¹ C. Boudignon, "Maxime le Confesseur, était-il constantinopolitain?" 15–22.

only point to his amicable and often confidential implication with various social layers in the city that included politicians and military commanders, but also academics, clergy, and monastics. Needless to say, the same cannot be said about either Constantinople or Palestine.

As far as his relations with politicians are concerned, a curious episode in the *Trial of Maximos* indicates that he was known for corresponding with high Roman functionaries, such as Petros of Numidia.²³² In this vignette, Ioannes, the former treasurer of Petros of Numidia, is brought in to testify against Maximos, whom he charges with dissuading the general from obeying Herakleios' order to march to Egypt against the "Saracens." What is fascinating about the Confessor's reply is that he does not deny the charge, as he denies, on their face, the accusations that he hates the emperor or that he is an Origenist.²³³ Rather, he requests that the treasurer produce the letter wherein he advised the general not to march on Egypt or, for that matter, his letter asking for advice. The treasurer predictably fails to bring the letters forward, but still holds firm, averring that "I do not have the letter, neither do I know if he wrote to you at all. But at that time everyone in the camp was talking about these matters (ἐν τῷ φροσάτῳ ταῦτα κατ' ἐκεῖνον ἐλάλουν πάντες τὸν καιρὸν)."²³⁴ It is not entirely clear whether Ioannes is here referring to everyone talking about the Saracen (i.e., Arab) invasions or about Maximos' efforts to dissuade Peter, though contextually this latter option appears more likely; if true, it would suggest that the Confessor's exchanges with the *strategos* were, quite literally, the talk of the camp. What is especially clever about this episode is that although Maximos exonerates himself from the charge by knowing Roman legal proceedings and especially as regards the summoning of evidence, he does not contradict the accusation. Moreover, Maximos did exchange letters with Petros at least four times: *Letters* 13, 14, *Computus ecclesiasticus*, and *Opuscule* 12; some of these, notably, are penned with remarkable *parrhesia* and request favors or advise about major strategic matters. Finally, we should note that the *Computus ecclesiasticus* (addressed to Petros) is a defense of the Alexandrian chronology over what is now called the Byzantine chronology.²³⁵

Another meaningful association in this regard was Maximos' evidently deep friendship with Georgios the prefect of Africa. Somewhere between 640 and 642 the prefect had been summoned to Constantinople "to explain himself," as it were, for contravening an order of the Empress Martina. In *Letter* 1 Maximos wrote to the prefect an exhortatory encomium that is highly telling of their tight relationship. Around the same time, Maximos sent two epistles (*Letters* 44 and 45) to his contact at Constantinople, Ioannes the chamberlain, on behalf of Georgios, to lobby in the prefect's favor. In the same course of events, Maximos penned a letter (18) to the *hegoumene* Iannia concerning some nuns at Alexandria who had re-converted to Miaphysitism; what is striking about this epistle is that he was apparently granted the authority to write with the authority of the prefect Georgios himself.²³⁶ Finally, in this unfolding of events, Maximos wrote to an Alexandrian deacon by the name of Kosmas (*Letter* 16) and thanked him for the consolatory note the latter had sent him on the occasion of Georgios' grim summons to the capital. From these various epistolary exchanges, it is evident that the Confessor had become a close confidant to the most powerful Roman functionary in Africa.

Perhaps it is germane to note, but another politically salient Alexandrian figure intimately associated with Maximos was his disciple Anastasios, who was not only an Alexandrian, but once held the

²³² See Allen and Neil, *Documents from Exile*, 48, 50.

²³³ *Documents from Exile*, 48 and 58.

²³⁴ *Relatio motionis* 1, Allen and Neil, *Documents*, 50.

²³⁵ PG 91.1217–1280. See Jankowiak and Booth, "New Date-List," 39.

²³⁶ See Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 152.

enviable political station of νοτάριος (*notarios* or personal secretary) to emperor Konstans II's grandmother—either Eudokeia, the wife of Emperor Herakleios, or the wife of Niketas and mother to Gregoria, Konstans' mother.²³⁷ Whatever the case, Anastasios again links Maximos closely to the Roman political elite and particularly that in Alexandria.²³⁸ Perhaps what is most outstanding of Anastasios' case is that the *Trial of Maximos* indicates very precisely how old Maximos was when the two began their long life together. The aforementioned trial happened in 655, at which time the Confessor explicitly said that he was seventy-five years of age and to this added that Anastasios had been with him for thirty-seven years.²³⁹ In this case, the two would have met when Maximos was approximately thirty-eight years old or around the year 618; there is no reason to discount the possibility that they met in Alexandria, given Anastasios' provenance from that city. If so, the earliest event from the mouth of the Confessor would be his encounter with an Alexandrian some eight years before he crafted his earliest works. From the perspective I offer here, this meeting would not be inconsequential for determining Maximos' earlier movements, since he would already—or still—be in Alexandria at the age of thirty-eight.

Moreover, the Confessor corresponded with several Alexandrian intellectuals, which tethers him further to yet another cut of the Alexandrian social fabric. For example, *Letter 17* is addressed to Ioulianos Scholastikos and is concerned with expositing a brief account of the Church's teaching concerning the Incarnation of the Lord (περὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὴν σάρκωσιν τοῦ Κυρίου ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ δόγματος).²⁴⁰ Maximos identifies this Ioulianos as “the Alexandrian” (Ἀλεξανδρέα) and includes as a secondary addressee a certain Christopemptos Scholastikos who apparently was also at Alexandria. There is one phrase in particular in this letter that stands out. As Maximos expounded the ecclesiastical teaching on the Incarnation of Christ, he refers to “our father Cyril” (Πατὴρ ἡμῶν Κυρίλλου), clearly referring to the famed fifth-century Alexandrian bishop (d. 444), unambiguously recognizable as such by the Confessor's verbatim reproduction of his phrase “one incarnate nature of God the Incarnate Word” (μίαν αὐτοῦ τοῦ σαρκωθέντος Θεοῦ Λόγου φύσιν σεσαρκωμένη).²⁴¹ It is surely tantalizing to interpret the first person plural pronoun in Maximos' reference to the bishop as a geographical designation that implies Alexandrians, such as saying, “Cyril, the father of us Alexandrians.” It could also be meant as an exclusion of non-Chalcedonians, but if so, it is very subtle and fits ill with the context. The letter likewise discloses Maximos' intimacy with the prefect (Georgios?), as he mentions in passing that he took their messages (συλλαβάς) to him.²⁴² Maximos' academic connections with Alexandrians are on further display in his *Questions, and Responses for Theopemptos*, who was both an Alexandrian and surnamed *scholastikos*.²⁴³

Finally, Maximos also had clerical and monastic ties at Alexandria. We have already mentioned his assumption of the authority of the prefect Georgios in a letter to the nuns under the care of the *begoumene* Iannia. It appears Maximos again addressed her a letter (*Letter 11*) concerning a nun who defected from Chalcedonianism and later returned to her former position. Additionally, some of the Confessor's most vivid and personal writing is addressed to a certain Alexandrian deacon by the name

²³⁷ See Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 153.

²³⁸ *Dispute at Byzia* 13 (Allen and Neil: 114).

²³⁹ *Relatio motionis* 11, Allen and Neil, *Documents* 70.

²⁴⁰ *Ep.* 17, PG 91.580C–584D.

²⁴¹ See Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Holy Trinity*, PG 77.1160B.

²⁴² *Ep.* 17, PG 91.584BC.

²⁴³ Roosen and van Deun, eds., “A Critical Edition,” 65–79; PG 90.1393–1400.

of Kosmas, to whom he addressed two letters (15 and 16), one of them (15), in true Alexandrian philosophical fashion, waxing eloquent about particulars and universals. It appears Kosmas was a close confidant of the Confessor, since he is referred to as the letter-bearer of the important *Letter 14* to Petros. In this latter epistle Maximos intercedes on behalf of the Alexandrian deacon, requesting that he be allowed to return to serve. Here again, we must wonder at the kind of personal authority Maximos enjoyed in order to make a request of that nature from the supreme authority in the most important African city in the empire.

In brief, a substantial amount of Maximos' correspondence literature is addressed to Alexandrians. In virtually every case the letters point to longstanding relationships with the addressees. What is equally important to note is that Maximos' connections to Alexandria have a certain "immersive" feel to them, that is, they do not give the impression that he was a passerby on a short-lived errand, but someone who spent the time that is necessary both to nurture relationships and to establish them on various social levels: political, academic, and ecclesial. This portrait would comfortably fit with the career of an Alexandrian aristocrat-turned-monk who had fostered meaningful and enduring relations with the various social enclaves of the city and who was, we can infer through the tone and preface of his letters, regarded highly by his addressees.

Scholars who accept the Palestinian or Constantinopolitan accounts of Maximos' birth have had to conjecture a variety of chimeric theories to account for Maximos' close ties at Constantinople and Alexandria, respectively. While the interpretation I am proposing here is not without its own difficulties—such as accounting for Maximos' correspondence with two relatively eminent Constantinopolitan figures, Ioannes the chamberlain and Konstantinos the treasurer—it accounts for most of the circumstantial evidence with the least explanatory principles. In this way it addresses Pauline Allen's astute observation that: ". . . a Palestinian origin makes it more difficult to credit Maximus' relationships with high-profile officials of the court in Constantinople and elsewhere in the Byzantine world, such as Peter *illustris* and George, the eparch of Africa."²⁴⁴ Although my interpretation still must explain Maximos' ties to Konstantinos and Ioannes at Constantinople, an Alexandrian aristocratic origin story is far more likely to account for these relations than the highly literarily-inflected account of George of Resh'aina taken *prima facie*. After all, the Roman elite had the privilege of geographical mobility and moved in circles that, though often separated by substantial distances, were socially closer than their adjacent destitute neighbors.

In this light, a different understanding of Maximos' early years becomes possible and one that may confirm some suspicions already raised by Booth and Jankowiak.²⁴⁵ The seemingly long-standing relationship between Maximos and Sophronios has perplexed the proponents of the Confessor's Constantinopolitan origin and has required proponents of the Palestinian origin account to suppose that Maximos met Sophronios at some point during the latter's stay in Palestine following his travels to Egypt and Alexandria with Ioannes Moschos. Between 603 and 605 Ioannes Moschos and Sophronios travelled to Africa and spent time in Alexandria, where they met Ioannes the Almsgiver and Stephanos of Alexandria, as mentioned previously. Thus, it is not unlikely that they would have made Maximos' acquaintance during this time if the Confessor indeed hailed from Alexandria. One may object that neither Sophronios nor Ioannes Moschos refer to Maximos as being in Alexandria, but that is because neither mentions him at all. Under this interpretation, the seemingly longstanding

²⁴⁴ Allen, "Life and Times," 13.

²⁴⁵ Jankowiak and Booth, "New Date-List," 20 and Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 148, n. 31 and 211.

relationship between Maximos and Sophronios, which is hinted at in *Letter 8*,²⁴⁶ may well have originated as far back as the turn of the century in Alexandria, even earlier than Booth and Jankowiak had suggested.²⁴⁷

What to make, then, of Maximos' repeated claims that he did not receive training in rhetoric?²⁴⁸ After all, the claim does not appear to be the mere show of monastic humility. The renown literary critic Photios I of Constantinople makes this much clear in his characteristically unsparing assessment of the literary and rhetorical quality of Maximos' *Questions, and Responses to Thalassios*: "But it [the treatise] is drawn out (σχονοτενής) in style (φράσιν) and in meanderings (ταῖς περιόδους), delighting in hyperbatons, both blossoming with ornateness and not striving to speak as is proper (ἐνακμάζων τε ταῖς περιβολαῖς, καὶ κυριολογεῖν οὐκ ἐσπουδασμένος), for which reasons turgidity (τὸ ἀσαφές) and indecipherability (δυσεπισκόπητον) run wild (διατρέχει) in his composition."²⁴⁹ Although Laga has recently attempted to exonerate Maximos of Photios' (and subsequent literary critics') castigations, his examples are limited to a few moments where the Confessor showed some expressive refinement that remain, however, exceptional to his writing.²⁵⁰ A different rationale can account for this dissonance. Maximos was not an eloquent Constantinopolitan stylist, nor did he aspire to be one in any of his known writings. On the contrary, he was trained and wrote in a distinctive philosophical-theological dialect that was characteristic of Alexandria and the multifarious mosaic of the different intellectual currents that had crisscrossed it in the foregoing centuries. His circles and sources were not the Greek rhetoricians (despite his rhetorical prowess, Maximos did not read Gregory of Nazianzos for the winsomeness of his polished phrases), but the philosophers and fathers, both past and recent. Under this rubric, Maximos would be fully justified in claiming that he had no rhetorical training without thereby precluding a rigorous education in philosophy and what he calls the "patristic tradition" (πατρικὴ παράδοσις);²⁵¹ his fluency in these two is incontestable on the basis of the most cursory reading of his texts.

Maximos' philosophical and theological sources are primarily also Alexandrians. With the exceptions of the Cappadocians and Dionysios the Areopagite—all of whom, of course, had become famous across the Empire, the primary sources of Maximos' theology and exegesis are consistently Alexandrians: Philo, Clement, Origen, Athanasios, and Cyril, to mention a few. Though scholarship has explored these relations less, it would be highly unlikely for Maximos to have no exposure to the late Platonists, and especially the Alexandrians like Olympiodoros, Ammonios Hermeiou, etc. We will explore this relationship further in *ad hoc* detail over the course of the dissertation.

There is another key document that would place Maximos directly in Alexandria during his early years. *Additamentum 34* was edited for the first time by Bram Roosen in 2001 and he seems convinced of the attribution to the Confessor. This brief piece appears to be notes taken from lectures on

²⁴⁶ See PG 91:445A. See also Jankowiak and Booth, "A New Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor," 40–41.

²⁴⁷ Jankowiak and Booth, "New Date-List," 20–21.

²⁴⁸ See *Ambig.* prol., DOML 28:67 and *Myst.* 5:31; (PG 90:660B). The reference συντεθραμμένος ιδιωτεία comes from the *Mystagogy* and has been, I believe, wrongly rendered as "my education was in private" (Berthold, *Maximus Confessor*, 183), since the phrase doubles the meaning of the preceding one, which Berthold renders as "I do not have experience in the power and practice of discourse" (μήτε τὴν πείραν ἔχειν τῆς πρὸς τὸ λέγειν δυνάμεως τε καὶ τριβῆς). I believe the second phrase must thus mean something like "having been brought up in uncouthness." In either case, I think the impulse to make the reference autobiographical should be curbed.

²⁴⁹ Photios, *Library*, 192A.156b26–30.

²⁵⁰ See Laga, "Maximus as a Stylist," 142–3.

²⁵¹ *Ep.* 17, PG 91.581D.

Porphyrios' *Eisagoge* and on Aristotle's *Categories* by David, a late-sixth century Alexandrian Christian commentator about whom little is known.²⁵² This *Additamentum* is certainly not common currency in the widely accepted Maximian corpus and has, for various reasons, not figured in considerations about his intellectual career. It is possible that one of these reasons is due to the impossibility of squaring it with a Constantinopolitan or a Palestinian origin narrative. Nevertheless, some scholars have preliminarily noted that this small work would be quite meaningful for reconstructing Maximos' ties to Alexandria if it proved to be by his hand.²⁵³ In light of the evidence I have presented here, the attribution to the Confessor does not appear to be completely far-flung. If it is in point of fact his writing, his Alexandrian provenance would be all but cemented. In this account, Maximos would have been a (likely affluent) teenager studying at the feet of a sophisticated commentator on Porphyrios and Aristotle in Alexandria before the turn of the century. This suggestion is borne out by the circumstantial evidence better than the accounts of either *SL* or *GL3*.

I have argued that the Alexandrian origin account makes the most sense of the most circumstantial evidence available without requiring the unnecessary multiplication of explanatory factors. In this way, this account pays its debt to Occam's razor. Perhaps this argument will take its place as a "third option" concerning the origin story of Maximos the Confessor. And although I will attempt to illumine several perplexing areas of internal logical tensions in Maximos' thought by appealing to the imaginative horizons that an Alexandrian origin account would draw out, it seems that some manner of salutary caution and restraint is in order with respect to the Confessor's early years. In *Ambiguum* 10, Maximos dwelled at length on the perplexing figure of Melchizedek as presented in Hebrews 7:3 and found a compelling contemplation or theory for him. He represented a human who had been so thoroughly deified that only the divine predicates were any longer known about him: "he was without mother and father, without genealogy, without beginning or end of days." Perhaps Maximian scholars may agree, whatever their persuasions, on one point: that the Confessor would be pleased to have attained some of the epithets of the mysterious Melchizedek who had so thoroughly captivated his exegetical gaze and whose fate he may share in the absence of any further scholarly breakthroughs.

²⁵² See *Additamentum* 34, in Roosen, 901–2. See M. Portaru, "Classical Philosophical Influences," *OHMC*, 134.

²⁵³ See Jankowiak and Booth, "New Date-List," 72 and Boudignon, "Maxime le Confesseur," 15–17.

PART TWO: MAXIMOS' METAPHYSICS, ETHICS, AND DOCTRINE OF DEIFICATION

CHAPTER THREE

ARISTOTLE, MAXIMOS, AND THE LOGIC OF BEING

We indeed say that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so life and an infinite and continuous eternity belong to him, for this is what God is.

—Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12, 1072b29–31

Introduction

The light the first two chapters of this study have shed on Maximos' milieu opens up a range of analytical possibilities for understanding better the complexity of his thought. The following three chapters will extend these findings by articulating the logic that binds metaphysics, virtue, and deification together in the ascetic intellectual's oeuvre. In this chapter, the emphasis will decidedly fall on re-contextualizing Maximos in the trajectory of the Aristotelian commentators in order to elucidate his dialectical appropriation of the Classical legacy, but especially of the late ancient complex that Aristotle's philosophy had become. This approach will fill in a significant lacuna in scholarship on the Confessor's relationship to Aristotle and the late ancient philosophers, which will further illumine largely unexplored questions belonging to Maximos' cosmic vision.

Three major components constitute the problem of metaphysics, virtue, and deification in Maximos' system. First, he repeatedly affirms,²⁵⁴ (especially in *Opuscule* 1), that deification does not result from the natural realization of the potentialities that inhere in the human substance. This is so, he reasons, because humans would become divine by nature (as the realization of the potential of their substance) and not by grace.²⁵⁵ But this scenario is impossible within Maximos' theological vision for several reasons. For one, what is divine by nature can only *be*; it cannot *become* divine by nature because to do so would mean that it is composite (and divinity by definition is singular). Additionally, to say that something could become divine through the realization of the potential of substance would be to destroy the ontological divide between created and uncreated. This would violate what scholars have called the Confessor's "Neo-Chalcedonianism," according to which he took great care to retain human and divine natures "unconfused," not only *in persona Christi*, but, by extension, in all of human nature deified through Christ's incarnation.²⁵⁶ The second major component of Maximos' thought concerning the intersection of metaphysics, virtue and deification, exemplified in his *Disputation with Pyrrhos*, concerns the notion that the virtues are natural to humans. For example, he affirms this by claiming that they were not "lately introduced from without; for from creation they lie in us."²⁵⁷ He echoes this sentiment in *Epistle* 3, addressed to Ioannes the Chamberlain.²⁵⁸ The third major insight of Maximos' corpus is the connection between the virtues and deification.²⁵⁹ For example, in *Epistle* 2,

²⁵⁴ E.g., *Thal* 22, CCSG 7, p. 141, ll. 90–98 and 59, CCSG 22, p. 55, ll. 159–160.

²⁵⁵ For commentary see Larchet, *La divinisation*, 163.

²⁵⁶ See Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 46; compare to Törönen, *Unity and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 88–91.

²⁵⁷ For the complete discussion see *Disputation with Pyrrhos*, PG 91.309B–311A.

²⁵⁸ See *Ep.* 3, PG 91.408D–409A.

²⁵⁹ See, e.g., his comments on Melchizedek in *Amb.* 10.44–45; see also *Thal.* 54, CCSG 7, p. 451, ll.142–143.

he writes to this same Ioannes: “For truly nothing is more deiform (θεοειδέστερον) than divine love, nor more mysterious (μυστηριωδέστερον), nor more exalting (ὑψηλότερον) for humans to deification.”²⁶⁰

Further passages could be listed that maintain these three different points, but these suffice to lay the groundwork. Individually, these three claims do not seem to present any difficulties, but read as a unit, they present a certain logical tension. If the virtues are natural to humans, and if the virtues exalt humans to deification, would it not appear that virtues are natural potentialities of the human substance by the realization of which humans are deified?

This problem has not gone entirely unnoticed among the Confessor’s scholars. For instance, the famed expositor of his thought Jean-Claude Larchet highlighted a similar difficulty in his *La divinisation de l’homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur*.²⁶¹ On his reading of Maximos, the contrast between the divine image and the divine likeness engenders a certain form of impasse: “The qualities that constitute the likeness (*ressemblance*) [i.e., the virtues], by the fact that they result from a spiritual becoming (*devenir*) on the one hand, and that they are gifted by God by grace (*gracieusement*) on the other, could appear to be superimposed (*surajouter*) on nature. But Maximos otherwise underlines the natural character of the virtues. Is there not a contradiction here?”²⁶²

Larchet attempts to resolve this “contradiction” by making a compelling case for the relative fluidity of the lines between grace and nature for Maximos. He then distinguishes Maximos’ understanding from later western medieval thought that emphasized a *pura natura*.²⁶³ As such, Larchet contrasts the image (which represents what is received) and the likeness (which represents what is acquired) and concludes that: “It is clear that, for Maximos, there is no solution of continuity between the likeness and the image.”²⁶⁴ Later he elaborates on this claim: “What we have said previously allows us to affirm (*constater*) that for Maximos the absence of a solution of continuity between the image and the likeness has less to do with the fact that the supernatural is found in the finality of nature and in its own dynamism than with the fact that nature is found, in its foundation and in its accomplishment, enveloped or conditioned by grace and the supernatural.”²⁶⁵ I take it that Larchet means that nature’s intrinsic dynamism derives from the fact that all creation is itself an expression of an ongoing divine grace, on which grace it depends for its existence, preservation, and movement toward its finality in deification.²⁶⁶ In other words, every facet of existence is imbued with grace, which disrupts any hard and fast line between nature and grace and thus eschews a static ontology.

I concur with Larchet that the relationship between nature and grace—or the supernatural—in Maximos’ thought was far more fluid than for the later western Christians to whom he alludes. But Larchet’s analysis appears to ignore the significance of *Opuscule* 1 for understanding this tension.²⁶⁷ What is especially important about this passage is that it unambiguously draws a distinction between the natural and supernatural possibilities to which the human substance (οὐσία) can aspire. Thus, even if natural and supernatural eventually fuse in a greyscale horizon in Maximos’ corpus—I believe this is what Larchet means by referring to the lack of a solution of continuity between the image and

²⁶⁰ *Ep.* 2, PG 91.393B.

²⁶¹ See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 158–163, 210–212, 467–469, 482–488, 544, 581.

²⁶² Larchet, *La divinisation*, 158.

²⁶³ Larchet, *La divinisation*, 158–163; see also 482–488.

²⁶⁴ Larchet, *La divinisation*, 161.

²⁶⁵ Larchet, *La divinisation*, 163.

²⁶⁶ See Maximos, *Four Hundred Chapters on Love*, 3.25 and *Ambig.* 7.16.

²⁶⁷ To be sure, he does engage *Opuscule* 1 elsewhere in his analysis of Maximos. E.g., Larchet, *La divinisation*, 241.

likeness—this passage emphatically demarcates the visible planes of their logical differences. This segment of *Opusculum* 1 is well worth reproducing in full here, given the weight it will carry for the rest of this study:

But, concerning the phrase ‘one operation’ (μιᾶς ἐνεργείας) that is situated in the seventh chapter of the *Difficulties of the Great Gregory*, the sense (λόγος) is clear. For I, hinting at the impending future condition (ἐσομένην κατάστασιν) of the saints, called ‘one operation of God and of the saints’ the deifying [operation] of all the saints that belongs to the hoped-for blessedness; on the one hand, it is of God by substance, on the other hand, it comes to belong to the saints by grace (κατὰ χάριν). ‘And better yet,’ I added, ‘of God alone,’ since the deification of the saints by grace is the accomplishment (ἀποτέλεσμα) of the divine operation (ἐνεργείας), of which we do not have implanted by nature the potentiality (ἧς ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐγκατεσπαρμένην τῇ φύσει τὴν δύναμιν). And of those things that we do not have the potentiality, neither do we have the act (πρᾶξιν), since it [i.e., the act] is the accomplishment of a natural potentiality (φυσικῆς δυνάμεως). Consequently, act (πρᾶξις) follows from potentiality, and potentiality from substance (οὐσίας). For act is from potentiality and potentiality from substance and is in the substance. Consequently, these are three, as they say, that follow upon one another (ἀλλήλων ἐχόμενα): the one who has potentiality (δυνάμενον), potentiality (δύναμις), and what is possible (δυνατόν).²⁶⁸ And they call ‘the one who has potentiality’ *substance*, and ‘potentiality’ *that according to which we have the movement of being able to* (καθ’ ἣν ἔχομεν τὴν τοῦ δύνασθαι κίνησιν); and ‘what is possible’ *what is naturally possible for us to have become according to potentiality* (τὸ παρ’ ἡμῶν κατὰ δύναμιν γενέσθαι πεφυκότως). And if *it is possible for us to become by nature*, we have [it] according to a natural potentiality. But deification does not pertain to what is possible for us to become naturally according to potentiality, for it does not pertain to what is up to us (Οὐκ ἔστι δὲ τῶν παρ’ ἡμῶν κατὰ δύναμιν γίνεσθαι πεφυκότων ἢ θέωσις, οὐκ οὔσα τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῶν); for there is no *logos* in nature of things beyond nature. Therefore, deification is not the act of our potentiality, of which [deification] we do not have the potentiality according to nature, but [deification belongs to] only the divine power (μόνης τῆς θείας δυνάμεως), since it [deification] is not the repayment (ἀντίδοσις) of just deeds for the saints, but a demonstration of the Creator’s liberality (ἀφθονίας); he will by condition (θέσει) make the lovers of good things that which he will be shown to be by nature in order that he may both be perfectly known and may remain altogether incomprehensible. Consequently, I did not remove the natural operation of those who will undergo this, the activity of whom, being finished, has naturally come to rest, displaying solely the undergone enjoyment of good things; rather, I only indicated the effecting power of deification that is beyond substance that has come to be (γεγενημένην) by virtue of the grace that belongs to those who have been deified.²⁶⁹

This passage, on its face, would seem to complicate Larchet’s exposition above concerning nature, grace, and the supernatural state of deification, particularly Maximos’ emphatic differentiation between

²⁶⁸ See Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Nature of the Human*, ch. 34, p. 103, ll. 12–17.

²⁶⁹ *Opusculum* 1, PG 91.33A–36A. This passage has often been claimed to amount to the Confessor’s “retraction” of the phrase he said in the *Difficulties*, but a careful look at his explanation here shows that is hardly the case. Maximos clarifies what he meant by the phrase “one activity of God and the saints” and implicitly distances it from the Christological controversy of monenergism. See Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 55 and Blowers and Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 53.

the *logos* of nature and what is beyond nature. This is especially the case if we take Larchet's argument in the context of an assertion he made earlier, that "the human is created with, within his natural constitution, the movement and all the potentialities (or faculties) that allow him to obtain this end [i.e., the end of being divinized]." ²⁷⁰ And while Larchet is fully aware of this passage from *Opuscule* 1, this statement would seem to come into conflict with its incisive distinction between natural and supernatural. Larchet's conclusion about Maximos' ontology has recently also been, with minor changes, restated by Paul Blowers: "For Maximus virtue is natural because it draws out the potential for assimilation to God already embedded in human nature." ²⁷¹ Here again the language of "potential" edges close to a logical contradiction of the Confessor's statements in *Opuscule* 1. For what is especially significant about Maximos' statements in *Opuscule* 1 is that he directly juxtaposes a natural conception of human ontology that is clearly based on Aristotle's divisions of nature (substance, potentiality, and act/actuality) to a supernatural condition that cannot be obtained on the basis of the substance's actualization of its potentialities; rather, it is conferred by grace in contrast to the substance's natural actualization.

To be clear, Larchet's position regarding the fluidity between nature and grace, natural and supernatural, in Maximos' thought is compelling. In this exact respect, Blowers has also emphasized the permeable boundaries between grace, nature, and supernatural deification in his most recent work: "This natural and motile goal-directedness [of beings toward God], while reminiscent of the Aristotelian *entelecheia*, represents more importantly for Maximus the *graced* state of being which, distending the creature's 'natural' development, opens the creature toward the future glory of supernatural deification while simultaneously anticipating the dynamic interplay of divine grace with the creature's own *energeia*, its own desire and volition." ²⁷² What is more, Torstein Tollefsen, has spoken on the same topic, noting that: "To convert, however, is one of the possibilities connected with an earthly existence, and the actualization of such a potential is often described by Maximus as a kind of *movement*. Metaphorically speaking, this movement is a movement towards God, and in fact it culminates in the deification of the creature." ²⁷³ By "convert" Tollefsen refers to one of the three facets of late Platonic descriptions of beings' remaining in their cause, proceeding from it, and converting or returning to it, a teaching most lucidly explicated in proposition 35 of Proklos' *Elements of Theology*. What is noteworthy about Tollefsen's description, however, is that like Larchet and Blowers, he positions potentiality, actuality, and deification in close proximity in such a way that to the incautious reader it may seem that the creature's self-realization by means of the movement to which Tollefsen refers does in fact culminate in deification. But that is not the case. So how do we reconcile the insights of some of the greatest living expositors of Maximos' thought with the content of *Opuscule* 1? ²⁷⁴ How can God both be and not be the ontological end, fulfillment, or completion of humanity?

This chapter will address several aspects of this question by emphasizing the critical nuances of Maximos' ontology, which are necessary for a resolution to the dilemma (which will be worked out in subsequent chapters). It is, of course possible, that Larchet, Blowers, and Tollefsen were well aware of these nuances but forewent expositing them in programmatic form to avoid losing focus on the

²⁷⁰ Larchet, *La divinisation*, 126.

²⁷¹ Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 272.

²⁷² See Blowers, *Jesus Christ*, 129.

²⁷³ Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of Maximus the Confessor*, 72.

²⁷⁴ For further comment on this passage see Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 276–277.

governing questions of their own fascinating projects for the sake of pursuing a tangential matter. But here we make that tangential matter the center of our investigation. To be specific, this chapter argues that the question posed in the preceding paragraph can be resolved into a coherent vision by demonstrating that Maximos does not operate with a univocal ontology of creation, but rather with a contextually-sensitive, multivalent ontology that is rooted in Aristotelian distinctions subsequently expanded by the late ancient commentators. Put differently, Maximos means something different by “substance” or *ousia*, as well as its logical and semantic correlates, depending on context. We will differentiate and define these contextual distinctions in relation to the philosophical traditions that Maximos inherited as part of a larger setup of the next two chapters.

1. The “Blessed Elder”: The Starting Point of Maximos’ Ontology and Teaching on Deification

When and why did Maximos begin to explore the phenomenon of deification? It is almost certain that he articulated his teaching about deification in response to his encounter with the most enigmatic figure in his corpus, a “certain great elder, truly wise in divine matters,”²⁷⁵ to whom he alludes repeatedly as the “blessed elder” in the *Mystagogy* and *Difficulties*.²⁷⁶ The identity of this man has long been disputed.²⁷⁷ It is certain, however, that Maximos had met this elder during the formative years of his career and that he left a deep and lasting impression on him. For our purposes, Maximos’ discussion of the elder highlights the paradox of a man who had not yet, chronologically speaking, attained the “life of the world to come” and nevertheless manifested its characteristics in this life. We might surmise, then, that the monastic intellectual’s teaching of deification was in some sense his response to this transformative encounter.

In this regard, Fr. Maximos (Constas) of Simonopetra has written concerning this elder that “the ‘ideal type’ of the divinized saint described in the *Ambigua* is in fact a description of this saintly philosopher.”²⁷⁸ If this is true—and I am swayed by his tantalizing connection—the result is that Maximos witnessed the phenomenon of deification in a human nature that was able to receive it in the here and now by virtue of the Incarnation.²⁷⁹ Accordingly, the Confessor’s ontology had to reflect a pluriform pattern wherein the flexible existential fibers of time and eternity crisscrossed into an endless Christomorphic knot. Thus, the contradictions and ambiguities of creaturely existence were for him rooted in an eschatological reality that persistently and relentlessly shone through the lithe ontological veil that partitions heaven and earth. It is impossible for these reasons to speak of a univocal ontology in Maximos’ thought. There are various angles from which being could be understood in Maximos’ context and I would argue that Aristotle and the commentators provided the necessary resources for articulating his experience of deification in this elder.

²⁷⁵ τινὶ μεγάλῳ γέροντι, καὶ ὄντως τὰ θεῖα σοφῶ *Mystagogy*, proem., 6. CCSG, vol. 69, ll. 9–10.

²⁷⁶ See *Mystagogy* above, as well as *Ambigua*, 27.5, 28.2, 29.2, 35.2, 39.2, 43.2, and 66.2.

²⁷⁷ See e.g., T. Nikolaou, “Zur Identität des Makarios Geron in der Mystagogia von Maximos dem Bekenner,” in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica Roma* (1983), 49:2, 407–418; Christian Boudignon, “Maxime le Confesseur et ses maîtres: À propos du ‘bienheureux ancien’ de la *Mistagogie*,” in Giovanni Filoramo, ed., *Maestro e Discepolo: Temi e problemi della direzione spirituale tra VI secolo a.C. e VII secolo d.C.* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2002), 317–23; Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 70–71; George Berthold, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, 215, n. 4; Christoph von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972).

²⁷⁸ Constas, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, xx.

²⁷⁹ See Luis Joshua Salés, *Maximus the Confessor: Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*, 28 – 29, 32–35.

2. Recent Aristotle-Maximos Scholarship and Revisiting Some Methodological Considerations

As noted in the Introduction and previous chapters, recent scholarship on Maximus' has failed to appreciate the extent to which he was familiar with and engaged the thought of Aristotle. In this regard, the most recent and forceful voice is Marius Portaru's entry in the *Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, entitled "Classical Philosophical Influences: Aristotle and Platonism." In this entry, he has perceptively underscored the dearth of references to Aristotle's corpus in the work of those researchers of the Confessor's theology who are of an "Aristotelianizing" persuasion, as he calls them.²⁸⁰ For instance, he incisively notes about von Balthasar's *Kosmische Liturgie*: "After this Aristotle-oriented introduction, the reader would expect to find more than just two footnotes about the Stagirite in von Balthasar's entire book (Balthasar 2003: 158 n.72, 240 n.158), neither of which points to a precise text deemed to have stamped Maximus' vision."²⁸¹ Concerning other scholars of an Aristotelianizing persuasion, including Riou, Garrigues, Léthel, and Piret, he writes: "For the rest, the presence of Aristotle in Maximus is merely (and unintelligibly) asserted."²⁸² A brief survey of the authors he critiques here corroborates their general lack of references to Aristotle or of a concerted effort to illumine Maximus' philosophical backdrop through sustained dialectical engagement with his non-Christian predecessors. As a counterbalance to these problems in scholarship, Portaru outlines what he calls a "method of research capable of underlining compelling connections between classical philosophers and patristic authors."²⁸³ He distinguishes between an author A1 being 1) a *source*, 2) a *positive influence*, and 3) a *negative influence* for an author A2 depending on what use the author A2 makes of the author A1. Having applied this method to the Confessor's relationship with especial attention to Aristotle he concludes "that we cannot speak of any direct and significant influence of Aristotle on Maximus."²⁸⁴

I have returned to the historiographical question here in order to differentiate my methodology from a prevalent approach applied by some of Maximus' scholars. My approach here is primarily informed by the hermeneutical theories developed by the Argentinian essayist, novelist, and literary critic Jorge Luis Borges. In one of his most candid pieces on the nature of authorship, "Kafka y sus precursores," Borges wrote that "In critical vocabulary, the word precursor is indispensable, but one ought to attempt to purify it (*habría que tratar de purificarla*) from any polemical or rivalrous connotation. The fact is that every writer creates his precursors. His labor modifies our conception of the past, as he is to modify that of the future. In this correlation, the identity or plurality of men does not matter."²⁸⁵ For Borges, the advent of every new author has the power to draw together into a system of coherence what are otherwise disparate voices and ideas with no necessary connection between them. Patricia Novillo-Corvalán, a scholar of Borges' thought, explains the significance of his

²⁸⁰ Portaru, "Classical Influences," 132.

²⁸¹ Portaru, "Classical Influences," 131.

²⁸² Portaru, "Classical Influences," 133. We should note, however, that this is hardly true of other scholars of a similar persuasion, such as Renczes' *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l'homme*, which demonstrates protracted interaction with Aristotle's philosophy.

²⁸³ Portaru, "Classical Influences," 128.

²⁸⁴ Portaru, "Classical Influences," 144.

²⁸⁵ Borges, "Kafka y sus precursores," 65. See further on this subject: Martín Salazar and Yelin, *Kafka*; Luján Salazar, *Hermenéutica analógica*; Botero Camacho, *El abismo lógico*; Barei, *Borges y la crítica literaria*; del Río, *Jorge Luis Borges*.

interpretative contributions: “In ‘Kafka y sus precursores’ Borges famously postulates a radical model of reading that dismantled the idea of chronological influence and proposed instead an inverted *modus operandi* in which ‘cada escritor crea a sus precursores’ [every writer creates his precursors].”²⁸⁶ Her insightful remarks concerning his capsizing of chronological influence point to a different dimension of interpretative interplay that can equally be applied to the study of intellectual history.

For Borges, the creation of any text takes place in dialectical appositeness with predecessors, whom an author yokes together by drawing their ideas into the context of that author’s work. This action, in turn, alters both the past and the future as unintermittingly- and discursively-constituted realities. Novillo-Corvalán adds: “The richness of this process lies in the conception of a text as the confluence of several preexisting discourses, a hybrid composite that enters into dialogue with other texts.”²⁸⁷ What is especially important for our purposes about Borges’ hermeneutical model is that it not only underscores the active agency of writers and thus challenges the usefulness of the more passive sense implied by the term influence, but that it compels interpreters to retrace the meaningful connections that another mind made in a different time and place as an intrinsic facet of exposing a thinker’s internal logic.

In this regard, Fr. Maximos of Simonopetra has spoken of the impact that Maximos had in the creation of an Orthodox Christian identity: “After his death, his theology was vindicated by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–681), and so thoroughly did his voice come to resound throughout the Byzantine theological tradition that it is not possible to trace the subsequent history of Orthodox Christianity without knowledge of his work.”²⁸⁸ More overlooked in scholarship is the Confessor’s impact on the creation of his non-Christian predecessors, particularly on Aristotle and the late Platonists. Thus, the Aristotle and late Platonists that we encounter in the ascetic intellectual’s oeuvre had not, in a sense, ever existed nor had the logic that interwove their ideas in Maximos’ work been articulated before him. In this we see that Borges’ hermeneutical approach focuses on the transformative aspects that undergird the individual’s appropriative process and on the creation of legitimately new material by the creation of fresh contexts and connections, while eschewing what I ultimately consider the limiting category of “influence.” For we can hardly speak of any passive influences on Maximos’ thought, but only of the imaginative limits that his *in der Welt sein* imposed upon him—as indeed it does upon any thinker—and of the kaleidoscopic vision he amalgamated by shattering the structures of previous discourses and shoring those fragments against his age’s ruins.²⁸⁹

If my arguments in chapters one and two are compelling, we should believe that a denial of Aristotle’s significance for Maximos severely compromises the intelligibility of his philosophical system. To be sure, I agree with Portaru that Maximos’ reception of Aristotle was highly conditioned—though the same can be said about any author, past or present.²⁹⁰ But his subsequent handling of the relationship between the two thinkers insinuates that there was none—or very little and indirect at that. In this, he reflects a broader assumption in the dominant scholarship on Maximos’ intellectual trajectory. At the same time, promoting Aristotle’s relevance for the Confessor runs the risk of association with the longstanding interpretative tradition of a Neothomistic persuasion that has been subject to extensive criticism. My study does not continue that trajectory, since its objective is to

²⁸⁶ Novillo-Corvalán, “James Joyce,” 59–82, 59.

²⁸⁷ Novillo-Corvalán, “James Joyce,” 59.

²⁸⁸ Constas, *On Difficulties*, vii.

²⁸⁹ Cf. T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, l. 431.

²⁹⁰ Portaru, “Classical Influences,” 134.

recreate the Aristotle (or Aristotles) of the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries in the Roman Empire as the monastic thinker may have known him (or them).²⁹¹ I think Borges’ interpretative lens can function as a corrective to these various scholarly missteps, because it shifts the center of gravity onto the ascetic intellectual’s active agency in the creation of his precursors and the new connections he created in the process, the sum of which is his cosmic vision.

The equivocal claim has been made in Maximos’ scholarship that the Confessor’s failure to refer to Aristotle by name—save once and negatively at that—is indicative of his general lack of interest in or knowledge of the Peripatetic’s work.²⁹² Two problems present themselves here. First, by the same metric Maximos would have even less interest in or knowledge of the “Neoplatonists,” none of whom he mentions by name. And yet, scholars agree that his thought was largely “Neoplatonic.” Second, it is simply not true that the ascetic intellectual refers to Aristotle by name once. For instance, in *Questions and Doubts* 126, Maximos attempts to address an etymological question by invoking Aristotle (by name) as an authority, since, he adds, the grammarians and rhetoricians have not spoken on the matter. What follows is especially significant because it indicates that Maximos’ knowledge of Aristotle is a complex matter:

Fragment from Aristotle, <i>On Animals</i> , Category 7.39, fr. 361	Maximos, <i>Questions and Doubts</i> , 126
<p>Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ ἐν τῷ περὶ ζώων μέμνηται ζώου μάργου λέγων ὅτι γεννᾶται ἀπὸ σήψεως μεταξὺ γῆς καὶ ὕδατος. καὶ ἀφ’ οὗ γεννηθῆ ἰσὺ παύεται γαιηφαγοῦν ἕως οὗ ἐκτροπήσῃ τὴν γῆν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν ἔλθῃ, καὶ ἔλθὼν θνήσκει τρεῖς ἡμέρας. καὶ <μετὰ τὰς τρεῖς ἡμέρας Et. Gud.> ἔρχεται νέφος μετὰ βροντῆς καὶ βρέχει ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναζῆ μῆκέτι γαιηφαγοῦν.</p>	<p>Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ ἐν τῷ Περὶ ζώων μέμνηται ζώου μαργοῦ λεγομένου καὶ ὅτι γεννᾶται ἀπὸ σήψεως μεταξὺ τῆς γῆς καὶ τοῦ ὕδατος· καὶ ἀφ’ οὗ γεννηθῆ, ἰσὺ παύεται γῆν φαγὼν ἕως ἐκτροπήσῃ τὴν γῆν εἰς τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν ἔλθῃ· καὶ ἔλθὼν θνήσκει τρεῖς ἡμέρας, καὶ μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἔρχεται νέφος βροχῆς καὶ βρέχει ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναζῆ, μῆκέτι ἀειφάγον ὄν.</p>
<p>And Aristotle, in the treatise <i>On Animals</i>, makes mention of a gluttonous animal (ζώου μάργου), saying that it is spawned from the decomposition of earth and water. And from when it is spawned, it does not desist from earth-eating until it hollows out the earth and comes to the surface, and having come [to the surface] it dies for three days. And <after the three days, Et. Gud.> a cloud comes with thunder (ἔρχεται νέφος μετὰ βροντῆς) and it rains over it and it comes back to life, no longer an earth-eater (γαιηφαγοῦν).</p>	<p>And Aristotle, in the treatise <i>On Animals</i>, makes mention of an animal called “gluttonous” (μαργοῦ λεγομένου) and that it is spawned from the decomposition of the earth and the water; and from when it is spawned, it does not desist from eating earth until, having hollowed the earth, it comes to the surface; and having come [to the surface] it dies for three days, and after three days, a cloud of rain comes (ἔρχεται νέφος βροχῆς) and it rains over it and it comes back to life, no longer being an ever-eater (ἀειφάγον).</p>

²⁹¹ See Baltussen, *Philosophy and Exegesis*; Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism*; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West and Interpreting Aristotle’s Posterior* in de Haas, Leunissen, and Martijn, 321–479; *The Cambridge History of Philosophy*, Gerson, ed. especially vol. 2, 813–828; Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 17–34; and Mueller-Jourdan, *Typologie spatio-temporelle*, 23–33 and 44–48.

²⁹² See Portaru, “Classical Influences,” 136, who claims that an allusion to Aristotle in *Letter 8* is “indeed the only occasion when Maximus invokes Aristotle by name.”

As before, I have bolded similar words and phrases to underline the connection between the two texts. Clearly the passage here in question is not a verbatim citation. It also differs from any other surviving witness to the citation, and the addition of articles as well as the curious exchange of “thunder” (*brontes*) for “rain” (*broches*) and “earth-eating” (*gaiefagoun*) for “ever-eating” (*aeifagon*) give the impression that Maximos is imperfectly reproducing the passage from memory or perhaps consciously modifying it to fit an ascetical context having to do with the sin of gluttony—or perhaps both. The *Questions and Doubts* was an early work (i.e., before 633); he most likely penned it during his time in North Africa, where his access to books was limited, requiring him to reproduce the text from memory.²⁹³ The point of the matter is that he references Aristotle positively by name and uses this frankly bizarre tale in response to an ascetical question veiled as etymological curiosity. Elsewhere in *Difficulty* 7, Maximos reproduces a paraphrase of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and speaks approvingly of him, even if he was “foreign to Christianity.”²⁹⁴ In light of these cases, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Maximos would have read the Peripatetic, even if perhaps in anthologized form—though the evidence we consider following might suggest a more engaged and extensive reading of his works. If the monastic thinker did indeed study at Alexandria and at the feet of a philosopher like David²⁹⁵ there is good reason to believe that his knowledge of Plato’s most notable disciple, as transmitted through the commentary tradition, would have been not limited, but complex and compendious. In this, he was no different than any other well-versed student of ancient texts from this time frame, who practiced an art of reading a text with others, both living and dead.

A quick survey of most extant Greek manuscripts, and especially those whose cultural value was held in high esteem, such as those by Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and numerous fathers, shows that these texts were *meant* to be mediated in a variety of ways. Most texts occupy only the center of the folio and have vast margins that were subsequently filled in with scholia or were indexed to match a set of accompanying scholia, sometimes written separately on account of their extensiveness.²⁹⁶ Some scholia were written in ad hoc, much like a student of ancient texts today might fill in the margins of a Loeb or Dumbarton Oaks series volume with notes that come to mind in the course of reading; other scholia, however, were so protracted that they were written in a separate tome, where they were systematically indexed to correspond to codified marks in the manuscript that contained the primary work.²⁹⁷

A salient example can be found in the Dionysian corpus, which had predictably accumulated a substantial corpus of scholia that were historically attributed to Maximos, even if Ioannes of Skythopolis in fact wrote the bulk of them. In the year 827, a Roman delegation from Constantinople arrived at the Carolingian court with the manuscript now coded as *Parisinus graecus* 437, which is the oldest extant copy of the works of Dionysios. Although this specific manuscript contained only minimal marginalia, it is indexed throughout so that the reader can consult a particular scholion where appropriate, as the extract from *Parisinus graecus* 437 shows here below. During his travels to Constantinople, Anastasius Bibliothecarius came across a set of scholia that were meant to accompany

²⁹³ See Jankowiak and Booth, “A New Date-List,” in *OHMC*, 29.

²⁹⁴ *Ambig.* 7.7. On this allusion see Vladimir Cvetković, “The Identity of the *allotrios* and his Definition in *Ambiguum* 7 of St Maximus the Confessor,” in *Studia Patristica* 48 (2010), 105–110.

²⁹⁵ Portaru has claimed that this is “certain.” See “Classical Philosophical Influences,” 134.

²⁹⁶ For a general overview of this topic, refer to Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic*; Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, especially see 103–217.

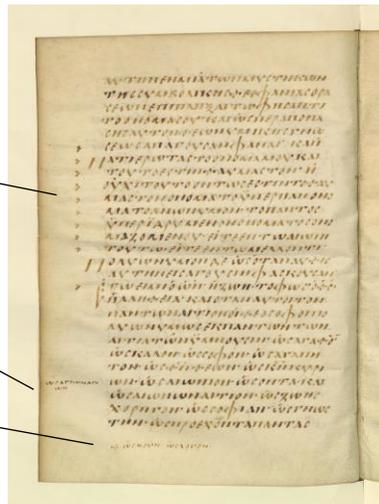
²⁹⁷ See Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 133–134.

the reading of the Areopagitical corpus.²⁹⁸ He translated these scholia into Latin, annotated them, and returned to the Carolingian court with them.²⁹⁹ When Charles the Bald commissioned John Scotus Eriugena with the surely intimidating task of translating the Areopagitical corpus, it was precisely to these scholia that the Scot turned. Significantly, in the prefatory epistle to the translation addressed to his patron monarch, Eriugena expressly thanked the “wisest Maximos” for illuminating the darkest passages in the *Corpus dionysiacum*.³⁰⁰ His reference to Maximos, of course, refers to the scholia on Dionysios that he was deemed to have written. What this curious moment of cultural crosspollination demonstrates is the irrevocable practice of reading within a network of mediated and contextually transmitted ideas that often aided one’s engagement with taxing thinkers like the Stagirite and the Areopagite.

Cross-reference indicators

Marginal elucidation

Marginal elucidation



Parisinus graecus 437,
folio 111, verso

Early-ninth century

Uncial script

Parchment

Bibliothèque
Nationale, Paris

Finally, we should add that it was not only extremely uncommon but also highly impractical to employ (the prohibitively expensive) copies of an author’s complete work for the classroom setting.³⁰¹ Far more common were *encheiridia*—handbooks—that, as the name suggests, were handy for pedagogical purposes. These handbooks were compendia that contained select and significant passages from a variety of authors for classroom instruction, much as anthologies are employed in university courses today. But the fact that most young and aspiring Romans were reading Aristotle, Plato, and Galen in handbooks hardly means they did not have “direct” access to their work. Rather, it means that they practiced an art of reading together with a certain tradition that both offered

²⁹⁸ See Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus* 36–37; Suchla, *Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien* and “Die Überlieferung,” 79–83.

²⁹⁹ For his comments on how he would differentiate those of Maximos from others see PL 129:740; the distinctions were already lost by the time of the oldest extant manuscript, a 10th-century specimen, Berlin Phill. 1668.

³⁰⁰ CCSG 18, p. 3.15–25. See for a fuller account Fr. Maximos Simonopetrites (Nicholas Conostas), “St Maximos the Confessor: The Reception of His Thought in East and West,” in Vasiljevic, 25–53.

³⁰¹ Generally, see Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, especially see 32–95 and “Notes on ‘Primary’ and ‘Secondary’ Schools in Late Antiquity,” in *Transactions*, 113, 323–346; Watts, *City and School*; Lee Too, *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity; Education and Religion*, Gemeinhardt, van Hoof, and van Nuffelen, eds. especially 13–32, 61–81, and 159–170; Criboire, *The School of Libanius*; *Brill’s Companion to Ancient Scholarship*, Montanari, Matthaïos, and Rengakos, eds. especially see Pontani, “Scholarship in the Byzantine Empire,” 298–455 and de Jonge, “Grammatical Theory and Rhetorical Teaching,” 981–1011; and Hauge, *Ancient Education*.

guidance on difficult matters but also elicited original contributions or responses from the reader. Ancient texts were thus constantly being discursively rewritten because students' experience of reading a text was always already within a synoptic context that brought a wide spectrum of (often disparate) ideas together and engendered original responses to a diversity of opinions on perennial questions.

3. Aristotle, "Aristotle," and the Other Aristotle

Resistance to Maximus' knowledge of Aristotle, and Christians' more broadly, has galvanized around the following points: first, that Christian knowledge of Aristotle would have been largely doxographical and not based on readings of his works; second, that Christians were consistently critical of the Peripatetic; and third, that Christians had identified a constellation of problematic loci in Aristotle's thought that hindered their appropriation of his thought. One scholar has summed these loci up as follows: "(a) that Aristotle denied divine providence in the lower part of the universe; (b) that happiness required external goods, such as wealth; (c) that the universe was eternal; (d) that the soul was mortal, being considered only as the *entelechy* of the body."³⁰² While it is true that Christians voiced their misgivings about some of Aristotle's teachings, their views of the Peripatetic ranged widely, not only among one another, but even in their own works and depending on the specific purposes of their texts. And even if Christians were critical of Aristotle, the force of their preferential misgivings depends to a commensurate degree on their knowledge of his work.

The point of the matter is that most late ancient Christian texts were penned by relatively, and sometimes impressively, intelligent thinkers who had received an exceptionally rigorous education, and had been trained in the art of discursive persuasion far better than contemporary curricular and logistical constraints allow. Thus, although my observation may seem germane, Christian writers from this period were master rhetors, the sharpness of whose craft has hardly been dulled by the fifteen or so centuries that divide us from them. As such, a robust hermeneutical suspicion about their claims is fully justified. In this sense, then, we must be aware of a variety of "Aristotles" in their works, such as Aristotle as a persona or historical figure, a rhetorically- and discursively-invented Aristotle for the sake of Christian polemics, or the Aristotle whose ideas and terms they widely appropriated, I would argue, but frequently forewent acknowledging.

In some cases, rhetorical barrages against Aristotle likely do not even belong to the original author but were a later interpolation by a pious and well-intentioned scribe who nevertheless did us a disservice. These consideration, too, must be kept in mind. In this respect, one scholar has pointed to a passage in *Against Eunomios* 1.1.55, where Gregory of Nyssa supposedly censures Aetios for employing Aristotle's evil artifice (κακοτεχνία)—meaning, perhaps, the syllogistic—to promote his heresy, as a sure sign of Christian disapproval of Aristotle. But such an allusion hardly accounts for the totality of Gregory's complicated relationship to the Stagirite; moreover, the selection of this particular passage is unfortunate.

Werner Jäger placed this allusion to Aristotle's "evil artifice" in square brackets in his critical edition for good reason. Of the nine relevant manuscripts that preserve *Against Eunomios*, one entirely omits it (v=*textus vulgatus editionis Parisinae*, 1638 by Aegidio Morello), six (*Vaticanus graecus* 447, 12th c., *Laurentianus Mediceus* plut. VI 17, 10th/11th c., *Lesbicus Mytilenensis monasterii S. Joannis* 6, 12th c., *Athous monasterii Vatopedi* 129/118, 11th/12th c., *Vaticanus graecus* 424, 13th c., and *Vaticanus graecus* 1907,

³⁰² Portaru, "Classical Philosophical Influences," 135. Here he cites Lilla (2006), 518.

12th/13th c.) present cases of *interpretamentum seclusi*, and only two (*Ambrosianus* C 215, 12th c. and *Marcianus graecus* LXIX 501, 12th/13th c.) contain the phrase without addenda.³⁰³ In other words, six different copyists, including the earliest witness to the work, considered the phrase on which scholars have built their case a clear interpolation; only the latest two manuscripts include it without misgivings and Aegidio Morello had the good sense of altogether omitting the interpolation in his version. Put simply, it is virtually certain that Gregory did not write that phrase. A different reading of this text shows that the Cappadocian not only possessed precise knowledge concerning the methods of teaching the Aristotelian syllogistic in the fourth century, but that he himself was highly proficient in the dialectical arts. To this point, he censures the Anomians' reasoning as being a nonsensical application of syllogisms they had learned by rote in the classroom for the sake of showing off.³⁰⁴

The foregoing point suggests that Gregory's relation to Aristotle is more complex, though we may only consider it briefly here. In his dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, Gregory shows a certain ambiguity about Aristotle's work. On the one hand, he (half-heartedly) finds fault with an unqualified notion of the soul's mortality; on the other hand (and in the exact same phrase), he expresses his admiration for the Peripatetic's research acumen and the usefulness of his psychology for his own inquiry, referring to him as one who "followed phenomena systematically and painstakingly examined through diligence the subject matter now lying before us."³⁰⁵ It may thus not be universally true that Christians spurned the ideation of soul as entelechy or form of the body or that they rescinded the possibility of its mortality altogether. As I have argued elsewhere,³⁰⁶ Gregory does not in fact define the soul as "immortal" by nature in the dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*; in other texts, he shows strategic pause about predicating immortality of the soul without further qualifications,³⁰⁷ as Origen had done before him.³⁰⁸

I have likewise argued that Gregory in effect appropriated Aristotle's idea of the soul as actuality of the body in the interest of describing the role the soul plays in the gestation of life, at birth, over the course of growth and psychological development, but especially in the resurrection.³⁰⁹ Gregory expands this application of the soul as form or actuality of the body in his *On the Making of the Human*, where he borrows a series of Aristotle's images from *On the Soul* and the *Metaphysics* in tacit approval of the philosopher from Stageiros.³¹⁰ In the *Life of Moses*, Gregory adopts his distinctive teaching on virtue as the mean between two extremes of deficiency, chiefly presented in the *Nikomachean Ethics*.³¹¹ In brief, to reduce Gregory to an unqualified and uncompromising critic of Aristotle on the basis of an interpolated rhetorical turn of phrase in a dogmatic dispute hardly gets at the numerous layers of interconnectedness between Christian and Aristotelian ideas.

The same can be said about some of the other *loci communes* mentioned earlier. For example, the idea of *eudaimonia* and Peripatetic ethics more broadly enjoyed significant adherents, like Origen, who

³⁰³ See GNO 1.1, *Against Eunomios*, 1.1.55, p. 41, ll. 4–5.

³⁰⁴ See GNO 1.1, *Against Eunomios*, 1.1.45, p. 37, ll. 17–22; see also p. 220.1–5.

³⁰⁵ See GNO, 3.3, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, p. 33.14–34.5.

³⁰⁶ Salés, "Can These Bones Live?"

³⁰⁷ E.g., *On Holy Easter*, GNO 9, p. 266.13–18; *Homily on the Song of Songs* 15, GNO 6, pp. 361.18–362.4; *On the Making of the Human*, PG 44:188B; *On the Life of Moses* 2.40, SC 1, 3rd ed., p. 128.1–2.

³⁰⁸ See Origen, *Commentary on John* 6.7, PG 14:220BC and *On First Principles* 2.9.2, SC 252, p. 354.31–39. See also Methodios of Olympus, *Aglaophon* or *On the Resurrection*, 1.11, PG 18:280C.

³⁰⁹ See Salés, "Can These Bones Live?" (forthcoming).

³¹⁰ See *On the Making of the Human*, PG 44:236A–237D.

³¹¹ See *On the Life of Moses*, 2.243, SC 1, 3rd ed., pp. 272.1–274.12 and compare to *Nikomachean Ethics* 1104a25–27.

inveighed against the Stoics for rejecting the Peripatetic ethic, which, he says “is most suitably human (ἀνθρωπικώτατον) and more reasonably acknowledges (εὐγνωμόνως ὁμολογοῦντα) human good things than the remainder of the <non-Christian> ways of thought (αἱρέσεων).”³¹² Origen, of course, does not consistently think this highly of Peripatetics, but his words nevertheless complicate the representation of early Christian attitudes toward Aristotle. Indeed, even Eusebios, otherwise emphatic about Aristotle’s and Plato’s radical disagreement and the latter’s greater congeniality with Christianity, did not hesitate to employ some of Aristotle’s and Alexandros of Aphrodisias’ teaching on providence, choice, and human causality to contradict certain fatalist Stoic doctrines that brought deliberate choice (προαίρεσις) or self-rule (αὐτεξούσιον) into question.³¹³ In this he was not alone, but followed the lead of other earlier Christians, like Clement and Origen of Alexandria.³¹⁴ Indeed, even one of Aristotle’s admittedly most contentious teachings, that the universe was eternal, was gradually accepted by some Christians, albeit in a highly qualified way, by recourse to the doctrine of the *logoi* of creation, to which Maximus gave sophisticated expression. We may add that this position was also gradually accepted by Latin thinkers, like Thomas Aquinas, who defended a qualified version of the eternity of the world in his aptly titled *De aeternitate mundi*. In sum, the picture of early Christian appreciation of Aristotle may not be as bleak as is often claimed.

4. The Rich Legacy of Aristotle’s Metaphysical Divisions of Nature

A careful analysis of Maximus’ appropriation of Aristotle’s metaphysical divisions of nature (substance, potentiality, actuality) is critical to address the conundrum raised in the introduction. Here again, there is scholarly resistance. For instance, one interpreter of the Confessor’s work has noted that, on the one hand, the category of substance/οὐσία was a positive influence on Maximus; on the other, he has claimed that “The triad of essence–power–energy (οὐσία–δύναμις–ἐνέργεια), despite the similarity of words, is not Aristotelian; it can be found as such in Proclus (*Elementa theologica* 169), and

³¹² *Against Kelsos* 1.10.18–20.

³¹³ See *On the Preparation for the Gospel* 6.9.1–12 and compare to his different assessment of him in, e.g., 13.13.4 and 15.12.6.

³¹⁴ For Klemes, see: οὐκέτ’ οὖν προαιρέσεως κατόρθωμα ἡ πίστις, εἰ φύσεως πλεονέκτημα, οὐδὲ ἀμοιβῆς δικαίας τεύξεται ἀνάιτιος ὧν ὁ μὴ πιστεύσας, καὶ οὐκ αἰτιος ὁ πιστεύσας, πᾶσα δὲ ἡ τῆς πίστεως καὶ ἀπιστίας ιδιότης καὶ διαφορότης οὐτ’ ἐπαίνῳ οὐτε μὴν ψόγῳ ὑποπέσοι ἂν ὀρθῶς λογιζομένους, προηγουμένην ἔχουσα τὴν ἐκ τοῦ τὰ πάντα δυνατοῦ φυσικῆν ἀνάγκην γενομένην· νευροσπαστομένων δὲ ἡμῶν ἀψύχων δίκην φυσικαῖς ἐνεργείαις τό τε <ἐκούσιον καὶ τὸ> ἀκούσιον παρέλκει ὄρμη τε ἢ προκαθηγουμένη τούτων. Καὶ οὐκέτι ἔγωγε ἐνοῶ ζῶν τοῦτο, οὗ τὸ ὄρμητικὸν ἀνάγκη λέλογχεν ὑπὸ τῆς ἔξωθεν αἰτίας κινούμενον. *Str.* II.3. (GCS 11.1, 2.) Clement of Alexandria is here directly opposing the Stoic doctrine of physical causality; note, especially, the usage of the term ἔξωθεν. Compare to Chrysippos, SVF 3.988 and 2.974. See also Amand, *Fatalisme*, 104. For Origen, see “Si enim nostri arbitrii sumus, impugnare nos fortasse possint aliquae virtutes ad peccatum et aliae iuvare ad salutem, non tamen necessitate cogimur vel recte agere vel male; quod fieri arbitrantur hi, qui stellarum cursum et motus causam dicunt humanorum esse gestorum, non solum eorum, quae extra arbitrii accidunt libertatem, sed et eorum, quae in nostra sunt posita potestate.” *On First Principles*, preface, 5. SC 252, p. 84.111–118. See also: Εἰ γὰρ ὁ ἐκκαθάρας ἑαυτὸν γίνεται ἄσκευος εἰς τιμὴν, ὁ δὲ ἀπερικάθαρτον ἑαυτὸν περιιδὼν ἄσκευος εἰς ἀτιμίαν, ὅσον ἐπὶ ταύταις ταῖς λέξεσιν οὐδαμῶς αἰτιος ὁ δημιουργός. ποιεῖ μὲν γὰρ ὁ δημιουργός ἄσκευη τιμῆς καὶ σκευὴ ἀτιμίας, οὐκ ἀρχήθεν κατὰ τὴν πρόγνωσιν, ἐπεὶ μὴ κατ’ αὐτὴν προκατακρίνει ἢ προδικαιοῖ, ἀλλὰ ἄσκευη τιμῆς τοὺς ἐκκαθάραντας ἑαυτοὺς καὶ ἄσκευη ἀτιμίας, τοὺς ἀπερικαθάρτους ἑαυτοὺς περιιδόντας· ὥστε ἐκ πρεσβυτέρων αἰτιῶν τῆς κατασκευῆς . . . γίνεσθαι ὃν μὲν εἰς τιμὴν ὃν δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν. Εἰ δ’ ἅπαξ προσιέμεθα εἶναι τινὰς πρεσβυτέρας αἰτίας τοῦ ἄσκευους τῆς τιμῆς καὶ τοῦ ἄσκευους τῆς ἀτιμίας, τί ἄτοπον ἀνελθόντας εἰς τὸν περὶ ψυχῆς τόπον <νοεῖν> πρεσβύτερα αἴτια τοῦ τὸν Ἰακώβ ἠγαπήσθαι καὶ τὸν Ἡσαΐ μμισθῆσθαι γεγονέναι εἰς τὸν Ἰακώβ πρὸ τῆς ἐνσωματώσεως καὶ εἰς τὸν Ἡσαΐ πρὸ τοῦ εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν τῆς Ῥεβέκκας γενέσθαι; *On First Principles*, 3.1.20, 21. SC 268, pp. 134.708–136.723.

in Dionysius (*Hier.cael.* 11.2).³¹⁵ The implication here, it would seem, is that the triad “substance–potentiality–actuality” is a later development that cannot be traced to Aristotle. Two serious problems plague this assessment.

First, this assessment shows little consideration for the plurivocity of οὐσία/*ousia* both in Aristotle and Maximus. The Stagirite, like the Confessor, boarded the topic of substance from different angles, depending on the purposes of his investigation. For example, the *ousia* he speaks of in the *Categories* is really rather different than some of the senses of *ousia* presented in the *Metaphysics*. In the former work, Aristotle is primarily interested in analyzing substance as the subject of predication (*kategoria* in Greek means “predicate”) of the nine secondary predicates he introduces following his exposition of substance. Substance, in other words, is the “what” or “who” to which or to whom predicates are ascribed. In the *Metaphysics*, by contrast, he is primarily concerned with investigating “being as being.”

This investigation led him to consider substance in at least four ways, since in books 3 and 4 of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle encountered a defining problem for his investigation. Being is spoken of in different ways depending on context. For this reason, Aristotle feels the urge of clarifying what the exact subject of inquiry in the *Metaphysics* is and how to approach it. Being, Aristotle holds, may be plurivocal, but all terms said of being stand in a πρὸς ἓν relation;³¹⁶ this kind of relation unifies disparate terms by rapport to a singularity. In this case, that means being in a primary sense from which all others derive.³¹⁷ In book 4, he introduces the famous principle of non-contradiction, which holds that “it is impossible for something simultaneously both to belong and not to belong to something in the same respect.”³¹⁸ This principle applies to being in the sense that the “whatness” of being that is under investigation must be compared in the same respect that is the subject of comparison. So, being can be studied from several different perspectives that yield various results without entailing logical contradiction, as Aristotle further argues in book 7, where he mentions that there are no fewer than four different senses of substance.³¹⁹ Indeed, in this same book, he makes a distinction between substance as the individual and as subject of predication of various categories.³²⁰ Therefore, Aristotle’s use of substance across different works (and indeed, even within those works), such as the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics*, requires special attention to this guiding logical principle and the contextual situation of the term.³²¹ To illustrate, in *Metaphysics* 1029a10 Aristotle holds that the definition of substance as subject of predication is insufficient (οὐ ἰκανόν) for his following purposes, which aim at comprehending being as such.

The second problem with the assessment above that “The triad of essence–power–energy (οὐσία–δύναμις–ἐνέργεια), despite the similarity of words, is not Aristotelian” is that it is factually incorrect. Though I do not wish to put too fine a point on the matter, the three terms, *ousia*, *dynamis*, *energeia* are not “similar” to those that Aristotle uses, but identical. Moreover, the Peripatetic in effect discusses these three terms in relation to one another no fewer than eight times and often at sprawling lengths.³²²

³¹⁵ Portaru, “Classical Philosophical Influences,” 138.

³¹⁶ See further, Cataldo, “Plato, Aristotle, and *pros hen* Equivocity,” 237–247.

³¹⁷ See especially 1004b28–1005a11.

³¹⁸ *Metaphysics* 1005b19–20.

³¹⁹ *Metaphysics* 1028b34–1029a3.

³²⁰ *Metaphysics* 1030a17–21.

³²¹ See further Loux, *Primary “Ousia,”* 72–107.

³²² See *On Interpretation* 23a22–26 and *Metaphysics* 1042b9–11, 1050a2–5, 1050b2–5, 1050b25–27, 1051b27–28, 1071b18–21, and 1088b1–3. For further scholarly discussion, see Witt, *Ways of Being*, 38–95; Yu, *The Structure of Being*; and Panayides, “Aristotle on the Priority of Actuality in Substance,” 327–344.

These terms likewise appear among other Aristotelians, like Alexandros of Aphrodisias, who, in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, treats this triad as a unit of commentary some four dozen times³²³ and in Themistios, who also includes the triad in his commentaries on the Peripatetic in various places.³²⁴ This triad, to be sure, was also subsequently employed by late Platonists, including Plotinos, Porphyrios, Iamblichos, Dexippos, Ammonios, Proklos, Syrianos, Damaskios, Simplicios, Asklepios, Olympiodoros, and Elias.³²⁵ But these authors often discussed these three terms in commentaries on Aristotle.

Maximos also employs this triadic schema as we saw in *Opuscule* 1, cited earlier, and also demonstrates a sophisticated grasp of the nuances of Aristotle's *ousia*. This much is clear in his vastly understudied *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*, which will here serve as the spine of our analysis of Maximos' metaphysics. The complex opening decade presents several senses of substance that strongly suggest the ascetic thinker's grasp of the Aristotelian commentary tradition, especially with regard to substance. Here substance appears as a subject of predication, as an ontologically-defining principle, and as an ontological complex of actuality-driven motion; we should also point out here at the outset that the relationship between these last two, as in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, is narrow.³²⁶ The decade operates on a number of triadic structures, some of which are first introduced in 1.2, such as first principle (ἀρχή), intermediate state (μεσότης), and end (τέλος); indefinite (ἄοριστος), immobile (ἀκίνητος), and infinite (ἄπειρος); and substance (οὐσία), potentiality (δύναμις), and actuality (ἐνέργεια).³²⁷

It is clear that the terms of the triads are related, but different. For instance, the first principle and substance are the ontological starting point of beings that aims at an end or actuality through the intermediate state wherein the potentialities that inhere in the substance or pertain to the first principle are realized. The other three terms are negations of these six existential categories and are applied to God: "indefinite" negates a first principle or substance; "immobile" negates the intermediary state and potentiality; "infinite" negates an end or actuality. We will later return to the Aristotelian provenance of these terms.³²⁸ In 1.3, the Confessor appears to identify substance with a first principle, potentiality with the intermediary state, and actuality with end: "Each substance, including its own definition in itself, is a first principle by nature productive of the movement discerned in potentiality in it. Each natural motion toward actuality, conceptualized as after substance, yet prior to actuality, is an intermediate state, since in nature it divides both as that which mediates between them. And each actuality, in nature circumscribed by its corresponding *logos*, is the end of the substantializing movement (οὐσιώδους κινήσεως) conceptually prior to it." Substance as Maximos envisions it here is

³²³ Selected examples: 534:35–36, 587:1–5, 591:12–13 and 18–22, 724:32, etc.

³²⁴ E.g., *Periphrasis on Aristotle's On the Soul* 5.3.99.32–37 and 5.3.112.3–5.

³²⁵ See Plotinos (e.g., *Enneads* 6.6.9.26–28), Porphyrios (e.g., *Commentary on the Timaios* 2.75.12–13), Iamblichos (e.g., *Protreptikos* 112:20–22 and *On Mysteries* 1.4.15–18), Dexippos (e.g., *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 34:12–14, 49:1–4), Ammonios (e.g., *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 247:4–8, 250:9–11) Proklos (e.g., *Commentary on Plato's Republic* 1.65.23–24, *Platonic Theology* 1.102.14, *Elements of Theology* 77.1–2), Syrianos (e.g., *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 101:28–29, 171:35–36), Damaskios (e.g., *On First Principles* 1.23.15–16, 1.31.20–24), Simplicios (e.g., *Commentary on Aristotle's On the Heavens* 7.421.16–17, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 8.95.15–17), Asklepios (e.g., *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 142.22–23, 317.10–11), Olympiodoros (e.g., *Commentary on Plato's Alkebiades* 38.22), and Elias (e.g., *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 180.14–17).

³²⁶ See Witt, *Ways of Being*, 75–95.

³²⁷ See Salés, *Maximus the Confessor*, 43, n. 3.

³²⁸ See *Metaphysics* 1071b3–1073a11 and Bradshaw, "In What Sense is the Prime Mover Eternal?" 359–369 and compare with Terezis, "The Pair Limit-Finitude," 71–84.

closely related to substance as Aristotle articulates it in select places of the *Metaphysics*. This substance is a complex of end-driven ontological dynamisms that is circumscribed by its existential principle.³²⁹ This existential principle refers to the “what it is for x to be x,” which had been the singular most important question in the *Metaphysics* and that which has most divided scholars, whereas its dynamism, actualized by the realization of its potentialities, belongs to its ongoing motion toward its natural completion.³³⁰

5. Substance, Essence, Substantial Form, and the *Logoi* of Creation

In Aristotelian scholarship, both ancient and modern, this aforementioned existential principle is commonly referred to as the “substantial form” (εἶδος οὐσιῶδες) and is the essence or quiddity (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι—“the what it was being for something to be existing”) of a substance (οὐσία) by way of (onto)logical definition (ὄρος). Alexandros of Aphrodisias seemingly coined the compound term “substantial form” in his *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* as a way of referring to the *quiddity* of a substance but one, additionally, that does not exist separate from its substrate; rather, it is only logically inferable through theoretical science, as he notes in his exposition of the Stagirite: “Having demonstrated that the form of substances (τὸ τῶν οὐσιῶν εἶδος) does not occur as a form, but occurs in respect of a certain substrate (τι ὑποκείμενον), in effect I mean matter, he [i.e., Aristotle] says that the demonstrative argument (ὁ δεικνύων λόγος) not only demonstrates that the substantial form (οὐσιῶδες εἶδος) does not occur as an essence (οὐσίαν) [in the Platonic sense], but neither do the remainder of the predicates [or categories], quantity, quality, and the rest. For just as the copper sphere occurs, but not the form of ‘sphere,’ so also white wood or <wood that is> two cubits long occurs, but not ‘whiteness’ (λευκότης) or ‘size’ (ποσότης).”³³¹ This term, “substantial form,” would subsequently play a significant role in the late Platonic interpretations of Plato and Aristotle and was employed as a set phrase by Plotinos, Porphyrios, Ammonios, Syrianos, Proklos, Damaskios, Simplicios, Ioannes Philoponos, and David.³³²

³²⁹ Refer to Gill, *Aristotle on Substance*, 90–107, 172–183, and 214–226.

³³⁰ The discussion here centers on two possible interpretations of Aristotle’s understanding of the substantial form and its relation to universals and particulars. One major tradition argues that substantial forms are indeed particulars and as such subsist and ontologically define every being and every being has a unique substantial form. See Sellars, “Substance and Form in Aristotle,” 688–699; Hartman, “Aristotle on the Identity of Substance and Essence,” 545–561; Irwin, “Homonymy in Aristotle,” 523–544; and Witt, “Aristotelian Essentialism Revisited,” 285–298. Another tradition holds that the substantial form refers to a universal predicated of numerous individuals that fall under that definition. For this line of reasoning see Woods, “Problems in *Metaphysics Z*” in Moravcsik; Owen, “Inherence” 97–105 and “Particular and General,” 1–21; Code, “No Universal is a Substance,” in Simmons, 65–74 and “Aristotle: Essence and Accident,” in Grandy and Warner, 411–439; Loux, *Primary Ousia*; and Lewis, *Substance and Predication in Aristotle*.

³³¹ Alexandros of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, p. 501, ll. 13–17.

³³² See Plotinos, *Enneads* 6.3.3.14–15; Porphyrios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories*, CAG 4.1, p. 133, ll. 15–16; Ammonios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s On Interpretation* p. 89, l. 21; Syrianos, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* p. 149, ll. 4–5; Proklos, *Commentary on the Parmenides*, p. 936, l. 32 and p. 980, ll. 35–36; Damaskios, *On First Principles* vol. 1, p. 218, l. 7 and p. 294, l. 13, *Commentary on the Parmenides* p. 160, l. 5; Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s On the Heavens* vol. 7, p. 127, l. 32, vol. 8, p. 227, l. 34, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories*, vol. 8, p. 261, l. 28, p. 286, l. 14, *Commentary on Aristotle’s On the Soul*, vol. 11, p. 7, l. 7, p. 169, l. 3; Ioannes Philoponos, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* vol. 13.1, p. 73, l. 15, p. 199, l. 16, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics* vol. 13.3, p. 242, l. 9, *Commentary on Aristotle’s On Generation and Corruption* vol. 14.2, p. 118, l. 8, p. 169, l. 31, p. 204, l. 7, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*, vol. 16, p. 222, ll. 9–10, p. 224, l. 6, l. 11, l. 19, p. 225, l. 10, p. 227, l. 14, p. 788, l. 22, David, *Commentary on Porphyrios’ Introduction*, p. 98, ll. 30–31, p. 99, l. 17.

It is thus not surprising that Maximos, squarely situated in this philosophical trajectory, also uses a variant on the phrase “substantial form”³³³ in order to make an implicit distinction between substance and its “substantial form;” he, however, more commonly prefers a different term when referring to the ontologically-defining reality of a substance. In *Chapters on Theology* 1.3, Maximos inserts an explanatory phrase to the effect that every substance already contains in itself precisely this (onto)logical definition: “Each substance, including its own definition in itself . . .” which he later identifies as the substance’s circumscribing definition (ὄρος): its *logos*. It would appear that the *logos* functions for Maximos in an ontologically-defining sense that is decidedly not coterminous with *ousia* or substance, since it is precisely *ousia* that the *logos* defines. Rather, the role that the *logos* plays here bears a striking similarity to that which Aristotle’s interpreters assigned to the substantial form, whereas the *ousia* is the subject defined by the *logos*. We should also note that referring to the essentially-defining term of a substance as *logos* is not foreign to Aristotle, since he holds that “And ‘definition’ is a *logos* signifying the essence” (ἔστι δ’ ὄρος μὲν λόγος ὁ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι σημαίνων, *Topics* 102a3).

In this context, then, Maximos does not identify *ousia* with the essential properties of a being. This interpretation is confirmed in 1.9, where Maximos writes that “What is known of beings naturally includes the interwoven intrinsic *logoi* as what make it [i.e., what is known of beings] demonstrable, by which it [i.e., what is known of beings] naturally admits of circumscription.” Here substances are known as what they are in an essential sense through their *logos*, since their intelligibility depends on the definition that makes them demonstrable.³³⁴ Substance, here, just is what beings are; it is not their conceptual or existential definition. This interpretation can be upheld from other texts, such as *Difficulties* 17.9.1, where Maximos explicitly asks concerning the *logos* of each particular substance (Καὶ αὐθις τίς ὁ λόγος τῆς τοῦ καθ’ ἕκαστον οὐσίας;), implying thereby that they are not identical; on the contrary, the former defines (and is responsible for the coming into being of) the latter. If *logos* and *ousia* would be roughly synonymous, Maximos’ phrase above would be no more than a redundant tautology.³³⁵

One of the most important passages that speaks at length about the *logoi* is Maximos’ first extended exposition of this teaching in *Difficulties* 7.15–16. In 7.15 he begins:

For who, knowing that with *logos* and wisdom beings were brought into being out of non-being by God, if he were in his mind (ἐμφρόνως) to direct the contemplative capacity of his soul to the infinite natural difference and complexity (ποικιλία)³³⁶ of beings and were to distinguish with the analytical capacity of reason the *logos* in conceptual form (κατ’ ἐπίνοιαν) in accordance with which they were created would not know that the One Logos is many *logoi*, distinguished indivisibly in the difference of things that have come into being on account of their unconfused particularity toward one another and themselves? And again, [who would not know] that the many [*logoi*] are One [Logos] by the relation of all things to Him [and that they] exist unconfusedly on account of Him, [who is] the substantive and existing (ἐνούσιόν τε καὶ ἐνυπόστατον) Word of God and of the Father since (ὡς) [he is] the first principle and cause of all things . . . ?

³³³ Maximos, *Questions to Thalassios* 13, l. 22 and l. 25.

³³⁴ See further Salés, *Maximos the Confessor*, 30–32.

³³⁵ For contrasts with my own interpretation, see Larchet, *La divinisation*, 141–151 and Blowers, *Jesus Christ*, 129.

³³⁶ It is quite possible that Maximos may have borrowed this precise phrase from Ioannes Philoponos, *On the Eternity of the World*, 340, ll. 21–22.

The activity that Maximos describes here, by which one can distinguish the unconfused plurality of being, is meant to take place intellectually, with both the contemplative—or theoretical—and analytical capacities of the soul,³³⁷ and yields a concept abstracted from being that are the *logoi* or Logos undergirding all existence. The science described here by the Confessor bears striking resemblances to Aristotle’s formulations concerning the abstraction of the form or substantial form by which the essence (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι) of a substance can be conceptually known on the basis of the substrate wherein it is contemplated.³³⁸ It is possible to inquire into being as being, despite these infinite differences, because of the relation to the singularity of the Logos that underlies every substance. Again, this tenet is conceptually identical to that put forth by Aristotle in book 4 of the *Metaphysics*, discussed above, specifically with respect to the principle of relation to a singularity (πρὸς ἓν), which in this case is the Logos of God.³³⁹ We should also add that his use of “unconfused particularity” (ἀσυγχύτον ιδιότητα), despite sharing the same root as one of the four Christological definitions of Chalcedon, more likely functions in light of the ontological divisions promoted in the so-called Porphyrian Tree, as Melchisedec Törönen has argued.³⁴⁰

Maximos continues:

For, containing before all ages the pre-established (προϋφειστώτας) *logoi* of things that have come into being, by his good will he established the visible and invisible creation out of non-being in accordance with them, having made and making by *logos* and wisdom all things according to the necessary time, both universals and particulars. For we believe that a *logos* preceded and directed (προκαθηγεῖσθαι) the creation of angels, a *logos* of each of the substances and powers (οὐσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων) filling the world above, a *logos* of humans, [in brief,] a *logos* of everything receiving being from God so that I do not mention the particulars (ἵνα μὴ τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστον λέγω).

In this passage Maximos clarifies that God brings beings into existence on the basis of a pre-established *logos*. While there are some similarities between the *logoi* as the Confessor envisions them here (and elsewhere in his corpus) and Plato’s forms, Larchet has convincingly demonstrated that the parallels are superficial rather than substantive.³⁴¹ I would add that the ascetic thinker’s articulation of the *logoi* is not a Christian substitution for the Platonic interpretations of Plato’s doctrine of the forms that Aristotle critiqued in the *Metaphysics*, but a serendipitous approbatory nod to the Peripatetic in that he grounded the preexisting ideas of creation in a specific, really existing substrate, that is, the *Logos* of God. In this respect, it is significant that Maximos would refer to the “Word of God and of the Father,” in a twofold affirmation of his real existence, as “substantive and existing” (ἐνούσιόν τε

³³⁷ See Iamblichos, *On Universal Mathematical Sciences*, sect. 87, l. 14. The term ἐξεταστικόν as Maximos employs it here is most probably from Aristotelian derivation, which he defines in the *Topics* 101b2–4. Origen used it extensively and it figures widely in both Christian and Platonic authors of late antiquity.

³³⁸ See Black, *Aristotle’s Theory of Abstraction* and Lollar, *To See into the Life of Things* and see Blowers’s review of this latter in *Journal of Theological Studies* 66.1 (2015), 462–464.

³³⁹ See also, *Chapters on Theology* 1.17, 21–22, 32, 54–56, 59, 61, 65–67, 70, 78–80, 82–85, 97, 2.4, 8–10, 13, 16–18, 23, 27–29, 33–34, 36, 39, 41, 43–46, 50–51, 59, 61, 74–76, 80, 82, and 98–100, as well as *Difficulty* 7.15–16.

³⁴⁰ See Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 2–9.

³⁴¹ Larchet, “La conception maximienne,” 276–283.

καὶ ἐνυπόστατον).³⁴² I believe the move is partly meant to preclude a separately-existing realm of forms as an affirmation of a radical and transcendent Christian monotheism.

The clue to this interpretation may be something rather germane, namely, the Confessor’s use of the emphatic conjunctive construction τε καὶ, which would suggest that these two words form a hendiadys rather than points of contrast. In this way, Maximos can both affirm the *logoi*, understood as Aristotle’s substantial forms, while also grounding them in a specific—and, presumably, archetypal in the strictest sense—substantial hypostasis: the Word of God. So, the *logoi* are not really existing intermediaries (such as those that Proklos proposed and termed “gods”)³⁴³ that bridge the imparticipable³⁴⁴ and radically transcendent God and creation, but the really existing singularity that ontologically grounds and logically binds all things to Godself.

We must touch on one final point before returning to the opening decade of the *Chapters on Theology*. A strong indicator that Maximos’ doctrine of the *logoi* functions in a similar way to Aristotle’s substantial form or, as he calls it in the *Metaphysics*, substance in a primary sense, is the fact that the same questions surround Maximos’ doctrine of the *logoi* as those frequently brought up in scholarship on Aristotle concerning the substantial form.³⁴⁵

Aristotle famously engendered a lively discussion in book 7 of the *Metaphysics* concerning whether substance in a primary sense refers to the individual and unique form of each and every substance (by his example, Kallias and Sokrates) or whether it refers to universals (e.g., “human” and “horse”). The problem takes the following form. In *On Interpretation* 17a37 and in *Metaphysics* 1038b11–12 Aristotle specifies that universals are predicated of the many rather than of individuals. And indeed, as far as *Metaphysics* 1038b1, it appeared that Aristotle favored the notion that substance in a primary sense, with the meaning of essence (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι), is form.³⁴⁶ One of the key passages here is his well-known phrase that Kallias and Sokrates differ in matter, but not in form.³⁴⁷ He argues in *Metaphysics* 1029b29–1030b14 that substance in the primary sense is essence (or form).³⁴⁸

³⁴² For further analysis of Maximos’ use of these terms, but especially ἐνυπόστατον, refer to Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 103.

³⁴³ See Proklos Diadochos, *Elements of Theology*, 118.

³⁴⁴ Maximos infrequently calls God “imparticipable” (ἀμέθεκτος), such as in *Difficulties* 42.15: Πάντων οὖν τῶν κατ’ οὐσίαν ὑπαρκτικῶς ὄντων τε καὶ ἐσομένων, ἢ γενομένων, ἢ γενησομένων ἢ φαινομένων, ἢ φανησομένων, ἐν τῷ Θεῷ προϋπάρχουσι παγίως ὄντες οἱ λόγοι, καθ’ οὓς καὶ εἰσι τὰ πάντα καὶ γέγονασι καὶ διαμένουσιν αἰεὶ τοῖς ἑαυτῶν κατὰ πρόθεσιν λόγοις διὰ κινήσεως φυσικῆς ἐγγίζοντα καὶ πρὸς τὸ εἶναι μᾶλλον συνεχόμενα, κατὰ τὴν ποιὰν τε καὶ ποσὴν τῆς προαιρέσεως κινήσιν τε καὶ ῥοπήν, τὸ εὖ δι’ ἀρετὴν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸν λόγον, καθ’ ὃν ἐστίν, εὐθυπορίαν, ἢ τὸ πεῦ εἶναι διὰ κακίαν καὶ τὴν παρὰ τὸν λόγον, καθ’ ὃν ἐστίν, κίνησιν λαμβάνοντα, καὶ συντόμως εἰπεῖν, κατὰ τὴν ἕξιν ἢ τὴν στέρησιν τῆς αὐτῶν κατὰ φύσιν μεθεκτικῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ παντελῶς ἀμεθέκτου κατὰ φύσιν ὑπάρχοντος, καὶ πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς ἑαυτὸν ἀξίους τε καὶ ἀναξίους ὅλον κατὰ χάριν δι’ ἄπειρον ἀγαθότητα παρέξοντος, καὶ τὴν τοῦ αἰεὶ εἶναι, καθὼς ἕκαστος ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦ διατέθειται τε καὶ ἔστι, διαμονὴν ἐμποιήσοντος. Portaru’s assertion (“Classical Philosophical Influences,” 137) that “Maximus never calls God ‘unparticipated’” (which is the same as imparticipable), is unfounded.

³⁴⁵ See Loux, *Primary “Ousia,”* 13–46.

³⁴⁶ For further discussion, refer to Angioni, “Definition and Essence in Aristotle’s ‘Metaphysics’ vii 4,” 75–100; Charles, *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence*; Code, “Aristotle: Essence and Accident,” in Grandy and Warner, 411–439; Dahl, “Two Kinds of Essence in Aristotle,” 233–265, “On Substance Being the Same As Its Essence in *Metaphysics* Z6,” 1–27, “On Substance Being the Same As Its Essence in *Metaphysics* vii 6,” 153–179, and “Substance, Sameness, and Essence in ‘Metaphysics’ VII 6,” 107–126; Hartman, “Aristotle on the Identity of Substance and Essence,” 545–561; Lewis, “What Is Aristotle’s Theory of Essence?” 89–132; Witt, *Substance and Essence*; Woods, “Substance and Essence in Aristotle,” 167–180; Yu, “The Identity of Form and Essence in Aristotle,” 299–312.

³⁴⁷ *Metaphysics* 1034a6–8. Consult Devereux, “Aristotle on the Form and Definition of a Human Being,” 167–196.

³⁴⁸ See Lewis, *How Aristotle Gets By in Metaphysics Zeta*; Mertz, *On the Elements of Ontology*; Abbate, “Acerca de la primacía del ΧΩΡΙΣΤΟΝ en la sustancia aristotélica,” 29–51; Wedin, *Aristotle’s Theory of Substance*, especially 11–36, 67–123, 138–151,

This claim is undergirded by his three interlinked arguments that 1) “It is clear, therefore, that definition belongs to substance alone” (Δῆλον τοίνυν ὅτι μόνῃς τῆς οὐσίας ἐστὶν ὁ ὀρισμὸς, *Metaphysics* 1031a1–2), 2) that “the particular is not to be defined, for definition belongs to the universal and to the form” (οὐκ ἐστὶν ὀρισσασθαι ἕκαστον· τοῦ γὰρ καθόλου καὶ τοῦ εἶδους ὁ ὀρισμὸς, *Metaphysics* 1036a29–30) and 3) his conclusion that “And for this reason also there is neither definition nor demonstration of particular sensible substances, because they have matter, the nature of which is such that it admits of being and not being” (διὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τῶν οὐσιῶν τῶν αἰσθητῶν τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστα οὔτε ὀρισμὸς οὔτε ἀπόδειξις ἐστὶν, ὅτι ἔχουσιν ὕλην ἧς ἡ φύσις τοιαύτη ὥστ’ ἐνδέχεται καὶ εἶναι καὶ μὴ, *Metaphysics* 1039b27–29). What confounds these propositions is Aristotle’s argument that “it is clear that none of the universals is substance, and that none of the predicates commonly refers to a specific something but to an aspect” (φανερὸν ὅτι οὐδὲν τῶν καθόλου ὑπαρχόντων οὐσία ἐστὶ, καὶ ὅτι οὐδὲν σημαίνει τῶν κοινῇ κατηγορουμένων τόδε τι, ἀλλὰ τοιόνδε, *Metaphysics* 1039b35–1039a2).

In brief, Aristotle holds that definition belongs only to substance, that universals and forms can be defined, that particulars cannot be defined, that primary substance is essence or form, and that substances are not universals. When these propositions are read together, the status of substance can be seen to remain in limbo because a primary substance seems in one way to be a form and forms are universals, but Aristotle explicitly says that substance is not universal, given that it refers to something specific according to *Metaphysics* 1029a3–35. This issue has divided the modern study of Aristotle, but each side with its respective subdivisions cannot be enumerated here. Briefly, Marc Cohen’s entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* identifies one interpretative tradition of this issue that believes that substantial forms refer to particulars, such that there are as many substantial forms as there are individuals; the other tradition has argued that Aristotle did not mean to preclude substance without qualification from being a universal, but rather that the substantial form refers to the universal of a specific species, such that it can be both predicated of many (e.g., “human” and “horse”) and not be reducible to any further subdivisions.³⁴⁹ Nevertheless, I would argue that the tension here, especially concerning the claim that substance is not universal, results from a univocal understanding of *ousia* on account of a synthetic reading of Aristotle that glosses over contextual differences that are lost when transposed into linear and propositional content.

In his investigation of *ousia* in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle often—though unfortunately not always—clarifies in what regard he analyzes *ousia*. For instance, in 1030a17–23 he makes a rather clear distinction between substance meant without qualification (ἀπλῶς) and with qualification (πῶς); the former refers in this context to primary substance by way of definition—that is, the main undertaking of the work, whereas the latter refers to a substance with predicates, harkening back to substance as represented in the *Categories*.³⁵⁰ Moreover, he had earlier reiterated that he arrived at this former meaning of substance (in *Metaphysics* 995b5–996a18) as part of his analysis of what option, from among

and 197–257; Albritton, “Forms of Particular Substances in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,” 699–707; Furth, *Substance, Form, and Psyche*; Grene, “Is Genus to Species as Matter to Form?” 51–69; Lacey, “*Ousia* and Form in Aristotle,” 54–69; Leshner, “Aristotle on Form, Substance, and Universals,” 169–178; Lloyd, *Form and Universal in Aristotle*; Sykes, “Form in Aristotle: Universal or Particular?” 311–331.

³⁴⁹ See “Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 edition), Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/>.

³⁵⁰ Refer to Devereux, “Inherence and Primary Substance in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 113–131; Erginel, “Non-substantial Individuals in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 185–212; Jones, “Individuals in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 107–123; Kohl, “Substancehood and Subjecthood in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 152–179; Perin, “Substantial Universals in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 125–143.

several, was most pertinent to the subject: “And since at the outset we distinguished the various ways in which we define substance, and of these a certain one seemed to be essence, that one ought to be looked into” (Ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐν ἀρχῇ διειλόμεθα πόσοις ὀρίζομεν τὴν οὐσίαν, καὶ τούτων ἐν τι ἐδόκει εἶναι τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, θεωρητέον περὶ αὐτοῦ, *Metaphysics* 1029b12–13). In this light, I would argue that the tension from Aristotle’s statements above results from a reduction of substance to a single meaning. These confusions may be attributed to the fact that the Peripatetic’s texts were based on lectures that presupposed an oral context that would have evinced ambiguity. But it is possible, all the same, to forego a search for logical contradictions in the Peripatetic’s exposition of *ousia* by attempting to discern which sense of substance would contextually make the most sense, depending on one’s own inquiry, as a number of modern Aristotelian scholars have insightfully done.³⁵¹

In the *Categories*, substance primarily has a sense of an individual and functions as a subject of predication.³⁵² But this meaning is not completely foreign to the *Metaphysics*, as is the case when Aristotle calls a substance something specific and separable (τόδε τι καὶ κειχωρισμένον), like an individual human (*Metaphysics* 1039a31–32).³⁵³ Substance, in this sense, should not be taken as a universal, because a specific human cannot be predicated of anything. In this first sense, then, a substance is not a universal; it refers to a particular (see *Metaphysics* 1036a29–30 and 1039b27–29). But when Aristotle writes that substance is form or that it can refer to the essence (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι), he envisions substance as what he calls “primary substance” (πρώτη οὐσία, see *Metaphysics* 995b7, 1005a35, 1028a32, 1029a1, 1032b2, 1037a5, 1037a28, 1037b1–2, 1054b1, 1064b10, 1069a20, 1071b5, etc.) by way of ontological definition and not “primary substance” in the same way that it appears in the *Categories* or even in the *Analytics* (e.g., 2a35, 2b4–3a8, 3a36, 3b3–25, 8a15, and 92b28–29), which refers to an individual, like Sokrates or Kallias. Substance, in this second sense presented in the *Metaphysics* must be identified with the form. Aristotle is unambiguously clear on this point: “and by ‘form’ I mean the essence of each thing and the primary substance” (εἶδος δὲ λέγω τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἐκάστου καὶ τὴν πρώτην οὐσίαν, *Metaphysics* 1032b2–3). He later clarifies that substance in this essential or definitional sense refers to substance without matter (1032b14), thus confirming that of 1) matter, 2) form, and 3) the compound of the two, it is form that is the primary substance (since matter can be or not be and the compound already presupposes both and is therefore logically secondary).³⁵⁴ Finally, primary substance in this case cannot refer to the particular, since the particular contains matter, which is always potential and will consequently foil any attempt for a lasting definition.³⁵⁵ In sum, the sense of substance as substantial form is primarily definitional or formulaic and is concerned with explaining what it means for x to be x. When Aristotle says that substance is not universal, he would appear not

³⁵¹ E.g., Halper, “A Solution to the Problem of Sensible Substance,” 666–672 and “Aristotle on Primary *ousia*,” 1–20; Lacey, “*Ousia* and Form in Aristotle,” 54–69; Loux, *Primary ousia*; Hansen, “Partikularitet og universalitet i Aristoteles’ formlære skitse af en position,” 91–109.

³⁵² Refer to Scaltsas, “Substratum, Subject, Substance,” 215–240; Allen, “Individual Properties in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 31–39; Annas, “Individuals in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 146–152; Code, “On the Origin of Some Aristotelian Theses About Predication,” in Bogen and McGuire, 101–131; Duerlinger, “Predication and Inherence in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 179–203; Engmann, “Aristotle’s Distinction between Substance and Universal,” 139–155; Jones, “Individuals in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 107–123; Stough, “Language and Ontology in Aristotle’s *Categories*,” 261–272.

³⁵³ See Abbate, “Acerca de la primacía del ΧΩΡΙΣΤΟΝ en la sustancia aristotélica,” 29–51.

³⁵⁴ Compare with *Metaphysics* 1029a2–4. See also Dancy, “Aristotle and the Priority of Actuality,” in Knuutila; Bechler, *Aristotle’s Theory of Actuality*; and Yepes Stork, *La Doctrina del Acto en Aristóteles*.

³⁵⁵ *Metaphysics* 1039b27–1040a8.

to have this understanding of substance in mind, but that of substance as individual subject of predication.

In this light, Maximus' teaching of the *logoi* is a curious take on the relation between particulars, universals, and the substantial form—or *logos*.³⁵⁶ It is clear that the *logoi* are the pre-established ideas or blueprints of creation contained by God and thus the *informing* principles of all beings. The *logoi* are not creatures, beings or products that result from the divine will,³⁵⁷ but the creative divine will itself directed toward and manifested in the plurality of creation; they can be contemplatively discerned in or abstracted from all of existence. Simultaneously, Maximus holds that the *logoi* undergird both universals and particulars, for the passage from *Difficulties* 7.16, cited earlier, explicitly states that the *logoi* precede and direct the creation of all things, both universals and particulars. In *Questions and Doubts*, his phrase “for every one of the things that has come into being in accordance with its very own *logos*, which is in God, is said to be a part of God and to have a place in God”³⁵⁸ would again suggest that the ascetic intellectual believes that every creature has a particular and unique *logos* and thus that the *logoi* are not exclusively universals. This point is significant, because the realization of a creature's potentialities then depends not solely on a universal and deindividuating principle, but on its dialectical relation to its own *logos*; that is, the realization of each substance takes on an irreplicable dynamism that is unique to the individual.

6. The Logic of Internal and External Motion

In keeping with the final point above, we must take up another way that the Stagirite handles substance in the *Metaphysics*, one that is primarily characterized by the study of an ontological goal-directed dynamism that he expressed with his triadic structure of substance, potentiality, and actuality.³⁵⁹ Although this exposition of goal-directed substance is closely tied to and informed by substance understood in a definitional way, it resumes a more capacious understanding of substance as a compound of matter and form that is liable to change and that strives after a specific end. In other words, it is not concerned with a formulaic account of substance, but with its existential self-outworking in space and time. The principle of continuity between Aristotle's discussion of primary substance and his investigation of substance, potentiality, and actuality is the fact that substance remains primary over potentiality both in logical definition and in formal existence, though not necessarily in time.³⁶⁰ For every potentiality must presuppose that of which it is the potentiality, which is the substance;³⁶¹ likewise, the realized form or substance must already exist in actuality in order to give rise to potentiality, such as adults who give being to an infant.³⁶² At the same time, the matter of which the infant will consist exists chronologically prior and is in this sense temporally primary.³⁶³

³⁵⁶ Compare with Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 25–33; Larchet, *La divinisation*, 92–99.

³⁵⁷ Pace Blowers and Wilken, *Cosmic Mystery*, 61 and Daley (trans.), *Cosmic Liturgy*, 119.

³⁵⁸ “Ἐκαστον γὰρ τῶν γεγονότων κατὰ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λόγον, τὸν ἐν τῷ θεῷ ὄντα, μέλος θεοῦ λέγεται εἶναι καὶ τόπον ἐν τῷ θεῷ ἔχειν. *Questions and Doubts*, 173, ll. 7–9.

³⁵⁹ Refer to Witt's exceptional study, *Ways of Being*; see also Code, “Potentiality in Aristotle's Science and Metaphysics,” 405–418; Frede, “Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics* Θ,” in Scaltsas, Charles, and Gill, 173–194.

³⁶⁰ See *Metaphysics* 1049b4–1051a3.

³⁶¹ *Metaphysics* 1049b4–13.

³⁶² *Metaphysics* 1050a4–23.

³⁶³ See Dancy, “Aristotle and the Priority of Actuality.”

Elsewhere, in *On the Soul*, Aristotle had identified substance or form with actuality and matter with potentiality;³⁶⁴ it is commonly taken for granted that this distinction remains implicit in the *Metaphysics*. Thus, in the compound of matter and form, potentiality represents the substrate of change, that which can be otherwise, while the form stands for the principle of continuity between prior and posterior transitional states of a substance, as Aristotle argued more extensively in the *Physics*.³⁶⁵ Therefore, in his discussion of potentiality's chronological priority over substance or actuality, Aristotle implicitly identifies potentiality with the matter that is a human potentially and only becomes a human by form after generation. But even here, he argues, a really subsisting actuality (such as a human or a grain of corn) must generate the substance wherein realizable potentialities inhere, that is, an embryo and a sprout per his example,³⁶⁶ for which reason actuality is chronologically prior to potentiality in this sense.

So, on the one hand, there is a certain internal logic that guides the process of maturation, so to speak, of a substance by which the form that inheres in it comes to full fruition by the accomplishment of its natural capacities. In this respect Aristotle claims that “Everything that comes into being proceeds to [its] first principle and end; for ‘that for the sake of which’ [something exists] is the first principle, and the origin is for the sake of the end. And actuality is the end, and potentiality is acquired for the sake of this latter” (ἅπαν ἐπ’ ἀρχὴν βαδίζει τὸ γινόμενον καὶ τέλος· ἀρχὴ γὰρ τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα, τοῦ τέλος δὲ ἕνεκα ἢ γένεσις, τέλος δ’ ἢ ἐνέργεια, καὶ τούτου χάριν ἢ δύναμις λαμβάνεται, *Metaphysics* 1050a7–10). Here the Peripatetic identifies the first principle of a being with its end, which is actuality, because the universal to which members of the same species belong is identical in form; children become adults when actualized, which is the actualized state that is capable of further engendering members of the same species. Thus, everything that comes into being aims at an end that marks its ontological completion and is, likewise, its principle of origin; this end is contained by its first principle as potential form and is accomplished when the substance is actualized. The difference, therefore, between substance and actuality or first principle and end is (chrono)logical.³⁶⁷

On the other hand, the presupposition that an actualized substance gave rise to a substance with potentialities begs the question about the first substance that was capable of doing so. Aristotle points out, in this respect, that all substances, insofar as they are not infinite, point to a different existential principle, a first and unoriginated actuality that does not naturally inhere in their substance, but is nevertheless necessary for their existence.³⁶⁸ It is of paramount importance to underline that this actuality cannot be identified with the natural actuality of any substance, neither universal nor particular, because all substances would then be identical. And this identity of being cannot simply be the identity that particulars have with other particulars in respect of their ontological subordination to the same universal and whose individual differences are rooted in matter (such as Sokrates and Kallias, who belong to the universal “human”); rather, this identity of being would be formal, according to which all particulars would belong to a single universal and would be formally indistinguishable, their material substrate notwithstanding. Therefore, while all things exist on account of this existential

³⁶⁴ *On the Soul*, 412a8–11.

³⁶⁵ *Physics*, 192a25–192b3. See also Waterlow, *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics*, especially 93–157 and 204–255; Bianchi, “Continuity and Change in the Aristotelian Tradition,” in Hankins, 49–71; and Wardy, *The Chain of Change*, especially see 93–120.

³⁶⁶ *Metaphysics* 1049b22–28.

³⁶⁷ See further, Witt, *Ways of Being*, 76–77.

³⁶⁸ For discussion, refer to Ryan, “Pure Form in Aristotle,” 209–224.

principle, which is both the cause and finality of their being, it is not their naturally corresponding actuality; rather, it is the ontological premise of their existence. In this way, all beings owe their existence to it on account of its (onto)logical priority, as well as their end inasmuch as it is that for the sake of which they are and after which they strive.

There are two salient ways for Maximos' thought in which Aristotle approaches this ultimate existential principle or actuality. First, in *Metaphysics* 2 and 3, he discusses the so-called final cause, which he defines in the following way: "Furthermore, that 'for the sake of which' is an end [i.e., the final cause], and is one such [end] that it is for the sake of nothing else; rather, all things are for its sake" (Ἐτι δὲ τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα τέλος, τοιοῦτον δὲ ὁ μὴ ἄλλου ἔνεκα, ἀλλὰ τᾶλλα ἐκείνου, 994b9–10). Later, in book 3, he continues this line of reasoning: "But indeed, if there is nothing in effect eternal, neither is it possible for there to be an origin; for it is necessary for something that comes into being to come into being from something and of these the last [must be] ungenerated." (ἀλλὰ μὴν, εἴ γε αἴδιον μηθέν ἐστίν, οὐδὲ γένεσιν εἶναι δυνατόν· ἀνάγκη γὰρ εἶναι τι τὸ γιγνόμενον καὶ ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται καὶ τούτων τὸ ἔσχατον ἀγένητον, 999b5–8).³⁶⁹ Aristotle reasons that the first term in the logical sequence cannot be generated; otherwise, the chain of existential sequence would regress infinitely and would make any investigation of these matters futile. Second, in *Metaphysics* 12 the Peripatetic, having considered the various definitions of substance and the various theories of their origination, concludes: "And since there were three substances, and two are natural whereas one is immobile, we must say about this latter that it is necessary for some eternal substance to be immobile. For primary substances belong to beings and if all [of these substances] are corruptible, all things are corruptible" (Ἐπεὶ δ' ἦσαν τρεῖς οὐσίαι, δύο μὲν αἰ φυσικαί, μία δὲ ἠ ἀκίνητος, περὶ ταύτης λεκτέον, ὅτι ἀνάγκη εἶναι αἴδιον τινὰ οὐσίαν ἀκίνητον. αἶ τε γὰρ οὐσίαι πρῶται τῶν ὄντων, καὶ εἰ πᾶσαι φθαρταί, πάντα φθαρτά, 1071b4–6). Here Aristotle differentiates the substances already mentioned, which are corruptible and finite, from a certain eternal substance that must be immobile so that its existence is not contingent on account of its potentiality. For this reason, he determines soon thereafter that "It is therefore necessary that such a principle [as the immobile and eternal substance] exist, the substance of which is actuality" (δεῖ ἄρα εἶναι ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην ἧς ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια, 1071b20–21). By identifying the substance of this principle with actuality, Aristotle simultaneously grounds the first actuality on which all others hinge and ends the otherwise infinite regress that he was often keen to avoid.

These passages from the *Metaphysics* share striking parallels to Maximos' presentation of God in *Chapters on Theology* 1.1–1.10. Especially important is the triad, previously flagged, of indefinite (ἄοριστος), immobile (ἀκίνητος), and infinite (ἄπειρος) in 1.2. These terms are precisely those that Aristotle employs in his presentation of the first mover,³⁷⁰ and though Aristotle uses "eternal" (αἴδιος) at first, rather than "infinite" (ἄπειρος), to refer to the first mover, the difference is semantically insignificant as evidenced in 1073a10–11, where he uses "infinite" in place of eternal. Like Aristotle, Maximos posits the necessity that God/the first mover be immobile, indefinite, and infinite in order to ground the subsistence of all other beings, while remaining ontologically distinct from them.³⁷¹

The crux of the matter, then, is this: all substances, insofar as they are substances, aim at the realization of their inherent potentialities whereby they attain an actuality commensurate with their

³⁶⁹ See further, Richardson, "Degrees of Finality," 327–352 and Cooper, "Plato and Aristotle on Finality and (Self-) Sufficiency," 270–308.

³⁷⁰ *Metaphysics* 1071b3–1073a11.

³⁷¹ Compare to *Difficulties* 10.95, ll. 1–8; 17.12, ll. 1–10, 23.3, ll. 9–15; and 41.5, l. 9–41.6, l. 18.

existential principle or substantial form: the acorn becomes an oak, the child an adult.³⁷² All substances, however, insofar as they are first potential and then actual, are not eternal and therefore exist for the sake of the first principle whose substance is actuality, from which they derive their logical origin and on which their actuality ultimately hinges.³⁷³ The two actualities, therefore, cannot be conflated: one refers to the accomplishment of the internal potentialities of a substance by which it is realized; the other refers to a substance's logical and existential dependence on the external cause of its being, toward which it tends and for the sake of which it exists.³⁷⁴ These logical differences offer a partial response to the conundrum with which we opened this chapter. The following section will develop these critical differences further.

7. Substances, Substantializing Movement, and the Asymmetry of Twofold Finality

The logic of a substance's end-directed actualization of potentialities that Aristotle presents informs Maximus' ontology generally, and distinctly so in the opening decade of the *Chapters on Theology*. In 1.3 he writes that "Each substance, including its own definition in itself, is a first principle by nature productive of the movement discerned in potentiality in it. Each natural motion toward actuality, conceptualized as after substance, yet prior to actuality, is an intermediate state, since in nature it divides both as that which mediates between them. And each actuality, in nature circumscribed by its corresponding *logos*, is the end of the substantializing movement (οὐσιώδους κινήσεως) conceptually prior to it." There are evident logical ties between Maximus' presentation of substance, potentiality, and actuality here and those we just covered in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.³⁷⁵ The substance that Maximus is concerned with in 1.3 is a particular substance with potentialities the realization of which allows it to attain its actuality. In this respect, his phrase "substantializing movement" points to his interpretation of a specific individual's actualization of the self and not simply to more general ontological definitions. This much is clear when considered in light of the history of this phrase, which is prevalent among the commentators.

The phrase occurs in a somewhat different context in earlier commentators, like Alexandros of Aphrodisias and Iamblichos.³⁷⁶ The nearest voices to Maximus' time who employed it were Proklos Diadochos, Dionysios, and Simplicios, whose usage shows significant logical corollaries to the sense it seems to have in the *Chapters on Theology*. Proklos interlinked the phrase with his well-known triadic schema of remaining, procession, and return (μονή, πρόοδος, ἐπιστροφή)³⁷⁷ in the interest of demonstrating that substantializing movement differentiates a substance from its cause: "And now let it be said on the basis of realities (πραγμάτων) that movement and rest are seen in the substances of beings and in their actualities; for procession (πρόοδος) is substantializing movement (κίνησις

³⁷² See also *Difficulties* 7.21–22.

³⁷³ See *Questions and Answers to Thalassios* 22, ll. 110–114, 28, ll. 76–81; and especially 38, ll. 38–45.

³⁷⁴ See Maximus, *Questions and Answers to Thalassios*, epistle, ll. 220–229; 52, ll. 103–107; 59, ll. 265–269; *Mystagogy* 1, ll. 75–81; *Difficulties* 10.88, ll. 10–12; 23.2, ll. 1–6.

³⁷⁵ Compare to Larchet, *La divinisation*, 112–123 and 152–153.

³⁷⁶ See Alexandros of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, p. 447, l. 10 and Iamblichos, *On the Mysteries* 1.4.32.

³⁷⁷ See Proklos, *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, vol. 2, p. 248, ll. 25–27; *Platonic Theology*, vol. 4, p. 7, ll. 10–13, p. 58, ll. 20–21, p. 105, ll. 8–10; *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, p. 712, ll. 38–40, p. 1048, ll. 28–30; *Commentary on Plato's Timaios*, vol. 1, p. 274, ll. 26–27, vol. 2, p. 215, ll. 23–24, p. 249, ll. 17–20, p. 257, ll. 12–13; compare to Syrianos, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, p. 127, ll. 8–10; Damaskios, *On First Principles*, vol. 1, p. 18, ll. 6–7, p. 80, ll. 3–4, p. 158, ll. 14–15, etc.

οὐσιώδης), and rest is the abiding in the causes.”³⁷⁸ By identifying substantializing movement with procession, Proklos harkened back to his triadic schema of ontological differentiation presented in the *Elements of Theology*, particularly in his thirty-fifth proposition, which holds that “Everything that is caused abides in its cause, and it proceeds from it, and it returns to it” (Πάν τὸ αἰτιατὸν καὶ μένει ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ αἰτία καὶ προέσιν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς αὐτήν, *Elements of Theology* 35, 1–2). Proklos reasons: “For if it were only to remain, it would differ in nothing from the cause, since it would be undifferentiable” (εἰ γὰρ μένοι μόνον, οὐδὲν διοίσει τῆς αἰτίας, ἀδιάκριτον ὄν, *Elements of Theology* 35, 3). In this way, Proklos makes substantializing movement a function of the unfolding of individual existence, something that separates what proceeds ontologically from the cause from which it proceeds.³⁷⁹

Simplikios, for his part, locates substantializing movement in a rather specific form of time, since the former is measured by the latter: “So, because time has a double nature—the one measures substantializing movement, and the other [is] the [movement] from without that is in actuality, [and] the former is so difficult to grasp in substance, if indeed it is even worthy of being called time, that Aristotle did not say that it measures temporal things that have an eternal substance, but [that it measures] those alone that come into being and are corruptible” (ὥσπερ καὶ τοῦ χρόνου διττὴν ἔχοντος φύσιν καὶ τοῦ μὲν τὴν οὐσιώδη κίνησιν μετροῦντος, τοῦ δὲ τὴν ἐκτὸς καὶ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν, ὁ μὲν κατ’ οὐσίαν οὕτως ἐστὶ δυσκατανόητος, εἴπερ καὶ χρόνος οὗτος ἄξιος λέγεσθαι, ὡς τὸν Ἀριστοτέλην μηδὲ φάναι ὅλως ἔγχρονα τὰ τὴν οὐσίαν αἰδίων [sic] ἔχοντα, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνα μόνα ὅσα τῶν γινομένων καὶ φθειρομένων μετρεῖται. *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*, vol. 9, p. 638, ll. 29–34). There are several difficult aspects about Simplikios’ claim here that need not detain us. But what matters for us is that he incisively contrasts time that measures substantializing movement with some form of time that measures motion from without that is in actuality. These two times differ inasmuch as one belongs to the substance’s realization of its potentialities as measured by and taking place in time, whereas the other form of time refers solely to the external motion of things that are moved by the One. By this, Simplikios seems to invoke Aristotle’s first mover, which explains why he would refer to movement from without as being in actuality (κατ’ ἐνέργειαν). The point is that Simplikios also identifies this substantializing movement with a substance’s process of self-actualization that is measured by time as it pertains to things that come into being and are liable to corruption. Implicit in the Kilikian’s text is Aristotle’s familiar point that a first actuality must be ontologically prior and must not be liable to corruption or change.

These contextual comparisons strongly suggest that the substantializing movement of which Maximus spoke above is likewise creaturely, that is, that it occurs within the originated substances; it is the motion whereby a specific and individual substance is actualized in time. In this regard, it is significant that Maximus pairs up, in *Chapters on Theology* 1.3, the terms first principle-substance, intermediate state-potentiality, and end-actuality. I believe that he uses this pairing to make an ontological distinction that he will qualify further in the following chapter, where he writes:

God is neither a substance, meant as unqualified or qualified substance, and therefore not a first principle; nor a potentiality, meant as unqualified or qualified potentiality, and therefore not an intermediate state; nor an actuality, meant as unqualified or qualified actuality, and therefore not the end of the substantializing motion that is conceived prior in terms of potentiality. He is,

³⁷⁸ Proklos, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 1154, ll. 19–23.

³⁷⁹ Compare to Maximus, *Thal* 1., ll. 34–40; 2, ll. 8–16; *Questions and Doubts* 173, ll. 1–7; *Mystagogy* 5, ll. 59–63.

however, a substance-causing reality while beyond substance, a potentiality-causing ground while beyond potentiality, and the effecting and unending state of each actuality; so, to speak concisely, he is causative of each substance, potentiality, and actuality, also of each first principle, intermediate state, and end.

This chapter introduces the distinction between a substance meant in a “qualified or unqualified way.” Maximus had likewise employed this division in *Difficulty* 10.92, where he makes the distinction more concrete with regard to God and creatures. Here he writes that “For the divine does not admit of any word or thought, wherefore when we call it ‘being’ we do not predicate ‘being’ of it. For being is from it, but it itself is not ‘being.’ For it is beyond even being itself, meant and thought in both a qualified (πῶς) and unqualified (ἀπλῶς) way.”³⁸⁰ The distinction of “qualified” and “unqualified” with reference to substance or being belongs to Aristotle and can only be found elsewhere in the commentaries of Alexandros of Aphrodisias.³⁸¹ In the *Metaphysics*, the Peripatetic makes unambiguously explicit that substance without qualification refers to substance in the primary sense, that is, substance by way of definition, whereas substance in a qualified way belongs to what is said about a substance, in an echo of the *Categories*: “Or perhaps is it the case that the definition, just like ‘what it is,’ is said in a manifold way? For also ‘what it is’ in one way signifies the substance and the individual, but in another each of the predicates: quantity, quality, and all the others that are such; for just as ‘what it is’ applies to everything, but not in the same way, but to the former primarily and to the latter in a logically sequential way, so also ‘what it is’ applies to substance in an unqualified way, but to the others [i.e., the predicates] in a qualified way” (“Ἡ καὶ ὁ ὀρισμὸς ὡσπερ καὶ τὸ τί ἐστὶ πλεοναχῶς λέγεται; καὶ γὰρ τὸ τί ἐστὶν ἓνα μὲν τρόπον σημαίνει τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τὸ τὸδε τι, ἄλλον δὲ ἕκαστον τῶν κατηγορουμένων, ποσόν, ποιὸν καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα. ὡσπερ γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐστὶν ὑπάρχει πᾶσιν, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὁμοίως ἀλλὰ τῷ μὲν πρώτῳ τοῖς δ’ ἐπομένῳ, οὕτω καὶ τὸ τί ἐστὶν ἀπλῶς μὲν τῇ οὐσίᾳ, πὼς δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις, *Metaphysics* 1030a17–23).

Maximos uses this distinction in order to deny that God is a substance, potentiality, or actuality meant either by way of definition or as the subject of predication, that is, in a qualified or unqualified way. In doing so, he distances God from the ontological definitions he previously brought up in 1.2. That the Confessor’s intention is to separate God from the terminology that Aristotle and the commentators attribute to substances, and thus to anything that exists, is clear by the fact that he explicitly denies that several of Aristotle’s categories apply to God, such as the first category, “substance,” in 1.4, the fourth category, “relation,” in 1.7, the sixth category, “when,” in 1.1 and 1.5 and the ninth category, “undergoing,” in 1.10. The ascetic thinker’s knowledge of the common philosophical parlance surrounding Aristotle’s *Categories* is here on clear display, especially if we consider that he uses set phrases that appear only in the commentators.³⁸² For example, in 1.7, Maximus claims that God is precluded from the fourth category, the category of relation: “No first principle intermediate state, and end is absolutely precluded from every relational category (τὴν σχετικὴν κατηγορίαν); God, however, incomprehensibly being infinitely above absolutely every relation, is evidently neither first principle, nor intermediate state, nor end, nor altogether anything else of those things in which the category of ‘toward something’ (πρὸς τί) can be envisioned as

³⁸⁰ *Difficulty* 10.92, DOML 28, p. 294.

³⁸¹ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, p. 473.20–474.7. Compare to Asklepios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, p. 386.31–387.5.

³⁸² See Constanas, *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, xxii.

corresponding with the relational category.” His choice of words “the relational category” (ἡ σχετική κατηγορία) belongs to the commentary tradition alone.³⁸³ Maximos is here appropriating the rich heritage of the commentators, but creating them as his precursors in the interest of expressing his own rigorous system of ontological differentiation between creation and God. In brief, he does so in two respects: first, to deny that any predicate is attributed to God univocally with creation; second, to preclude God from the ontological dynamisms that undergird substantializing motion.

The distinctions introduced in *Chapters on Theology* 1.4 contain yet another, far subtler, differentiation that suggests how Maximos might have understood the relation between actualization and deification. To recapitulate, the Confessor writes: “God is neither a substance, meant as unqualified or qualified substance, and therefore not a first principle.” Here he echoes Aristotle’s distinction of substance in a qualified or unqualified way, denying of God that he is either a substance, simply said, or a subject of predication. He continues: “nor a potentiality, meant as unqualified or qualified potentiality, and therefore not an intermediate state.” This phrase, an unqualified potentiality, again echoes Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1050b16–19, where Aristotle argues that something that is absolutely imperishable cannot be potential without qualification, even though he entertains the possibility of it being potential in some other sense, a sense, however, that Maximos here also denies of God. But most important is the following phrase in 1.4: “nor an actuality, meant as unqualified or qualified actuality, and therefore not the end of the substantializing motion that is conceived prior in terms of potentiality.” This phrase both continues the symmetrical order of the previous two by denying of God the third metaphysical division of nature (i.e., actuality) in a qualified and unqualified way, but also breaks this symmetry by qualifying the sense in which God is not the end, something that he did not do for the first principle and the intermediate state. God is not the end of a substance’s natural process of realization meant as its internal ontological development. This much should be obvious based on the text of *Opuscule* 1, introduced early in this chapter, since divinity is not something naturally predicable of the human substance. But this qualification begs the question whether God is the end in some other respect.

Maximos goes on: “He is, however, a substance-causing reality while beyond substance, a potentiality-causing ground while beyond potentiality, and the effecting and unending state of each actuality; so, to speak concisely, he is causative of each substance, potentiality, and actuality, also of each first principle, intermediate state, and end.” Maximos introduces a different set of relationships than those pertaining exclusively to the triad of substance, potentiality, and actuality. In the previous phrase he made it clear that God is not the logical end of substantializing movement. But in this phrase, he disambiguates in what sense God is the end by again fragmenting the otherwise symmetrical construction. For, while he is keen to underscore God’s transcendence of substance and potentiality, he does not strictly replicate that structure for actuality. Rather, he claims God is the “effecting and unending state of each actuality” and not that he is beyond every actuality. As before, this asymmetry is likely meant to draw attention to the phrase.

The contrast between “state” (ἔξις) and “actuality” or “operation” (ἐνέργεια) was most prevalent among Aristotle and the Peripatetics and subsequently attracted significant attention from the Platonic

³⁸³ For this phrase or a variant, πρὸς τι κατηγορία See Porphyrios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories*, vol. 4.1, p. 127, l. 2, and p. 134, l. 17; Ammonios (e.g., *Commentary on Porphyrios’ Introduction* 57:7, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* 54:11), Proklos (*Commentary on Eukleides’ First Book of the Elements* 51:9), Simplicios (e.g., *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* 8.11.26, 8.122.6, 8.157.1, 7.157.19, etc.), Ioannes Philoponos (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* 13.1.47.22, 13.1.83.19, 13.1.130.26), Olympiodoros (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* 54.3, 98.19), and, most significantly, Elias/David of Alexandria (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* 160:29, 206:2, 239:20, 245:21).

commentators. The contrast often underscored that a state is that which gives rise to an activity, that which makes actuality or operation possible. And while Maximos' use of the term here is meant to contrast with actuality, his use is peculiar in two significant ways. First, the term is qualified by "effecting and unending," a pairing that occurs for the first time in Maximos' corpus and one that only appears thereafter in quotations of the *Chapters on Theology*, as in the works of Gregorios Akindynos and Nikephoros Gregoras.³⁸⁴ Second, the term "state" usually differs from activity in psychological terms; this distinction primarily derived from Aristotle's ethics and was often referred to by commentators, like Aspasios, precisely in that context.³⁸⁵ Here, however, it seems to have a different sense. I believe the term is meant to convey the idea that God is the necessary condition of every actuality, whence the use of *drastike*—he is that which sets all actualities in motion as the external first mover (and hereby also precludes the possibility, raised by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1099a1–5 that a state can be inactive). God is also "unending" inasmuch as he is both the eternal condition of all actualities (as Aristotle's first and unoriginated cause) and the end toward which all creaturely motion is directed.³⁸⁶ The term "unending" likely echoes Maximos' previous attribution of infinity (ἄπειρος) to God, which would harken back to a distinction Aristotle makes in the *Physics*.³⁸⁷

The chapters analyzed thus far can be summarized like this: God is not a substance as the subject of predication or as a complex of ontological dynamisms, but is the source and foundation of all existential states; likewise, God cannot be attained by the realization of a substance's potentialities, since God is an eternal and indefinite external cause that can be circumscribed neither logically nor ontologically. As such, God remains infinitely beyond any creaturely activity, which is the substantializing movement of a being, while nevertheless remaining the end at which all existence aims.

This last point appears explicitly in *Difficulties* 7 in a famed passage where Maximos rebukes some form of revived seventh-century Origenism by appealing to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. He writes: "But not one of those things that has come into being is its very own end, since it is not self-causing, since it would also be unoriginated, without beginning, and immobile as being moved toward nothing in any way. For it transcends the nature of beings, as being for the sake of nothing, for which reason the definition concerning it is true, even if the one who said 'the end is that for the sake of which all things are, whereas it is for the sake of none' was foreign [to Christianity]" (Οὐδὲν δὲ τῶν γενητῶν ἑαυτοῦ τέλος ἐστίν, ἐπειδὴ οὔτε αὐταίτιον, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἀγέννητον καὶ ἄναρχον καὶ ἀκίνητον, ὡς πρὸς μηδὲν πως ἔχον κινήσθαι. Ἐκβαίνει γὰρ τῶν ὄντων τὴν φύσιν, ὡς οὐδενὸς ἔνεκεν ὄν, εἴπερ ἀληθῆς ὁ περὶ αὐτοῦ ὀρισμὸς, καὶ ἀλλότριος ἢ ὁ λέγων τέλος ἐστίν οὗ ἔνεκεν τὰ πάντα, αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδενὸς ἔνεκεν, *Difficulty* 7.7, p. 82).³⁸⁸

³⁸⁴ See Gregorios Akindynos, *Great Refutation*, 1.51, l. 38 and Nikephoros Gregoras, *History of the Romans*, vol. 2, p. 1067, l. 8.

³⁸⁵ See Aspasios, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 39, ll.31–37, 41, ll. 25–27, and especially 78, ll. 4–8; see also Albinos, *Didaskalikos* 26.3, ll. 9–10; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.11.66.2, ll. 3–4; Alexandros of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, p. 390, ll. 17–18 and *Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, p. 237, ll. 20–21 and p. 253, ll. 9–10; and Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, CAG 9, pp. 414, l. 29–415, l. 16.

³⁸⁶ Compare to Maximos of Tyre's phrase: ἐρωτα ἠράσθη κενὸν καὶ ἀτελεύτητον, *Dissertations* 1.5.11.

³⁸⁷ See *Physics* 204a4–7: ἄλλως δὲ τὸ διέξοδον ἔχον ἀτελεύτητον, ἢ ὁ μόγις, ἢ ὁ πεφυκὸς ἔχειν μὴ ἔχει διέξοδον ἢ πέρας. εἶτι ἄπειρον ἅπαν ἢ κατὰ πρόσθεσιν ἢ κατὰ διαίρεσιν ἢ ἀμφοτέρως.

³⁸⁸ The words Maximos uses here are found as such in Origen's *Selecta in Psalmos*, PG 12:1053A, though I would not attribute this to his ignorance of Aristotle's specific passage in the *Metaphysics*, but rather to an ingenious way of using Origen's own texts, with Aristotle in the background (Origen mentions Aristotle by name in this passage), to make his point more forcefully to his interlocutors. See also Aspasios: ἐπεὶ δὲ τιμιώτατον ἐστὶν ἐν ἐκάστη τὸ τέλος (αὐτοῦ γὰρ τὰ λοιπὰ γίνονται), *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 4, ll. 20–21.

The allusion to Aristotle in this passage may generally have in mind the Peripatetic's discussion of the ontological priority of the ungenerated principle that puts an end to an otherwise infinite regress in *Metaphysics* 999a33–999b12; it can likewise be illumined in the context of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 994b9–10, where the philosopher writes: “And furthermore, the end is that for the sake of which, but is such that it is not for the sake of anything else, but others are [for the sake] of it” (Ἐτι δὲ τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα τέλος, τοιοῦτον δὲ ὁ μὴ ἄλλου ἕνεκα, ἀλλὰ τᾶλλα ἐκείνου).

Read in this light, it is possible to surmise that Maximos articulated an ontology that allowed God to be the end of creatures inasmuch as God is their origin and cause, while not being “the end of the substantializing motion that is conceived prior in terms of potentiality,” as he explicitly stated in *Chapters on Theology* 1.4. This distinction is essential, because it answers the question we raised at the beginning of the chapter: how can God both be and not be the ontological end, fulfillment, or completion of humanity? God is not the end of any substance inasmuch as God is not the actuality that the realization of a substance's potentialities brings about. God is, however, the end of all substances inasmuch as all beings are existentially oriented toward God as the cause of their subsistence and activity, in whom their finality is likewise found.

CHAPTER FOUR

BECOMING A DIVINE HUMAN: THE CONFESSOR'S MORAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE ETHICAL DIALECTICS OF PERSON AND NATURE

I have been crucified with Christ; and I live no more, but Christ lives in me.

—Galatians 2:19–20

Introduction

The previous chapter was concerned with articulating the various senses in which Maximos spoke of substance. As such, it only addressed part of the conundrum raised in its introduction, which identified the following tension between his insistence on the natural character of virtue (which he often characterizes as deifying), and his insistence that there is no potentiality in the human substance by the realization of which humans can be deified. In the foregoing chapter, I argued that Maximos does not use the category of substance univocally in his corpus, but rather employs the term in three distinctive ways, all of which are appropriations of Aristotle's philosophy. Substance can refer to a specific being who is the subject of predicates; it can refer to the essence, substantial form, or, Maximos' preferred term, the *logos* of a being; finally, it can refer to an end-driven dynamic substrate that actualizes its potentialities in space and time. As I argued, this is an important insight because it explains how Maximos understood that God can be and not be the end of humanity's natural movement. The central task of this chapter is to show that virtue can be understood in a similar, though not neatly overlapping, way. That is, virtue for Maximos can be taken as a predicate, it can be analyzed for its essence, and it can be regarded as an ongoing dynamism that takes place in the human subject.

The modern history of the reception of Maximos' aretology—or teaching concerning virtue, may be divided into at least two, for some time overlapping, stages. The first stage, which has lasted some four sporadic decades (ca. 1976–present) is characterized by an emphatic focus on whether the virtues have an ontological character or not; it has largely split scholars along religiously-affiliated lines that revived ancient Catholic-Orthodox theological hostilities centering on a (Neo-)Thomistic understanding of *habitus* and an Orthodox interpretation of ἔξῃς.³⁸⁹ It could be said that a second stage began around 1996, when Paul Blowers published a characteristically insightful article entitled “Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of Human Passions” that, while hinting at this ongoing first stage debate, veered in a different direction. This article, though briefly flagging the work of previous scholars of a Neothomistic persuasion (he may have had LeGuillou, Garrigues, Riou, and Piret in mind), is more concerned with an illuminating contextualization of the Confessor's moral psychology in what he calls a “neo-Cappadocian (and to some degree neo-Areopagitic) key” that focuses on the teleological use of the human passions as part of the “ongoing, ever-unfolding potentiality, resourcefulness, and moral-spiritual ‘utility’ of all natural human faculties.”³⁹⁰

Blower's article was distinct from the Catholic-Orthodox debates that raged at the time in that it looked backward (to the Confessor's predecessors) and inward (to the inner workings of the human

³⁸⁹ For an overview of this dispute, see Salés and Papanikolaou, “A Power That Deifies the Human,” 24.

³⁹⁰ See Blowers, “Gentiles of the Soul,” 57 and 81.

subject), so to speak, rather than forward (to Aquinas or Palamas) and outward (to a model of superimposed grace or divine energies). It has taken time for Blower's insight to catch on.³⁹¹ Soon after the turn of this decade, a promising series of articles, chapters, and even a dissertation were penned that address various aspects of the Confessor's virtue theory in a less combative and more collaborative spirit than has characterized the first stage.³⁹² For instance, in 2013 *Studies in Christian Ethics* published a special volume that contained three entries on Maximos' articulation of virtue.³⁹³ These were followed up the next year by an article that explores the phenomenon of the incarnation of God in the virtuous as the Confessor envisioned it;³⁹⁴ the publication of the *Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor* in 2015 offered Demetrios Bathrellos an opportunity to analyze Maximos' ascetical teaching, with a special focus on the *Chapters on Love*;³⁹⁵ that same year, Emma Brown published an article that explored the relationship between virtue and participation in God's *agape*.³⁹⁶ Blower's *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (2016) contains a lengthy section on virtue that especially sheds new light on its liturgical dimensions.³⁹⁷ Further, a recent collaborative article has foregrounded the virtue of love and its relationship to hypostatic particularity, even if at points it harkens back to the disputes of the first stage mentioned above.³⁹⁸

Much, however, still lies ahead, especially given the prominence that the virtues enjoy in the Confessor's complex theological oeuvre and the relatively recent development of this second stage of scholarly inquiry. Thus, both this chapter and the next aim to expand the field of Maximos' aretology further by focusing on three aspects that remain underexamined. As previously mentioned, the various distinctions Maximos made in respect of substance can also be applied, but in a slightly modified way, to an investigation of virtue. In this vein, this chapter is primarily concerned with investigating virtue as a psychosomatic dynamism that is cultivated and trained through ascetic discipline. Put differently, this chapter seeks to exposit what it means to be virtuous and how that comes about by looking primarily at the human subject, though the divine elements of virtue necessarily will remain in this chapter's peripheral vision. We will turn to these latter aspects in the following chapter, though it bears mentioning that these themes are organically grafted together in the Confessor's thought and dividing them into different chapters solely functions as a tool of convenience for linear exposition that does not reflect a real division in his thought.

My approach to the Confessor's aretology in this chapter is primarily informed by comparative historical philology and philosophical-theological analysis, but it also looks to some twentieth-century theorists for some explanatory models or useful analogies, particularly those offered by so-called postmodern or poststructuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau. While the application of these three thinkers' ideas to the study of late ancient Christianity has been in vogue for some time, their analytical resources have not been applied to the study of the

³⁹¹ A salient entry that followed the trend Blowers inaugurated, though still insistently comparative to western thinkers like Lactantius, Augustine, and Thomas, was Wilken's "Maximus the Confessor on the Affections in Historical Perspective," in Wimbush and Valantasis, 412–423.

³⁹² Harper's dissertation, "The Analogy of Love" will soon be forthcoming from Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press.

³⁹³ See *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2013), which dedicated substantial attention to Maximos' teaching on virtue. Refer especially to the entries by Blowers (333–350), Louth (351–363), and Aquino (378–390).

³⁹⁴ Salés, "Divine Incarnation through the Virtues," 159–176.

³⁹⁵ Bathrellos, "Passions, Ascesis, and the Virtues," in *OHMC* 287–306.

³⁹⁶ Brown Dewhurst, "The Ontology of Virtue," 157–169.

³⁹⁷ Blowers, *Jesus Christ*, 254–283.

³⁹⁸ See Salés (with Papanikolaou), "A Power that Deifies the Human," 23–38.

Confessor.³⁹⁹ And even then, my own adaptation of their work for this study is decidedly limited and functions primarily as an occasional analogical tool that can illumine certain complex aspects about Maximus' aretology. Specifically, in this chapter I will adapt two concepts or images from Derrida's grammatological work and Michel de Certeau's *La invention du quotidien* to add some texture to what Foucault called "technologies of the self."

While Christianity and other late ancient philosophies disagreed with one another—as well as among themselves—about what cosmic narrative should inform their understanding of the good life, they universally agreed that the good life was the virtuous life. In order to strive after it, they developed sophisticated methods of self-discipline, which Foucault famously termed "technologies of the self." According to the French theorist, they "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."⁴⁰⁰ What is important about his analysis is the causal link he implies between "operations" and "states"; in his view, the performance of the former leads to the attainment of the latter. And while I would grant that his analysis accurately describes the way in which a range of ascetics, Christian or otherwise, understood the relationship between their ascetical practice and these "states," I would suggest that this relatively straightforward causal connection does not neatly fit the model Maximus envisioned. Rather, I will argue in this chapter that the "states" (of virtue) of which the Confessor wrote, especially in the ongoing struggle of the Christian ascetic, were not so much "attained" as they were constantly negotiated in this life by an unintermittent process of self-reflexive moral recalibration. To that effect, I will briefly draw on Derrida and de Certeau to introduce a pair of analogies that will function as conceptual analogies to render the Confessor's ascetical teaching more legible.

1. Ethics, Virtue, and Poststructuralism

In his lengthy refutation *Against Kelsos*, Origen of Alexandria reports his adversary's claim that "it is most difficult (*παγκάλεπον*) to change a nature (*φύσιν*) completely."⁴⁰¹ The Alexandrian responded that if human nature can be taught to do something "of no utility (*χρήσιμα*) whatever," such as tightrope-walking per his example, "by means of ascesis (*ἀσκήσει*) and diligence (*προσοχή*)," then certainly it could be taught "to bring about (*πεποίηκε*) . . . its own blessedness (*μακαριότητα*)" by living "according to virtue (*κατ' ἀρετήν*)." We see in Origen's retort some of the elements Foucault included in his definition of the "technologies of the self." Diligence and ascesis especially come to our attention here as the "operations" that bring about the "state" of blessedness after which one strives. But what is significant about the ascetic intellectual's analogy is that he draws a parallel between walking on a tightrope and navigating the intricacies of becoming virtuous. And his analogy is rather good if we consider that both acts are unavoidably dynamic but paradoxically have as their objective the procurement of a qualified stability. It would therefore be inaccurate to regard the struggle for virtue—as Origen seems to envision it here—as a condition that is accomplished as if "once and for all." We will see a similar dynamic at play in Maximus' aretology later in this chapter.

In *La invention du quotidien*, Michel de Certeau offered a remarkable analysis of the act of tightrope-walking in a larger discussion of daily contingencies creatively applied to the "practice of everyday

³⁹⁹ The first study of which I am aware that integrates so-called postmodern thinkers is Paul Blowers' *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, where he made very fruitful use of Jean-Luc Marion's idea of the "saturated phenomenon."

⁴⁰⁰ Foucault, *Ethics*, 225.

⁴⁰¹ *Against Kelsos*, 3.69.

life.” He writes: “To dance on a tightrope is to maintain from moment to moment *an equilibrium* by recreating it at each step by means of new adjustments (*interventions*); it is to preserve a balance (*rapport*) that is never attained and which an incessant readjustment (*invention*) renews while appearing ‘to preserve’ it.”⁴⁰² What emerges from de Certeau’s excellent phrasing is that balance is at best what we may call an interstitial stability that, as he says, “is never attained.” It is clear in the case of tightrope-walking that this balance is never “attained” as such because the relative center of gravity changes at every moment. For this reason, new movements must be executed in order to find a new balance that in turn modifies the new center of balance and so on. We must also make it clear that the possibility of falling off the rope is a constant and, in a sense, the necessary alterity that perpetually requires the renegotiation of one’s interstitial stability. For these reasons, we may introduce a significant distinction between “attaining,” understood as the definite accomplishment of a stable condition that is no longer in danger of falling from the rope, and “preserving,” taken as the dynamic negotiation of an ever-changing and thus elusive balance. The dialectic between these two poles will offer us a helpful analogy for Maximos’ exposition of virtue in the course of the following two chapters.

For Maximos, the life of virtue consisted in an infinite process of assimilation to the unattainable deity. The Confessor’s historical debt to Plato’s *Theaitetos* and the various traditions that appropriated the central insight of that dialogue for the sake of ethical treatises is apparent here. But he also owed a substantial debt to the Peripatetic. For example, in his *Disputation with Pyrrhos* he writes that “He who is not foolish is prudent, he who is not cowardly or rash is courageous, he who is not incontinent is temperate, and he who is not unrighteous is just.”⁴⁰³ Maximos echoes here Plato’s famous four cardinal virtues as found in the *Laws* and the *Phaidon*,⁴⁰⁴ but he likewise applies the vicious opposites Aristotle attached to these four virtues. More salient, however, is his subtle introduction of Aristotle’s doctrine of the virtuous mean, according to which many virtues have two corresponding vices, one of extremity and one of deficiency. Thus, differently than the other three cardinal virtues, the virtue of courage has a readily apparent vice of deficiency that Aristotle and Maximos term cowardice, and a vice of excess, which they called rashness.⁴⁰⁵ Let us reintroduce the analogy of the tightrope. If virtue is finding at each moment the virtuous mean between (generally) two vices of extremity and deficiency, then it is possible to err on either side of the tightrope. To be virtuous, then, is in this sense to strike a balance at every point, a balance that never allows one “to settle” and that is only preserved by a constant process of moral recalibration. We may wonder, however: What lies at the root of this dynamism? Why, in other words, could the virtuous life not be such that an agent, after a given time, finally “settles” and is no longer subject to this dynamism?

We now turn to our second explanatory analogy, which is drawn from the insights of poststructuralist linguistics. Between 1906 and 1911 Ferdinand de Saussure delivered a set of lectures at the University of Geneva entitled *Course in General Linguistics*. In this groundbreaking work, de Saussure made a now famous distinction between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech). The former is an abstract system of conventions, rules, and signification that is independent from its individual interlocutors; the latter refers to particular instantiations of *langue* by speakers. Most salient for our purposes is de Saussure’s discovery of what he called “The First Principle,” which holds that: “The link (*lien*) between the signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*) is arbitrary,” which he later

⁴⁰² “Danser sur une corde, c’est de moment en moment maintenir *un équilibre* en le recréant à chaque pas grâce à des nouvelles interventions; c’est conserver un rapport qui n’est jamais acquis et qu’une incessante invention renouvelle en ayant l’air de le «garder».” De Certeau, *L’invention*, 143.

⁴⁰³ *Disputation with Pyrrhos*, PG 91.311A.

⁴⁰⁴ See *Laws* 964b5–6 and 965d2–3; *Phaidon* 69b2–c3. Compare to *Republic* 504a5–6;

⁴⁰⁵ See further *Nikomachean Ethics* 1144a36–1144b6 and *Protreptikos*, fragments 39–40. Compare with *Politics* 1323b33–36a; *Various Fragments*, cat. 1, tr. 6, fr. 52, ll. 98–101.

simplified by finding that: “*The linguistic sign is arbitrary.*”⁴⁰⁶ Linguistic signs comprise a system of signification (*langue*), but are only coherent because they differ from one another. Thus, when de Saussure claims that the linguistic sign is arbitrary, he means that there is no “essential” connection between the linguistic sign and the object named by it. Rather, language communicates because linguistic signs stand in a relationship of difference to one another.

Decades later, the French theorist Jacques Derrida critically developed de Saussure’s theory by stressing that the infinite differences among words point to a constitutive alterity that makes signifiers possible, while simultaneously betraying their own insufficiency. For example, “book” signifies not because of an essential link to the (generally) rectangular object made of bound pages that it names, but because the grammatological conglomerate “book” is not “boot” is not “booth,” and so on. By the same token, “book” on its own is in effect meaningless. Derrida thus concluded further than de Saussure that there was no linguistic link to a “transcendental signified,” that is, a meaning beyond context. On this basis, he came to his famed conclusion that “*There is no beyond-text (hors-texte).*”⁴⁰⁷ Rather, all meaning is negotiated within the structures of language; these structures, in turn, become “culturally sedimented” over time, by use, by convention, and by replication. The language of “sedimentation” seems appropriate here, because it is a gradual process that gives the illusion of stability, much like the sediment at the bottom of bodies of water, but dissolves into a cloud of debris under the pressure of the “other.” Seen from this perspective, post-structuralist linguistics and de Certeau’s image above are similar, particularly in the fact that past “stabilities” cannot be trusted, being, as they are, characterized by their own insufficiency. What we can take away from these two conceptual analogies then, is that no act of balancing presupposes the permanence of an interstitial stability; in effect, precisely when one mistakes interstitial stabilities for something more than they are is one most likely to fall from the tightrope.

If we transfer these ideas and conceptual analogies to the realm of ethics, understood as a social group’s moral axiology, we may find that language and ethics behave in strikingly similar ways. Languages and ethics change over time; they differ from nation to nation and social status to social status. If so, ethical norms are arbitrary just as linguistic signifiers. Therefore, ethical behavior is not praised by virtue of an essential or transcendental link to a “moral absolute,” but because it operates within a socially-sedimented, mutually-intelligible network of ethical parameters that make morality simultaneously possible and insufficient. From this viewpoint, ethical behavior, like language, is always in what Derrida called “freeplay” in his essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1966, English translation 1970). The arbitrariness of ethics, like that of language, however, should not be emphasized at the expense or occlusion of the interstitial centers of gravity that become sedimented in societies over time. And yet, these interstitial centers of gravity are context-sensitive—indeed, they can be nothing else. Objections to Derridean linguistic theory frequently overlook this fact by claiming, as one will inevitably hear, that “all is relative” and that “there is no meaning.”

Two brief ripostes to these familiar, but unsatisfactory, critiques can be offered. First, they disregard an important factor of poststructuralist linguistic theory. The arbitrariness of the link between signifier and signified does not void language of communicative possibilities; in fact, it does quite the opposite in that it takes systems of linguistics seriously by deferring meaning to their constructed determinants. Second, relativizing the claims of any system is a welcome safeguard against ideological colonialism. The danger of the sedimentation of discourse is its ability to coopt the totality of a society’s vision and to eclipse, as it were, the imaginative possibilities of the “other.” Accordingly, history knows countless instances in which a social group sought to impose its own moral vision upon another by some avenue

⁴⁰⁶ De Saussure. *Cours de linguistique générale*, 100 (emphasis of the author).

⁴⁰⁷ Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 227 (emphasis of the author).

of force; worst among these offenders were those who wondered at the resistance they encountered from the “morally inferior other” to adopt a foreign vision.

We are still left wondering: how does this linguistic analogy cohere with late ancient ascetic ethics in the Roman Empire? I would suggest that virtue, as Christian monastics of the Roman Empire understood it, behaved much in the same way as the analogies we have so far introduced, though we should venture further nuances. It seems to me that what it means for a person to be virtuous is contingent on at least two significant variables: society and the self. Let us offer an analogy. It is virtually certain that the prized virtues of twenty-first century American corporate entrepreneurship would be classed as vices among seventh-century ascetics: “ambition” would with some certainty be considered greed, “strategic decision-making” and “corporate restructuring” would probably come across as misanthropy, and “successful image projection” would likely be regarded as pride and some vice associated with theft. And for all that, twenty-first century moral subjects would have to configure their ethical self, in part at least, in dialectic relation to the prescriptive norms that pertain to their corresponding social groups.

And this is the second variable: the moral self is an unfolding complex of intra- and intersubjectivity, whose path to virtue is as much determined by external social power structures as by internal networks of psychosomatic dynamics that simultaneously empower and debilitate the possibilities of active engagement with reality. Aristotle offers an illuminating parallel to this second variable in arguing that the arithmetic mean between “much food” and “too little food” is not the “right amount of food” for everyone because of the bodily differences between one person and another. For that reason, he says, six pounds may be far too much food for one who has only now begun training, whereas they would be far too little for Milon of Kroton, the wrestler who famously gained his strength by exercising with a calf that grew day by day.⁴⁰⁸ Aristotle’s analogy shows that virtue is not only contingent on society, but also on the moral subject. For this reason, he memorably concluded that ethics is “an imprecise science.”⁴⁰⁹ As we will see following, I attribute much of Maximus’ internal ethical logic to the Peripatetic and, to that degree, it reflects similar concerns and premises.

The Confessor’s articulation of each agent’s virtue will be squarely determined by reference to the “particular *logoi*” (rather than universal *logoi*) of each person, an idea we flagged in the previous chapter. This distinction has significant ramifications for his ethical teaching. If the divine *logoi* of beings are unique and individual, then so are the paths that beings must follow to return to the source of their existence. For this reason, it is impossible to speak of a “one-size-fits-all” model of ascetical discipline. Rather, the seasoned monastic showed, in his capacity as an influential teacher writing for posterity, practical sensitivity to the various stages of development through which the monk might go. This sensitivity is especially apparent in his aphoristic *Chapters on Love* and *Chapters on Theology*. These two treatises are, so to speak, “layered,” in order to reflect the various developmental stages of the ascetic’s moral psychology. That is, most chapters hold a different insight depending on where in the ascetical struggle a monk might find himself. Naturally, for those of us outside the ascetical cycle, the variety of these insights may be at best foreign, at worst, completely illegible, but that should not discount the tangible reality that his wisdom resonated with centuries of subsequent monastics, who affirmed the practical value of the Confessor’s teachings.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ *Nikomachean Ethics* 1106b1–5.

⁴⁰⁹ *Nikomachean Ethics*, 1098a21–1098b3.

⁴¹⁰ Perhaps an illuminating analogy for the uninitiate in monastic life is the experience of reading, as an adult, a book that was especially impactful during childhood. One may think of the Grimm’s Brothers tales, for instance, where new layers of meaning, of especial interest to psychoanalysts in the Freudian and Jungian traditions, emerge beyond what a child may be expected to see. Perhaps the clearest indication of the long-lasting impact that Maximus’ ascetical writings had on the

2. The Practical Aim of Monastic Authorship and Maximos' Contextual Asceticism

Maximos hardly wrote on his own initiative before the outbreak of the Monenergist controversy (ca. 634). When he began to write (ca. 626), he was already quite an old man by late ancient standards. We might suppose that, as most ascetics, he had greater interest in dedicating himself to a serene life in contemplation of God, rather than writing about it or than he had in carving out his own position amid a constellation of spiritual authorities whom he vocally considered his superiors in every positive regard. These are, of course, the characteristics that elicit monastic fandom and earned the Confessor a sizeable following, close and far, that was eager to hear his wisdom as a man advanced in divine affairs. Only hereafter was he compelled to write, it seems. His personal charisma and commanding presence subsequently proved instrumental in steeling Dyenergist and Dyothelite opposition to Imperially-sanctioned Christology, as scholarship has noted.⁴¹¹

The lateness of his writing could suggest his aversion to set anything in writing, though it is clear that when he began to write, he did so at an alarmingly prolific pace, producing the vast majority of his works in the span of some eight years. It is possible that he found a redemptive quality about writing about those things that he considered far better to live in practice. Derek Kruger has illumined more generally the practice of monastic authorship by articulating how ascetics aspired to imitate a Christ-like kenotic quality by means of the written word.⁴¹² For this reason, the Confessor could transpose the rigors of the disciplined life to parchment and thus, literally, “materialize” a spiritual dimension of tonsured existence for future generations. We should stress, however, that this practice of writing ought not be reduced to a self-centered avenue to procure his own spiritual advancement. Rather, at the outset of most of his writings he presented a key, so to speak, to approaching his treatises so that the manner of reading them itself became a way of bearing out their contents in living form for the benefit of the reader.

The kenotic quality of monastic authorship and the key to unfolding the written contents of a work were predictably common in Maximos' epistolary dedications to those who had commissioned the piece. The Confessor rehearsed the tropes of self-abasement with great skill in virtually all of his prologues; but in some sense, he also subverted or relativized the enterprise of writing on the ascetic life by embedding in the words a primer, so to speak, for *action*. His proemium to the *Chapters on Love* furnishes a vivid example of this admonition:

Note, Father Elpidios, that in addition to the treatise *On the Ascetical Life* I have also sent to your blessedness the treatise *On Love*, equal to the four gospels in the number of its centuries of chapters; while probably worthy of your expectation in no way, it is nevertheless not inferior to our ability. Be this as it may, your holiness should know that these are not the yield of our own thought; on the contrary, having traversed the words of the holy fathers, having collected therefrom the sense that contributes to the subject, and having in the most summary fashion reconciled many senses in a few phrases—in order that they may become readily visible together for the sake of easy memorization—I sent them to your blessedness, beseeching you read them with right judgment and in them seek after benefit alone, while overlooking the charmless style and interceding on behalf of my mediocrity, barren as it is of any spiritual contribution. Further, I beseech this also:

subsequent development of medieval Roman monasticism can be appreciated in the outbreak of the Hesychast controversy. In this regard, Gregorios Palamas' *Triads* can be interpreted as a reaffirmation of the Confessor's ascetical teaching in light of the new and recent ideas of Latin provenance that Barlaam the Calabrian introduced.

⁴¹¹ See Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 48.

⁴¹² *Writing and Holiness*, 2004.

that you not consider what has been said distressing, since I have carried out an order; I mention the foregoing given that at present we who distress with words are many, whereas those who teach or are taught by deeds are altogether too scarce.⁴¹³

In this prologue, some common monastic themes emerge that will continue throughout his works: he insists on his inability to compose the treatise and stresses that it is beneath the dignity of the addressee, but not because of a lack of effort, lest he insult the recipient by suggesting that he undertook the task at hand with indolence; he predictably attributes the wisdom of the treatise to the insights of the fathers rather than to himself; and he requests that the recipient pray on his behalf, specifically, for his “mediocrity.” From Maximos’ protestation, it would appear that the priest Elpidios had requested his thoughts concerning love and the ascetic life. And while the Confessor obliged him, it is quite possible that the last phrase cited above is meant as a cautionary note about how properly to handle the text. Reading it alone, or even discussing it, without applying it will bring no benefit to the reader.

This warning is highly reminiscent of Aristotle’s treatment of virtue proper at the beginning of book two of the *Nikomachean Ethics*. Here Aristotle likewise voiced his preoccupation that the proverbial student (traditionally believed to be Nikomachos his son) might miss the point of the treatise, when he writes: “So, given that the present study (πραγματεία) is not for the sake of theory as the others (for we are not investigating so we may know what virtue is, but so that we may become good, since [the former] would be of no benefit [in this regard]), it is necessary to investigate that which pertains to deeds (πράξεις) [and] how they ought to be performed, because they are primordial (κύρια), particularly (καί) for the quality that character states come to acquire (καὶ τοῦ ποιὰς γενέσθαι τὰς ἕξεις), as we have stated.”⁴¹⁴ Like Maximos, the Stagirite was concerned that by articulating a theory of ethics in written form, the whole object of the endeavor would be lost. He did not pen the treatise in order to theorize about the nature of virtue, but so that the reader could become good. He is sardonically incisive about this point a few pages later:

But no one will ever be able to become good on the basis of not performing these [virtuous deeds]. Rather, the many do not practice them; on the contrary, when they resort (καταφεύγοντες) to discussion (λόγον), they consider themselves to be philosophizing and that in this way they will be upright fellows (σπουδαῖοι). They do something similar to the infirm, who, while hearing the doctors zealously, nevertheless undertake none of the [remedies] prescribed (προσταττομένων). Therefore, just as the latter will not have the body in a good condition (οὐδ’ . . . εἰ ἔξουσι τὸ σῶμα) by being ‘healed’ after this manner, neither will the former [have] the soul [in a good condition] by philosophizing after that manner.⁴¹⁵

The fundamental concern that the reader may simply read, rather than practice, the ideas inscribed in a treatise on ethics had not waned in the millennium that separated Aristotle from Maximos.

Possibly for this very reason, the Confessor set out a “guide,” so to speak, that laid out a series of warnings and suggestions for the reader of the *Chapters on Love*. He writes after the opening lines quoted above:

Nevertheless, one should pay especially painstaking attention to each of the [individual] chapters, since not all of them, I suspect, are readily comprehensible to everyone; on the contrary, for many,

⁴¹³ *Chapters on Love*, prologue.

⁴¹⁴ *Nikomachean Ethics* 1103b26–31.

⁴¹⁵ *Nikomachean Ethics* 1105b11–18.

many require considerably careful examination, even if they seem to have been expressed rather simply. Perhaps, then, something beneficial for the soul might become manifest, having been revealed on their basis. Yet, it will certainly be manifested by the grace of God to him who reads without overwrought thoughts, with the fear of God, and with love. But to him who takes either this work or whatever other in hand, not for the sake of spiritual benefit but for the purpose of hunting for phrases in order to reproach him who has compiled them and, on that basis, establishing himself, as he supposes, as wiser than the former, nothing useful in any way will ever become manifest.

The Confessor's words here amount to an injunction to be an "active reader," so to speak, but not a contentious one. In other words, he believes that the text (and others, if read according to the rubrics he sets out in this one) is only beneficial to the reader as long as the reader approaches it "without overwrought thoughts, with the fear of God, and with love." But on closer inspection, his admonition is peculiar, because he enjoins the reader to approach the text "with love," that is, the central theme of the treatise.⁴¹⁶ Does it not seem counterintuitive to be expected to read a treatise on love with precisely that love which one is meant to acquire in the course of reading that treatise?

A similar dilemma emerges in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, albeit in a slightly different form, before the passage we cited above at 1105b11–18. The Stagirite had considered whether acquiring virtues was analogous to acquiring an artistic skill, but after considering the matter carefully, he concludes that artistic skills and the virtues are not analogous, because the products of artistic skills have merit in themselves. Acts that appear virtuous, by contrast, are not enough in themselves, because:

the one who acts must act in a certain condition (*πῶς ἔχων*): first, knowing, then, deliberately choosing (*προαιρούμενος*)—and deliberately choosing [courses of action] for their own sake (*δι' αὐτὰ*)—and third, acting while being firm and unwavering (*βεβαίως καὶ ἀμετακινήτως ἔχων*). In the case of having the other artistic skills, these [conditions] are not taken into account (*συναριθμεῖται*), but just knowing; but in the case of having the virtues, knowing avails little or nothing, whereas the other [conditions] are not worth little, but everything (*οὐ μικρὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ πᾶν δύναται*), since [virtue] comes about (*περιγίνεται*) on the basis of repeatedly doing just and temperate [deeds] It is rightly said, then, that it is by doing just deeds that the just person is produced (*γίνεται*) and the temperate person by temperate [deeds]. But no one will ever be able to become good by not performing these [virtuous deeds].

Aristotle's argument is clear: knowledge of virtue does little or nothing to produce a virtuous agent; rather, one becomes virtuous by acting virtuously. Maximus' injunction in the epistolary dedication of the *Chapters on Love*, cited above, replicates the same logic. The reading of the *Chapters on Love* is intended to be accompanied by a specific activity, that is, by the practical exercise of the virtue of love as applied to the very treatise that offers direction on its pursuit. In this way, it is not only the conceptual content of the treatise that matters, as if intellectually learning about love were to make one any more loving; rather, it is the practical exercise of love as applied to the reading of the treatise *On Love* that makes for the transformative character of the work. The *Chapters on Love*, then, can be considered in this light a treatise on monastic ethics that is self-aware of its written status but contains

⁴¹⁶ The fear of God and the simple thought likewise crisscross the work. See *Chapters on Love* 1.2–1.3 and 1.93.

in its introductory letter the key to its effectivity as a tool in the formation of the reader's moral psychology.⁴¹⁷

This strategy was not limited to the *Chapters on Love*, which indicates a certain consistency in the monk's writing endeavors. Maximos often encouraged his readers to exercise a certain form of disposition or practice when reading the texts that he penned and these practices had a pedagogical purpose that was meant to be applied to the very reading of his works. For instance, the longest of his works, the *Questions and Answers to Thalassios*, which consists in a series of exegeses of Scriptural passages in the interest of grasping better the nature and operation of the passions, encourages his readership not to consider his interpretations the definitive spiritual word on the matter: "And I beseech you who are most saintly (τοὺς ἁγιωτάτους ὑμᾶς) and all those who, as may be the case (ὡς εἰκόσ), will come across this writing (γράμματι), not to turn the things said by me into the standard of the spiritual interpretation of the passages."⁴¹⁸ Instead, he suggests that the passages should aid in bringing about a higher and truer understanding that is obtained through listening to and learning from others in the humility that the Confessor himself models by relativizing his own insight on these matters. This dynamic also reflects the very genre of the work, which took the form of an *erotapokeriseis*. Indeed, when the readers act in this virtuous capacity, Maximos says that the fruit they bear is none other than God, who is made present to the ones by means of the others.

The object of the practice of Scriptural interpretation as he expositis it in the *Questions and Answers to Thalassios*, then, is to make God present, but not solely on the basis of the words, but on the basis of the approach to them. After all, he notes, the Logos cannot be contained by any interpretation; that does not mean, he implies, that the Logos cannot be made present by the manner in which the hermeneutical endeavor is executed. He draws a complex analogy to makes this point:

For the divine Logos is like water to all manner of plants, and to offshoots, and to animals—I mean, to humans who drink him, the Logos (τοῖς αὐτόν φημι τὸν λόγον ποτιζόμενοις ἀνθρώποις)—as becoming manifest analogically to them in knowledge and in practice through the virtues as a fruit shown forth in relation to the quality of the virtue and knowledge in each and becoming manifest to some through others (ὡς καρπὸς προδεικνύμενος κατὰ τὴν ἐν ἐκάστῳ ποιότητα τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τῆς γνώσεως καὶ γινόμενος δι' ἄλλων ἄλλοις ἐπίδηλος); for he can in no way be circumscribed by anyone and he resists being imprisoned within a single insight on account of his natural infinity (ἐνὶ γὰρ οὐδέποτε περιγράφεται καὶ μιᾶς ἐντὸς οὐκ ἀνέχεται διανοίας γενέσθαι διὰ τὴν φυσικὴν ἀπειρίαν κατάκλειστος).⁴¹⁹

As with the *Chapters on Love* before, the introductory epistle to the *Questions and Answers to Thalassios* sets out a program whose objective is a dynamically transformative pedagogy that is accomplished through the activity one applies to the reading of the work.

The *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer* presents a peculiar case inasmuch as the addressee is unnamed, but receives, nonetheless, a substantial dedicatory epistle. In the letter, Maximos identifies the scope of the Prayer as the performance, by those who recite it, of all those things that the Logos did in his Incarnation.⁴²⁰ For he reasons that it is right to comprehend the significance of the prayer and subsequently to put it into action.⁴²¹ Previously in the epistle, he had drawn a bold link between his addressee and Christ—particularly in the action of benevolent condescension—opening the

⁴¹⁷ From this perspective, it is of course unremarkable that copyists preserved the epistolary dedication intact.

⁴¹⁸ *Thal*, ep., ll. 89–92.

⁴¹⁹ *Thal*, ep., ll. 99–107.

⁴²⁰ *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, ll. 62–74.

⁴²¹ *Comm LP*, esp. ll. 64–66.

dedication so: “It is my master himself, guarded by God (θεοφύλακτόν), whom I have received, present in his most praiseworthy letters, who is always present and is altogether incapable of being absent in the spirit; and similarly, in imitation of God by the abundance of virtue, he has not refused to hold converse with his servants For this reason, when I wondered at the greatness of his condescension, I mixed fear for him with desire and constituted from both—fear and desire—one: love.”⁴²² I take it that Maximos meant to highlight how humbled he, an unworthy monk, had been by receiving a letter from a man of such stature that in reaching out to him, he had displayed the Christ-like quality of condescension.⁴²³

And yet, the epistolary dedication is not as straightforward as it may appear. Frankly, there are perplexing elements in it. Unlike most of Maximos’ correspondence, it does not specify the name of the person addressed—unless one were to venture to take the adjective of the addressee, *theophylakton* (Θεοφύλακτον), as a personal name, which I simply consider a stretch. More confounding, however, is that the recipient is addressed throughout in the third person singular, rather than in the customary second person. The form of address is so peculiar that George Berthold, the translator of the English version, made an understandable judgment call and took artistic license in rendering all third person pronouns in the second person, and turned all participles (which in Greek have no person) into finite verbs in the second person. These peculiarities likely point to something more. If taken in light of the previous analyses of Maximos’ dedications, it is altogether likely that this one serves yet again a pedagogical purpose and, specifically, that it functions as the key to the active or performative interpretation of the text. In this case, as in the others, the ultimate objective is to bring about a certain form of character-molding activity. But here, specifically, that activity is to do precisely that which the Logos did in his Incarnation.⁴²⁴ In other words, the reader is meant to become an “imitator of Christ,” who takes on not only the characteristics, but also the proper activities of Christ.

From this perspective, I would suggest that the lack of an addressee is entirely deliberate and I also doubt that it had a single, specific recipient. Rather, the lack of an addressee, I take it, is meant to fold each and every reader of the letter into its contents, given that its words could apply to anyone who read it with the objective of accomplishing its purpose. For this very reason, the objective of the work (to act as the Incarnate Logos) and the titles of the addressee (i.e., Christological titles) converge. In other words, Maximos believed that the object of the Lord’s Prayer is the Christification of the supplicant; this contention is especially borne out by his interpretation of the opening phrase “our Father,”⁴²⁵ which he takes as a foreshadowing of our eschatological sonship in Christ. The work is thus addressed to all of those who pray the Prayer; they are, moreover, meant to become the addressee in the course of reading its interpretation by putting it into action. Maximos made the identification of the reader with the addressee possible by his unusual apostrophe to the designated recipient in the third person. Perhaps the most transparent indication of this open-ended address can be found in the title, preserved by virtually all relevant manuscripts without variation: *A Brief Commentary on the Prayer Our Father for a Given Lover of Christ* (εις την προσευχην του Πάτερ ημῶν προς τινα φιλόχριστον ἐρμηνεία σύντομος).⁴²⁶ The generality of the recipient is not only meant to lack specificity, but also aims at designating the *character* of the true addressee: the one who is transformed into the recipient through the praxis of what lies in the treatise.

⁴²² *Comm LP*, ll. 3–7, 8–11.

⁴²³ Compare to *Thal* 59, ll. 230–232; 61, ll. 85–89; 62, ll. 52–57; *Qu Theop* ll. 118–123; *Myst* 24, ll. 247–251; *Diff Thom* 4, ll. 31–36 and 61–66; *Diff Ioan* 7.22, ll. 18–24; 33.2, ll. 25–29, etc.

⁴²⁴ *Comm LP*, ll. 62–74.

⁴²⁵ *Comm LP*, ll. 230–257.

⁴²⁶ CCSG 23, p. 27, ll. 1–2; for further reference, see the critical apparatus for line 2.

While one may argue that the work was indeed addressed to a specific person who, out of monastic humility, chose to remain concealed from potential readers, that practice would fall outside of Maximus' traceable *modus operandi* and of early medieval monastic epistolary practices in the Roman Empire more generally. On the contrary, there are very few epistolary dedications in which he does not draw an array of flattering comparisons between God (or a person of the Trinity) and the recipients that especially praise their practice of virtue. For instance, his opening address to Thalassios in the *Questions and Answers to Thalassios* refers to him as a “man of God”⁴²⁷ who has shown forth the “ever-flowing spring of divine knowledge”⁴²⁸ and who, invoking 1 Corinthians 2:10, has “searched the depths of the Spirit with the Spirit.”⁴²⁹ This activity, of course, belongs to the Holy Spirit, who “searches the deep things of God” according to the Scriptural passage to which he alludes here. He likewise praises the fact that his practical application of virtue has been such that his soul has imprinted this divine quality on his very flesh in order to provide a visible model for others to follow.⁴³⁰

Perhaps more poignant is the prefatory epistle the Confessor sent to Thomas that accompanies the later *Difficulties* (or *Difficulties* 1–5). In it, he replicates the Christological quality of divine condescension that we already saw in the *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*.⁴³¹ But he went further in his praises as he considered the result of Thomas' practical application of wisdom:

Since you have acquired an unvarying character state of undeviating contemplation on the basis of a diligent zeal in divine affairs, you have become the most temperate lover, not only of wisdom, but of its, beauty, oh greatly beloved of God. And the beauty of wisdom is a practical knowledge or a wise praxis, the characteristic of which—since it is fulfilled by both—is the principle of divine providence and judgment; in accordance with it, you have intertwined the mind with sensation through the Spirit, demonstrating how God truly is of such a nature as to make the human in the image of God, and have rendered familiar the wealth of his goodness because you have lavishly shown forth in yourself, by the beautiful mixture of opposites, God embodied by means of the virtues, in whose imitation—since you have matched his exaltation in [your] self-emptying—you have not foregone lowering yourself as far as me by inquiring about those matters the knowledge of which you possess by experience.⁴³²

Here again the various themes we have considered emerge, such as *theomimesis* through self-abasement and the necessity to apply in practice that which one possesses intellectually. In this regard, his striking conclusion is that Thomas has made God embodied by means of the virtues. It is, therefore, not out of character for Maximus to intend for the reader of the *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer* “to embody God” through the practical application of its contents.

Further dedications could be examined, but we may already draw some conclusions from those we have considered. His ascetic teaching was occasional and therefore contextual. Its general objective was not the abstract exposition of a theme but the transformation of character through a simultaneous exposure to and practical application of the subjects he had been called on to address. By framing his ascetical works in this way, he was able to extend the rigors of embodied monastic life to the practice of individual or communal reading. As such, the act of reading the Confessor's treatises was meant to be a self-reflexive transformative activity marked by a dialectic of learning and self-adaptation. If so,

⁴²⁷ *Thal*, ep., l. 9.

⁴²⁸ *Thal*, ep., ll. 10–11.

⁴²⁹ *Thal*, ep., ll. 27–28.

⁴³⁰ *Thal*, ep., ll. 12–20.

⁴³¹ *Diff Thom*, prol., 2, ll. 13–14.

⁴³² *Diff Thom*, Prol., ll. 6–18.

his works should be understood in light of their dynamic contextual occasionalism and the network of relations and concerns from which they originated, as Blowers has astutely observed: “What is demanded, especially in assessing the work of a thinker whose theology is as intricate and nuanced as Maximus’, is the kind of thick description that elicits not only the internal intelligibility or consistency of his literary corpus but also the often subtle signals that his work has once been addressed to live audiences”⁴³³ It is often easy to lose sight of this last point when studying texts composed so many centuries ago. Nevertheless, it is essential to underscore the significance of the living recipients of these texts because, as far as their articulation of moral psychology is concerned, they presume a living subject.

3. Virtue, Part One: Psychosomatic Ethics, Motion, and Hypostatic Dynamism

We have suggested previously that Maximos had a variety of interlinked understandings of virtue and these, we may add, stem precisely from the living subject that virtue presupposes. In this section, we will be primarily concerned with sketching out the ascetic intellectual’s articulations as they concern psychosomatic relations and the hypostatic unfolding of the moral self in the active negotiation of virtue. As such, this section remains, so to speak, a skeleton that we will fill out in the remainder of this study. To focus our attention, we can ask the following questions: what is the relationship between the body and the soul vis-à-vis virtue? What does it mean that a dynamic being *is* virtuous? Does this imply that the subject becomes increasingly static as the subject becomes increasingly virtuous? And if not, what relation does the subject’s past have to the subject’s future possibilities? As before, I believe many of these questions can be fruitfully illumined by setting them in dialogue with Maximos’ more general appropriation of Aristotle’s philosophy.

The Peripatetic tradition was well known in the Hellenistic and Late Ancient periods for promoting the radical coextension and co-implication of body and soul. The origin of this idea can be traced to Aristotle and it predictably underwent substantial appropriations for different ends in the philosophies of subsequent generations. Aristotle’s first book of *On the Soul* offers a critical catalogue of existing psychologies whose merits and demerits he assesses. In light of the frankly overwhelming array of theories he considers, the originality of his own can hardly be overstressed. The philosopher of Stageiros promoted a radically naturalistic psychology whose appeal has hardly waned at any point in the history of philosophy. This much is true of many early Christian thinkers, such as Gregory of Nyssa, Nemesios of Emesa, and Maximos, as well as of Islamic philosophers, like ibn Rushd, who wrote three separate commentaries on *On the Soul*. For all of these philosophers, one of Aristotle’s most valuable insights was the unbreakable link between body and soul as constitutive elements of the human species. We cannot here treat the psychologies of all of the former thinkers with the nuance and care they deserve, so we will press on to the Confessor’s own articulation of psychosomatic relations and then consider their implications for virtue.

In *Difficulty* 7, Maximos addressed what may be with some qualification called a “neo-Origenist” interpretation of a passage from Gregory of Nazianzos’ *Oration on Love for the Poor* that spoke of humans as a “portion of God that has flowed down from above” (μοῖραν ἡμᾶς ὄντας Θεοῦ καὶ ἄνωθεν ρεύσαντας) and that referred to our “contest and battle with the body” (ἐν τῇ πρὸς τὸ σῶμα πάλη καὶ μάχη) that is yoked to us for the purpose of instructing us in our worthiness. We can infer from Maximos’ arguments that this passage from the “unimpeachable standard of the Orthodox faith,”⁴³⁴ Gregory the Theologian, had been used as a proof-text to support an Origenist belief in the

⁴³³ Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 2.

⁴³⁴ Conostas, *On Difficulties*, ix.

preexistence of the soul, its motion away from unity with the divine, and its subsequent interment in a body as the result of its fall. Maximus here famously reversed this “Origenist triad” of rest—motion—origin to origin—motion—rest.⁴³⁵ Intrinsic to this argument was his understanding of the human as a single species constituted by two elements that are (onto)logically simultaneous, completely coextensive, and that develop in unbroken continuity with each other. Maximus articulates the relation between body and soul lucidly in *Difficulty* 7.40 and 7.31, though these by no means exhaust his discussion of the matter.

In *Difficulty* 7.40, the Confessor vehemently argues for the inseparability of body and soul by drawing heavily on Aristotle’s *Categories* and its commentary tradition. He writes:

For if they [i.e., body and soul] are parts of the human, as has been promoted, the body and the soul coincide, and the parts necessarily are subject to reference to the “[category] of relation” (for the whole is definitely predicated of them), and those that are thus termed, [that is] “of relation,” belong both completely and necessarily to the [category] of logical simultaneity with respect to their origin, since, by coming together as parts, they complete a whole form, being separable from each other only conceptually for the purpose of the distinction of what each is in [its] substance. Therefore, it is impossible for soul and body, as parts of the human, to pre-exist or post-exist each other chronologically, since the so-called principle “of relation” would be violated.

The psychosomatic view Maximus presents here does not only derive from Aristotle’s *On the Soul*, but is fiercely backed by a sustained appeal to the logical rules of the Peripatetic’s *Categories*, two of which he invokes by name: the category of “relation” (πρός τι) and the category of “logical simultaneity” (ἄμια).⁴³⁶ He argues that if the aggregate of body and soul is the constitutive condition of a single form, then the whole can be predicated of the part (also known as synecdoche) and the parts must be (onto)logically coextensive. In his own words, the parts can only be separated for analyzing their substance, but any other form of separation would destroy their relationality and thus their existence. Put differently, body and soul cannot exist in separation from each other. So, he negates the proposition that the body can preexist the soul or that the soul can preexist the body. He likewise precludes the possibility that the one could go on existing after the other is gone, which follows from the principle of their logical simultaneity. As can be supposed, this position has serious implications for his eschatology—but more on that later. By precluding the possibility that body and soul can exist in separation from each other, he introduced the makings for a complex interaction and mutual influence between body and soul.

Earlier in the same *Difficulty*, though clearly making the psychosomatic assumptions above, Maximus held that the soul transmits its attributes to the body and elevates it with itself to deification. In this way, humans mediate the divine to the created order as each being is capable of receiving it:

The human has come into being through God [as constituted] from soul and body because of his [God’s] goodness, for the purpose that the rational and intellectual soul given to him [i.e., the human] . . . may, on the one hand, be deified owing to its longing for God out of the whole power of its complete love . . . and may attain *the likeness*, and, on the other hand—in line with the knowledgeable providence for what is lower [i.e., the body] and the commandment *enjoining to love one’s neighbor as oneself*—[that the soul] may prudently keep the body close and, through the virtues,

⁴³⁵ For more on this issue, see Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*.

⁴³⁶ See Aristotle, *Categories* 6a36–8b26 and 14b24–15a12. See also Constanas, *On Difficulties*, p. 483, nn. 48–49, as well as his references to Ammonios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* CAG 4, p. 4:77–78 and Elias, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* CAG 18.1, pp. 212–213.

[may] consider it its fellow-servant and [may] acquaint it with God, mediating through itself the indwelling of the Maker and making him who bound them the indissoluble link of the immortality [they will be] given ‘in order that what God is to the soul, this the soul will become to the body’ and that the Fashioner of all things will be shown to be one, through humanity residing in all beings in a way commensurate to their capacity [to receive him] . . .⁴³⁷

This passage also expresses an unbreakable link between body and soul and adds one of the Confessor’s central ideas, that is, that the deification of the soul extends to the body and through the body to the entire created order. Maximos elaborates on this idea at much greater length in *Difficulty* 41, where he also considers the ways in which humans were intended to overcome the five divisions of nature in themselves (created/uncreated, intelligible/sensible, heaven/earth, paradise/inhabited world, male/female) by functioning as a “certain natural bond” (σύνδεσμός τις φυσικός) between the extremes of the universe.⁴³⁸ But in this part of *Difficulty* 7, he is concerned with establishing the idea that the attributes of the soul can be transmitted to the body.

I do not think the sense of his words is as obscure as it may perhaps seem. The bodily actions are extensively determined by the sedimented behavioral conditions the soul acquires over protracted periods of time. As such, the body acts under the influence of the character states (ἔξεις) of the soul. The influence, of course, goes both ways. The body can also exert its might and main on the soul through pleasure and pain—Aristotle’s quintessential emotions with which virtue and vice are concerned, as well as through other forms of “natural” passivity, such as hunger, thirst, and exhaustion.⁴³⁹ At the same time, the Confessor did not regard the body-soul direction necessarily negative, given that he believes that there are virtues of the body that may at times even aid the soul.⁴⁴⁰

The context of both passages in Maximos’ *Difficulty* 7 should stand here in the foreground. The Confessor’s driving argument throughout the *Difficulty* is that the Origenist model that begins at rest, undergoes motion, and results in origin is flawed. He finds that a reversal of this triad makes better sense of the creation narrative and, indeed, of the goal-directedness of human actions. As he articulates it, humans were first created and were thereby set in motion by God; this natural motion that results from the transition from non-existence into existence may only come to rest in the source that originated that movement to begin with, as we partially overviewed in the previous chapter. All of human life in this world, however, is situated in the intermediate stage of this triad, the stage of “motion” and is accordingly unavoidably dynamic as created beings strive after the ultimate end of their existence and coming to rest in the object of their desire.⁴⁴¹

Because Maximos articulates his virtue theory within this triad of origin—motion—rest, he frequently associates activity and motion (a familiar idea present in Plato’s *Timaios* and Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Metaphysics*). Motion (κίνησις), however, embraces a much wider sense than that which we commonly ascribe to it. For Maximos, motion does not exclusively, or even primarily, refer to *locomotion*, for which he was in the habit of using the term φορά; rather, it conveys an internal sense of development of the self that is inextricable from Aristotle’s metaphysical divisions of nature (substance, potentiality, actuality); likewise, in subsequent centuries, it became intimately bound to the

⁴³⁷ *Difficulty* 7.31, DOML 28, pp. 118–120.

⁴³⁸ *Difficulty* 41.2–3, DOML 29, p. 102–104.

⁴³⁹ Compare with NE 1106b16–23.

⁴⁴⁰ See *Questions and Doubts* 1.1, ll. 1–6 in Declerck, *Maximi Confessoris quaestiones et dubia*; see also *Chapters on Theology*, 1.20, 1.58, 1.74, 2.64, 2.65, 2.88, 2.92, 2.100 in Salés, *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*; *Thal* 40, l. 69; 55, l. 483 in Laga and Steel, *Maximi Confessoris quaestiones ad Thalassium*; and *Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer*, l. 623 in van Deun, *Maximi Confessoris opuscula exegetica duo*. For further discussion and reference, see Salés and Papanikolaou, “A Power,” 25, compare with n. 7, where these references are listed.

⁴⁴¹ See *Difficulty* 7.10.

late Platonic triad of remaining, procession, and return. Finally, Maximos interwove these various strands into the tapestry of his own imagination by linking them to his doctrine of the *logoi* (principles) of creation and the *tropos* (manner) of human existence.

The inherent ontological undertones of motion predictably implicated it in an ethical network of dynamic relations within this cosmos. Maximos expresses this idea clearly in *Difficulty* 7.21–22. Here, he claims that a virtuous person:

has shown the end to be identical to the beginning, or rather, that the end and the beginning are identical, since he has come to be a genuine spokesperson of God, given that the goal of each thing is believed to be its origin and end, the former as that wherefrom he has received being and participation in what is good by nature, and the latter since, by unerringly conducting [himself] in accord with it [i.e., the beginning] in both mindset (*gnome*) and deliberate choice (*proairesis*), he finishes the praiseworthy race through diligence, by virtue of which he becomes God, receiving from God to be God, since by deliberate choice he adds to the beauty that belongs by nature to [existing] *in accordance with the image* the *likeness* through the virtues by means of his natural ascent and conformity to his own origin. In his case, moreover, the Apostolic expression *in him we live, move, and exist* is fulfilled.⁴⁴²

Although Maximos uses various images of motion that convey a sense of locomotion, his application is clearly metaphorical. These images serve to express a form of psychosomatic development that conforms to nature as defined by the *logos* of being. Maximos confirms this idea about the virtuous agent in the following lines: “For he comes to be *in* God through attentiveness by not corrupting [his] *logos* of being that preexists in God, and *moves* in God according to the *logos* of well-being that preexists in God, because he acts through the virtues, and *lives* in God according to the *logos* of eternal being that preexists in God.”⁴⁴³ Especially relevant from these three distinctions is the *logos* of well-being, since this *logos* points to the ethical quality with which one should imbue one’s existence through the virtues.

Here we encounter again Maximos’ famed distinction, mentioned already in passing, between *logos* and *tropos*, in its proper onto-ethical context, so to speak. The relationship between these two terms should be clarified for the sake of precision. Luis Granados García’s definition succinctly gets at the heart of the matter: “In the human being, the *logos* of nature corresponds to his unity (body and soul), whereas the *tropos* is the specific configuration of his dynamic being (*configuración específica de su ser dinámico*).”⁴⁴⁴ Especially accurate is his definition of the *tropos* as the “*configuración específica de su ser dinámico*,” because it conveys the two poles of this dynamism: the human has a “specific configuration,” since it belongs to a particular hypostasis, but it is, precisely for that reason, dynamic. The hypostasis is, in the present, unfolding on the stage that belongs in this triad to well-being, which is intrinsically characterized by motion. This motion must be understood as a hypostatic unfolding wherein ethics and ontology are mutually-conditioning variables. That is, who we are is affected by

⁴⁴² ταὐτὸν δεῖξας τῇ ἀρχῇ τὸ τέλος καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῷ τέλει, μᾶλλον δὲ ταὐτὸν ἀρχὴν οὖσαν καὶ τέλος, ὡς ἀνόθευτος Θεοῦ τυγχάνων συνήγορος, εἶπερ παντὸς πράγματος ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος ὁ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ σκοπὸς ὑπάρχειν πεπίστευται, τὴν μὲν ὡς ἐκεῖθεν εἰληφῶς πρὸς τῷ εἶναι καὶ τὸ κατὰ μέθεξιν φύσει ἀγαθόν, τὸ δὲ ὡς κατ’ αὐτὴν γνώμη τε καὶ προαιρέσει τὸν ἐπαινετὸν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἀπλανῶς ἄγοντα ἐξανύσας δρόμον διὰ σπουδῆς, καθ’ ὃν γίνεται Θεός, ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸ Θεὸς εἶναι λαμβάνων, ὡς τῷ κατ’ εἰκόνα φύσει καλῶ καὶ προαιρέσει τὴν δι’ ἀρετῶν προσθεὶς ἐξομοίωσιν διὰ τῆς ἐμφύτου πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν ἀρχὴν ἀναβάσεώς τε καὶ οικειότητος. Καὶ πληροῦται λοιπὸν καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τὸ ἀποστολικὸν ῥητὸν τὸ φάσκον· ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν. *Diff* 7.21–22.

⁴⁴³ *Difficulty* 7.22, DOML 28, p. 104.

⁴⁴⁴ García, “Seréis como dioses a imagen de Cristo,” 110.

what we do and what we do is affected by what we are. We had already discussed this inter-relational idea as we analyzed the prologue to Maximos' *Chapters on Love* in light of Aristotle's own explanation of how humans become virtuous; it likewise seems to be at play here. This dynamism did not remain epiphenomenal or abstract for Maximos, as we saw in his ingenious prologues, but undergirded and informed his ascetical theology throughout.

A good case of the foregoing observation can be found in one of his earlier works, the *Chapters on Theology*, which contains a collection of aphorisms that were intended to shape the moral outlook of the monastic in the pursuit of virtue. Chapter 1.35 represents many aspects of Maximos' ascetic worldview in the characteristically pithy style of this genre. He writes:

Whatever things exist in time are being fashioned in accordance with time and, having been perfected, they are brought to a standstill, thereby having ceased from growth according to nature. Whatever things God's science effects in the realm of virtue, when they have been perfected, they move again for increase, for their ends have established the starting points of further ends. For, he who through the virtues puts an end to the ground of corruptible things in himself, in accordance with the practical life has made a beginning of other more divine configurations, for God never rests from good things, of which there is also no beginning.⁴⁴⁵

In this chapter, the Confessor contrasts the natural growth of beings, which ends when they reach their biological potential, to the psychological or aretological growth of humans, which is unambiguously unending as the Confessor envisions it. For this reason, he writes that what is perfected in terms of virtue becomes liable to further increase that is determined on the basis of the previous configuration. And yet, this position entails a tension. How can perfection have degrees? Is not the point of perfection that it cannot be, to be obvious, "perfected" any further? While it would be convenient to attribute this tension to a linguistic ambiguity that can be resolved by rendering the passage otherwise than I have above, that simply will not do. Maximos uses the participial form *τελειωθέντα* from the verb *τελειόω* that is hardly ambiguous and means "to perfect"; he does not use other potentially ambivalent terms like "attain," (*τυγχάνω*), "bring to completion" (*ἐξεργάζομαι*), or "finish" (*τελέω*) that could indicate a broader semantic range. So, I think we must take him on his own terms and determine what he means by saying that something perfect can be perfected further.

I would argue that there are two poles in this equation, by virtue of which Maximos expresses his opinion that in the realm of virtue, one perfection leads to another and becomes the starting point of a new, more divine configuration. The first and perhaps most evident is the fact that the finite human strives, through virtue, to be assimilated to and thus reflect the infinite God. The process, accordingly, could be nothing other than infinitely unattainable. But this need not mean that the human does not *approximate* the divine even if the human cannot conclusively *reach* or *attain* the divine (which is uncircumscribable). Perhaps a valid analogy to illumine this point can be found in the Poincaré expansion in mathematics, also known as the asymptotic expansion or asymptotic series—from the Greek *ἀσύμπτωτος* (i.e., not coinciding or literally "not falling together"). A formula may yield an ever-closer approximation to a point of convergence between a function and a point on an axis; the function becomes increasingly closer to the axis with each new variable, but it remains, for all that, infinitely beyond convergence. This answer addresses the fact that one may indeed be *approximating* a point of convergence without necessarily ever reaching it. In mathematics, thus, one speaks of a tendency to *x* (whatever *x* may be), but the function and axis will never coincide. This model, however, does not explain how something that is perfect can be perfected further.

⁴⁴⁵ *Chapters on Love* 1.35, trans. Salés.

This second point can be elucidated by turning to a peculiar discussion in Aristotle’s tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle considers different senses in which we understand perfection. He holds that some activities are perfect in and of themselves, provided that certain conditions are met, while other activities are only perfect when they reach their goal or objective.⁴⁴⁶ He gives the example, for the latter case, of the construction of a temple, where none of the activities that are undertaken in order to make the temple are themselves perfect, since their objective is not contained in themselves, but in the completion of the temple.⁴⁴⁷ In this sense, then, the perfection in view here is one that is only accomplished when the final cause or purpose is brought to term, but one does not ascribe perfection to any one of the intermediate steps, because they are not self-sufficient and, on their own, rather meaningless—such as the action of striking a stone with a hammer once without considering further that it is to extract stone from a quarry for the purpose of fashioning a column for a temple. All of these actions, in brief, are understood in respect of a larger whole to which they contribute and that can eventually be finished, such as making a temple (that is not the Sagrada Familia). This parallels Maximos’ first instance of perfection above, that of natural growth, which comes to an observable end to which earlier stages contributed but none of which would in itself be considered perfect. That is clearly not the case as far as assimilation to the divine is concerned.

There are other actions that Aristotle considers to be perfect in themselves, which require neither reference to an externality wherein they find their perfection, nor which would be more perfect if they were to be prolonged in time. Per his example, if one sees an object, it does not matter whether one sees it for one minute or two seconds for one to be able to say that one has seen that object; similarly, if one feels pleasure for a moment or for a protracted period of time, the temporal duration of the feeling does not negate that one felt pleasure in both moments. Thus, the quality inheres in the very action itself and is not supplemented by temporal duration or other considerations of that type. Aristotle applies this definition in the case of virtue and makes the following claim: “And preferable in and of themselves are those things in the case of which one seeks nothing aside from their activity. And the activities in accordance with virtue seem to be such things.”⁴⁴⁸ Here Aristotle indicates that one does a virtuous action for the sake of the virtuous action itself and not for some higher goal by virtue of which the action is perfected: the virtuous action is perfect in itself.⁴⁴⁹ Maximos makes a similar distinction in his writings, though in some he layers the reasoning behind the good or virtuous deed further by dividing Christians into three classes: those who do the good for fear of punishment, those who do it for a promised reward, and those who do it for its own sake.⁴⁵⁰ This last sense is most ideal and the most predominant in his ascetical writings.

Maximos’ logic in *Chapters on Theology* 1.35 seems to operate in the same way as Aristotle’s, especially in that it makes a clear distinction between actions done for the sake of something else and those whose perfection is found in themselves. If one has acted virtuously, it is fair to speak of the perfection of that virtuous action in itself, given that it is done for the sake of nothing else. But the Confessor likewise appears to understand that the performance of these virtuous activities determines what he calls “starting points” for future virtuous activity. We may harken back to our analogy of tightrope-walking to elucidate these dynamics. If one takes a step on a tightrope and does not fall, it is fair to say that one has taken that step “perfectly” for the intrinsic object of that step—to move forward on the tightrope without falling—has been accomplished. But that does not mean that that step does not

⁴⁴⁶ NE 1173b–1177a2.

⁴⁴⁷ NE 1174a21–35.

⁴⁴⁸ NE 1176b6–9.

⁴⁴⁹ Compare to *Chapters on Love* 2.35–38, 3.47.

⁴⁵⁰ *Mystagogy* 24, CCSG 69, ll. 1057–1075.

condition one's future steps. For instance, one will not be able to step forward again with the same foot one put down and is, to that degree, limited by the previous action.

The same is true of virtue. One may act humbly in a particular instance, but that humble action has now determined what it means to be virtuous in the future. Perhaps, one may now need to be temperate or attentive in order not to become proud because of a previous humble deed—this progression seems to have been a constant ascetic preoccupation.⁴⁵¹ And the successful accomplishment of these two virtues, in turn, will create a new hypostatic dynamic condition, or “configuration” as Maximos calls it, that will determine one's further steps in the balancing act of remaining virtuous, and so on. For this reason, he was in the custom, as was Evagrios,⁴⁵² of offering advice on what virtues tended to bring about specific temptations to vice, or, alternatively, what virtues tended to be produced by other virtues, as can be appreciated in the opening decade of the *Chapters on Love* and elsewhere in his works.⁴⁵³

We can conclude that there is for Maximos a sense in which sustained performance of virtuous deeds foments and in some respects facilitates further performance of virtue, but each new progressive step toward virtue is accompanied by a very real possibility of failure that cannot be discounted by reason of previous successes. And, it appears, this eminent fallibility was rooted not only in the body, but in the complete constitution of the human being; every human faculty was prone to a particular pitfall that required incessant self-examination and ascesis in order to preserve the “balance” of virtue. In this sense, then, it is possible to look to the continuous string of self-sufficient perfections that are the virtues, by which one undertakes the infinite task of being assimilated to the divine.

4. The Greatest Question Mark in Virtue: Emotions, Character Stability, and *Apatheia*

In 1934, the native Kievan Nikolay Berdyayev published *Судьба человека в современном мире* (*The Destiny of the Human in the Contemporary World*), a treatise lamenting that philosophy had escaped its long captivity to theology only to land in the far crueler and more methodical hands of modern science. In his philosophical exposition of love, he critiqued earlier Christian theologians—specifically, Isaac the Syrian, Ioannes Klimakos, and Maximos the Confessor—for promoting the love of God at the expense of loving others. He writes that “For this reason, Christians have often been so tough, so cold hearted and insensitive in the name of virtues aiding in their salvation.”⁴⁵⁴ He continues some lines down:

A contrast was also demarcated between natural and supernatural love. And it seemed that spiritual and perfect love, that is, the highest, did not resemble love in the least; rather, it was impersonal, abstract, inhuman. Common sympathy and compassion are more gracious and more similar to love than this theological virtue. This is one of the most painful problems in Christian ethics. It indicates that Christians have been unable to receive the fullness of divinely human truth and that it is difficult for the human to unite the love of God and the love of humanity, love of the Creator and love of the creature. Love of the creature more generally, of animals, plants, minerals, of the earth and the stars, has not been developed in Christian ethics at all. It is a problem of cosmic ethics and it still has to be formulated Indeed, love for one's neighbor, for the human who bears the

⁴⁵¹ Compare to Maximos, *Chapters on Theology* 1.26–28; *Chapters on Love* 1.30, 1.46, 2.8–9, 2.14, 3.62, 3.84; see also Evagrios, *Praktikos* 13.

⁴⁵² See *Praktikos* 6, 11, 13–15, 44, 58, 70, 81, 84, 89.

⁴⁵³ E.g., *Chapters on Theology* 1.25–30; *Chapters on Love* 2.39–49, 3.74.

⁴⁵⁴ Berdyayev, *Судьба человека*, 4.5.

image and likeness of God, was understood only as a means of salvation, as an ascetic exercise in virtue.⁴⁵⁵

The sentiments Berdyayev expresses here have not fallen on deaf ears, especially, perhaps, on a contemporary audience's. And yet, given our brief overview of Maximos' concern for the deification of the entire universe, Berdyayev's claims are not without some misdirection.

Rather, I think that the social context to which the political exile was responding was a very particular instantiation of Orthodoxy as he remembered it from the late Romanov Russian Empire. His own exposure to a series of patristic figures seems primarily popular and it is unlikely that much of it derived from his formal higher education at the Faculty of Law at the University of Kiev (1894–1897), from which he was expelled for involvement in student Marxist demonstrations. It strikes one, rather, as the memory of his ecclesiastical contemporaries' proof-texting, a practice for which he had little appreciable fondness. Perhaps this broader sentiment can be appreciated in an inflammatory article he published in August of 1913 by the name of "Тасителн Духа" ("Spirit Quenchers," see 1 Thessalonians 5:19), where he charged his contemporary ecclesiastical leadership with a form of intellectual, but especially spiritual, paralysis that occasioned the death and decomposition of the Church's body; it was a form of complete imaginative stagnation that made of the ecclesiastical body, in his words, a rotting corpse.⁴⁵⁶ For him, the problem was precisely the inert appeal to bygone masters of the spiritual life in the interest of bolstering the credibility of his contemporaries' models of spiritual direction. The option he proposed was to overcome this stagnation by casting off the clothes Christianity had worn in its infancy and to grow into the fullness of its spiritual body. For him, this act of freedom as he envisions it in *Судьба*, largely amounts to a strategic withdrawal from Patristic authority.

A cursory and selective glance at the early Christian figures to whom he expressly refers could give the impression that his criticism did not materialize from the thin Parisian air he breathed as he wrote this work. For instance, the first chapter of the first century of Maximos' well-known *Chapters on Love* states that "Love is a good disposition of the soul, in accordance with which one prefers no being to the knowledge of God; and it is impossible for one who has a passionate proclivity for any worldly thing to come to the character state of this love." This line on first inspection lends credence to Berdyayev's valid concerns and would seem to replicate the traits of that "theological love" he had critically identified above. Humans cannot reach this form of love of which Maximos speaks as long as they prefer any being to God; they can never attain it as long as they have a "passionate proclivity" (*προσπάθεια*) for any earthly thing. As such, it might seem that the monastic intellectual is here encouraging detachment from others as a form of self-centered isolation wherein goodness is done to one's neighbor only in the utilitarian interest of attaining a higher state of godliness. It is easy to see how such a passage could quickly be decontextualized and spun to promote a certain form of spiritual discipline. It is far more difficult to find out why this passage represents in abbreviated form the cosmological theology of Maximos, a theology that has recently been positively appraised from various directions for offering an articulation of cosmologically-engaged Christian ethics, indeed, the first of its magnitude hailing from the Grecophone Christian context. It is likewise a complex affair to

⁴⁵⁵ Berdyayev, *Судьба*, 4.5.

⁴⁵⁶ He writes: Низшая физическая плоть церковности омертвела и сгнила. И спасения можно искать лишь в раскрытии ее духовной плоти. Дело архиепископов Никонов и архиепископов Антониев и есть гниение физической плоти церкви, ее ветхих одежда, предназначенных для младенчествующего человечества. Ныне выросло человечество из этих ветхих одежда и должно облечься в новую духовную плоть. In *Русская молва* 232 (August, 1913). Here he is especially pointed in his criticism of Archbishops Nikon and Antony, who for him embody the decomposing body of the Church, in large part due to its attachment to material wealth.

determine what this seemingly detached state is. It most frequently was referred to as *ἀπάθεια* (*apatheia*) and it has remained a cornerstone of eastern Christian asceticism until the present.

4.1. *What Is Ἀπάθεια (Apatheia)?*

The belief that early Christian ethics were largely Stoic in inspiration remains the prevalent scholarly voice; it is predicated under the assumption that Aristotelian philosophy, and especially Peripatetic ethics, had little appreciable impact on its formation of a distinct moral psychology and social ethic. Accordingly, most interpretations concerning the development of Christian ethics privilege Stoic over Aristotelian ethics—if it is even accurate to say that the latter has been entertained as a possibility. The foregoing assumptions often overlook or simplify the philosophical complexity of late antiquity, as we have shown in chapter 1. To the point of ethics, for example, the very first extant commentary on any of Aristotle’s works is Aspasios’ (ca. 80–ca. 150) *Commentary on the Nikomachean Ethics*, which the Peripatetic philosopher penned at around the same time that some of the latest texts that now constitute the Christian New Testament were being etched on papyrus. This remarkable commentary would have an eventful afterlife.

As Anna Komnene gathered around herself a circle of scholars to write commentaries on the works of Aristotle that had no commentary yet, it is remarkable how much text (commentary on books 1–4, 7 and 8) of such an ancient work—about one thousand years old by her time—had survived when extensive portions of the writings of Aspasios’ famed Christian contemporaries, such as Irenaios of Lyon and Clement of Alexandria, had been permanently lost. This fact speaks to the cultural relevance this commentary possessed. Its importance is also attested to by the frequency with which a range of authors mention its contents, as well as the author.⁴⁵⁷ It is likely that Maximos knew portions of this commentary or that he had inherited some of its concepts indirectly, as we have briefly suggested in the foregoing chapter. I will show how Aristotle’s and Aspasios’ ethical insights would prove deeply formative in the Confessor’s own articulation of the ascetic discipline, even if he would ultimately take his monastic ethics in a direction that he deemed best suited for his own purposes.

Apatheia (*ἀπάθεια*) is one of the organizing principles of the ascetic life and consistently emerges as one of its highest ideals. This term, however, has proven remarkably difficult to understand and therefore to translate satisfactorily: dispassion, passionlessness, impassivity, etc. all fail to capture the semantic range of this psychological state. I will make the case here that for Maximos, the term is best understood as “emotionlessness” because it really does mean the complete absence of passions (understood “negatively”) or emotions (understood “neutrally,” as it were).⁴⁵⁸ This may at first seem symptomatic of Berdyaev’s critiques overviewed above, but a closer inspection in effect shows that emotionlessness as Maximos understood it was not a negation of existential human faculties nor the sacrifice of profound human impulses on the metahuman altar of sanctity; rather, it was a different

⁴⁵⁷ See Alexandros, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, p. 41, ll. 26–28, p. 59, ll. 6–8, p. 379, ll. 379, ll. 3–6, *Commentary on On Sense Perception*, p. 10, ll. 1–4; Porphyrios, *Life of Plotinos* 14, ll. 13; Simplikios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* CAG 9, p. 131, ll. 12–16 (commenting on Aspasios’ and Alexandros’ disagreement), CAG 9, p. 422, ll. 18–25, and especially p. 423, ll. 12–13, where Simplikios refers to Aspasios’ writing as “most convincing” or “most trustworthy” (*ἀσφαλεστέρα*).

⁴⁵⁸ For an excellent overview of the question of *apatheia* and the emotions more generally, see Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, especially see 181–210, 343–370, 385–398. See also Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 76–77; Hunter, “The Language of Desire: Clement of Alexandria’s Transformation of Ascetic Discourse,” 95–111; a series of classical essays remain: Viller, “Aux sources de la spiritualité de saint Maxime,” 156–184, notes 331–336; Miquel, “Peira,” 355–361; Schönborn, “Plaisir et douleur,” in Heinzer and Schönborn, 273–284. See also Wilken, “Maximos the Confessor: The Emotions in Historical Perspective,” especially 413–416 and Blowers, “Gentiles of the Soul,” 58–65; Williams, “Macrina’s Deathbed Revisited,” in Wickham and Bammel, 227–246. Compare to Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*; Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, especially 173–175.

way of approaching them and understanding their constitutive function in the outworking of the deiform moral self.

Maximos' scholars agree that Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius of Pontos had considerable impact on his articulation of a practical spirituality system, including his understanding of the emotions in the unfolding of ascetic subjectivity. The first of the *Questions and Answers to Thalassios* begins the investigation of the treatise proper by posing the question that lies at the core of the work: “[Are] the emotions (πάθη) in and of themselves (καθ’ αὐτὰ) evil or [are they] evil depending on use? And I mean pleasure and pain, desire and fear, and those that follow upon them (τὰ τούτοις ἐπόμενα).” To this, Maximos offers the following reply: “These emotions, just as the rest, were not primordially (προηγουμένως) created along with the nature of humans, since they would also complete the definition (ὄρον) of nature. I say, having learned from the great Gregory of Nyssa, that these were introduced by the fall away from perfection and latched onto the more irrational part of nature; through them, instead of the divine and blessed image, the likeness of irrational animals immediately became apparent in the human in logical simultaneity (ἄμα) with the transgression.”⁴⁵⁹ At first, this passage, like *Chapters on Love* 1.1 cited above, would seem to ratify Berdyayev’s concerns. After all, it would be difficult to find a text that is more unequivocal about the fact that these emotions are not originally part of what defines a human. Maximos expressly says that they resulted from the fall and attached themselves to that part of human nature that is more irrational.

This passage must be understood in the context of Gregory of Nyssa’s discussion of the same subject matter, for which a pair of passages are relevant. The first is a brief description of the conditions the human underwent in consequence of the fall that can be found in his *On Virginity*. The link to this passage is a discussion of the loss of resemblance to the divine archetype and the introduction of evil to the world on account of humanity’s misuse of deliberate choice (προαίρεσις).⁴⁶⁰ A stronger connection, however, can be found in Gregory’s dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. In a protracted section of this treatise, the bishop of Nyssa discusses the nature of the emotions with his sister Makrina. She asserts that anything that is not proper to the divine nature should not be attributed to the human soul either, because the soul is fashioned in the image of the divine nature. For that reason, spiritedness and desire, which we do not see in the divine nature, should not be attributed to the soul by way of an essential definition, nor should any of the emotions that come from these.⁴⁶¹ Rather, Makrina makes an emboldened case for why desire (ἐπιθυμία) and spiritedness (θυμός)⁴⁶² are not constitutive of human nature;⁴⁶³ indeed, she describes them as accretions or warts (μυρμηκίαι) that have latched onto the soul as a consequence of the fall.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁹ *Thal* 1, ll. 5–12. Τὰ πάθη ταῦτα, ὡσπερ καὶ τὰ λοιπά, τῆ φύσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων προηγουμένως οὐ συνεκτίσθη, ἐπεὶ καὶ εἰς τὸν ὄρον ἂν συνετέλουν τῆς φύσεως. Λέγω δὲ παρὰ τοῦ Νυσσαέως μεγάλου Γρηγορίου μαθὼν, ὅτι διὰ τὴν τῆς τελειότητος ἔκπτωσιν ἐπεισῆχθη ταῦτα, τῷ ἀλογωτέρῳ μέρει προσφύεντα τῆς φύσεως· δι’ ὃν, ἀντὶ τῆς θείας καὶ μακαρίας εἰκόνας, εὐθὺς ἄμα τῆ παραβάσει διαφανῆς καὶ ἐπίδηλος ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ γέγονεν ἡ τῶν ἀλόγων ζῶων ὁμοίωσις.

⁴⁶⁰ See *On Virginity* 12.2, ll. 12–17, 20–22, and 32–52. Francois Vinel, the French translator of the *Questions to Thalassios*, seems to think that *On Virginity* is the most significant source of inspiration for Maximos here. I do not think so, because the section from *On Virginity* to which he alludes does not explicitly discuss the emotions, but rather the loss of the human faculties and the widespread devolvement of the human species to something more akin to the animal kingdom.

⁴⁶¹ See GNO 3.3, pp. 34–48 for the complete discussion.

⁴⁶² It is curious that she would pick this pair. See GNO 3.3, p. 34, ll. 5–7 and forward; compare to Plato, *Kratylos* 419d8, *Sophist* 228b2, and *Republic* 440b1–2; see also Aristotle, *On the Soul* 432a24–26. Refer further to G. Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire*, 34–39.

⁴⁶³ Warren Smith has made a compelling case that Makrina is very much relying on Aristotelian taxonomical categories to make her case. See *Passion and Paradise*, 63.

⁴⁶⁴ This image and choice of words are seemingly meant to recall the statue of the god Glaukos, drawn every year from the sea covered with barnacles and other maritime flora. See Plato, *Republic* 611d.

The similarity between Maximos and Gregory is here apparent. Particularly, the cornerstone idea that the emotions follow from the fall and that they were not initially created along with human nature spans both texts. I would add, however, that the specific emotions to which Makrina refers—desire (ἐπιθυμία) and spiritedness (θυμός), and those that Thalassios raised for discussion—pleasure (ἡδονή), pain (λύπη), desire (ἐπιθυμία), and fear (φόβος), are, with the exception of desire, not quite the same. Spiritedness and desire were the two non-rational faculties of the soul that Plato had famously described as two winged horses pulling a chariot controlled by the rational part of the soul in *Phaidros* 246a. As such, they are not, strictly, emotions per se, but the emotive faculties; they are the organ, so to speak, by which humans can emote in certain ways. Therefore, there is some difference in terms of what precisely is in view in *On the Soul and the Resurrection* and in *Thalassios*. We should add, however, that the distinction between the emotive faculties and the emotions as such is not consistently upheld or, alternatively, that they were sometimes used equivocally.

Gregory's ideas expressed through Makrina, specifically that nothing (here: the emotions) should be attributed to the soul by way of essential definition that is not also attributed to the divine belonged to the Peripatetics. Aspasios had already articulated this position lucidly in the second century. The opening paragraph of his *Commentary on the Nikomachean Ethics* makes the following point:

For if indeed we were without a body, there would be no need, as far as our nature is concerned, to have any other action than contemplation. But now, the nature of the body, since it is yoked together with bodily pleasures and pains, of necessity makes us be concerned with temperance, self-control, and many other such virtues, which, it does not seem, pertain to God on account of the fact that he participates of neither bodily pleasures nor pains. Consequently, we seem to take on the greatest concern regarding ethics out of the necessity of the body, since justice and prudence . . . fall far short of God. Rather, we have need of them on account of the injustices and oppressions that occur at the hands of others. As for the divine: it seems to exercise solely contemplative justice upon us and to continue therein.⁴⁶⁵

Aspasios makes the case that the training of the emotions for virtue is only due to bodily contingencies, such as pleasure and pain, Aristotle's two distinctive emotions that dispose us to virtue or vice, as mentioned in the previous section. The point of contrast, he argues, is the divine, which has no pleasure or pain and as such is engaged in an eternal act of contemplation that is not liable to the alteration that can be seen in humans on account of their corporeal reality and the dynamism of the emotions. Thus, both Aspasios and Gregory presuppose that the bodily element introduces a contingency with respect to the emotions that is not predicated of the divine and that is, to some degree, problematic in humans. The point of contrast to this mutability is the relative stability that pursuit of virtue gradually establishes in the character of the agent and by virtue of which the agent comes to resemble the divine's immutability.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ καὶ γὰρ εἰ μὲν ἄνευ σώματος ἦμεν, οὐδὲν ἂν ἔδει τὴν φύσιν ἡμῶν ἄλλο ἔχειν ἔργον ἢ τὴν θεωρίαν, νῦν δὲ ἢ τοῦ σώματος φύσις ἡδοναῖς καὶ λύπαις συνεξευγμένη σωματικαῖς ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ ἐγκρατείας καὶ πολλῶν ἄλλων τοιούτων ἀρετῶν, ὧν οὐκ εἰκὸς μετεῖναι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τὸ μῆτε ἡδονῶν μῆτε λυπῶν σωματικῶν μετέχειν. ἐξ ἀνάγκης οὖν τοῦ σώματος φαινόμεθα τὴν πλείστην περὶ τὰ ἡθῆ ἐπιμέλειαν πορίζεσθαι, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἡ φρόνησις . . . πολὺ μὲν λείπονται τοῦ θεοῦ. δεόμεθα δὲ αὐτῶν διὰ τὰς ἀδικίας καὶ πλεονεξίας τὰς ὑπ' ἀλλήλων γινομένας, ἐπεὶ τό γε θεῖον εἰκὸς ἐστὶ δικαιοσύνη πρὸς ἡμᾶς μόνη χρῆσθαι τῇ θεωρητικῇ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ διατελεῖν. Aspasios, *Commentary on the Nikomachean Ethics*, p. 1, l. 14–p. 2, l. 4.

⁴⁶⁶ For Gregory, see, e.g., *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 5, GNO 6, p. 272, ll. 13–19. For Aspasios, see *Commentary on the Nikomachean Ethics*, p. 25, ll. 25–30; p. 33, ll. 21–27; but compare to p. 30, ll. 33–35 and p. 34, ll. 21–26, where he differentiates between bodily and psychological virtues, as well as divine and human, and that it is the latter and the latter that are to be investigated.

What follows Gregory's overture concerning the emotions is peculiar inasmuch as it blurs the otherwise clear distinction of teacher (Makrina) and student (Gregory) so far diligently observed. Here, Gregory challenges Makrina's contention that the emotions are not part of human nature.⁴⁶⁷ Makrina had made the case that it is in accordance with a certain rational principle that virtue is, precisely, virtue, and that the emotions should not be considered an intrinsic part of human nature because they often contend with this rational principle, which essentially defines humans. I have elsewhere made a connection between her approach to essential predicates and that which Aristotle outlines in the *Categories*. I contended that: "Following Aristotle's taxonomical logic, Makrina seeks to define the human soul not by reference to what it has in common with other living things, but by reference to what separates it from them. For that reason, she can assert that spiritedness and desire, or cowardice and rashness, do not differentiate humans from animals, since the latter equally possess these characteristics."⁴⁶⁸ If this observation has merit, the individuating principle that makes for the taxonomical *differentiae* in the case of humans is reason, which, according to the Cappadocian, animals do not share. So, if the emotions come in conflict with that which makes humans what they are, they should not be considered part of their essential definition. The argument Makrina here expresses seems to be lifted directly from Aristotle's *Nikomachean Ethics* 1102b17–19, which likewise refers to the emotions' contention with this rational principle, though it adds (as Makrina does shortly hereafter) that they are capable of cooperating with or participating of reason and thus to be rational themselves, even if only by extension.⁴⁶⁹

To counter Makrina's claim that the emotive faculties should not be considered proper to the human, Gregory builds his case on Scriptural instances where emotions were praiseworthy, such as Daniel's desire and Phineas' spiritedness.⁴⁷⁰ Makrina initially takes a step back in her position and, while insisting on the fact that the emotions cannot define human nature, she acknowledges their positive potential: "Consequently, if reason (λόγος), which is in fact characteristic of [our] nature, were to exercise rule over the external accretions . . . no given one of these kinds of motions [i.e., the emotions] would operate in us in service of vice, but fear would produce obedience, and spiritedness what is courageous, and timidity precaution, and the desiring impulse would procure for us divine and undefiled pleasure."⁴⁷¹ This position could have represented a compromise between her understanding of the emotions and that which Gregory initially favored, but she in fact reverses her initial stance by admitting further that virtue, which is a divine quality, would be impossible without desire and spiritedness.⁴⁷² As I have shown elsewhere, this exchange amounts to an affirmation of a transformed Aristotelian moral psychology and a veiled rejection of a handful of Stoics, like Chrysippos and Epiktetos.⁴⁷³ The "emotions" as presented here are in effect capacities of the non-rational part of the soul as identified by both Plato and Aristotle. So, to eliminate these capacities would be coterminous with the erasure of the complex human subject and a negation of the psychological holism that Gregory and his Cappadocian confreres championed in their Christological campaigns.

On this reading, Gregory hardly promoted an ascetical theology that demanded the extinction of the emotive faculties as such. Rather, he sought after their consistent operation in line with right

⁴⁶⁷ See Salés, "Can These Bones Live?" (forthcoming). This exchange makes one wonder whether this much of the dialogue may have had some basis in earnest sibling disagreement.

⁴⁶⁸ See Salés, "Can These Bones Live?" (forthcoming).

⁴⁶⁹ See Salés, "Can These Bones Live?" (forthcoming), note 88; see also Konstantinou, *Die Tugendlehre Gregors von Nyssa*, 46–48.

⁴⁷⁰ GNO 3.3, p. 38, ll. 16–19.

⁴⁷¹ GNO 3.3, pp. 42, l. 13–43, l. 1. See Salés, "Can These Bones Live?" (forthcoming).

⁴⁷² GNO 3.3, p. 45, ll. 13–19.

⁴⁷³ See Salés, "Can These Bones Live?" (forthcoming), nn. 91–99; see also Aristotle, *Nikomachean Ethics*, 1102b25–28, 1104b21–27, 1105b19–1106a3, and *Eudaimian Ethics* 1220b7–1221a15.

reason, by which these various capacities produce virtuous actions. This line of reasoning is grounded in his understanding of the emotions as situated at a midpoint (μεθορίω) in the soul and liable to incline in one direction or another.⁴⁷⁴ For this reason, they are always a potential force, one that can operate for virtue or vice. The emotions, then, are for Gregory morally neutral; they are positive when they align with right reason, and negative when they fight against it.⁴⁷⁵

Although Maximos invokes Gregory by name and clearly calls this exchange in *On the Soul and the Resurrection* to mind, he does not innocently and uncritically replicate the Nyssen's position. At least two substantial differences separate Maximos and Gregory. First, the two did not share the same protology; so, by re-contextualizing some of the latter's claims about the emotions into his own framework, he in fact assigned them a new meaning. Second, he regards the emotions "in themselves," as Thalassios put it, as a long-term ontological and metaphysical problem.

For Maximos, the creation and fall of humanity were virtually concurrent events. When humans fell, "the likeness of irrational animals immediately became apparent and manifest in the human in logical simultaneity (ἄμα) with the transgression."⁴⁷⁶ It is important to note that the Confessor underscores the concurrence of the events by means of a repetitive adverbial enjambment—"immediately" and "in logical simultaneity"—in the interest, I believe, of highlighting their logical or theoretical sense; he does not primarily have in mind a chronological sequence in this passage. From this perspective, his use of the technical term ἄμα (in logical simultaneity) points to more than a simple modifier. This concept was one of Aristotle's tertiary categories that would subsequently carry great theological burdens on its proverbial shoulders, including extensive use in Trinitarian debates in the Greek and Arabic Christian traditions, where it functioned to describe the logical simultaneity of Father, Son, and Spirit,⁴⁷⁷ as well as in psycho-somatic relations, as we have seen in the previous section.⁴⁷⁸ What defines this category of logical simultaneity most especially is that the omission of one component necessarily entails the omission of the other.

Thus, in his mind, the fall and the similitude to irrational animals are identical; we must stress that the Confessor is not thinking here of a diachronic progression of events, as if the human *first* sinned and *then* acquired likeness to animals. Therefore, it is significant that he does not say that the state of irrationality *followed from* (for which he would have likely chosen the verb ἔπομαι) the fall, but that it became "apparent" and "manifest" simultaneously with the transgression. Blowers has commented very perceptively on this passage and noted that "By making Adam's paradisiac impassibility more a

⁴⁷⁴ *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, GNO 3.3, p. 39, l. 17.

⁴⁷⁵ Compare to Aristotle, *Nikomachean Ethics* 1102b25–28.

⁴⁷⁶ *Thal* 1, ll. 10–12. Τὰ πάθη ταῦτα, ὡσπερ καὶ τὰ λοιπά, τῇ φύσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων προηγουμένως οὐ συνεκτίσθη, ἐπει καὶ εἰς τὸν ὅρον ἂν συνετέλουν τῆς φύσεως. Λέγω δὲ παρὰ τοῦ Νυσσαέως μεγάλου Γρηγορίου μαθὼν, ὅτι διὰ τὴν τῆς τελειότητος ἔκπτωσιν ἐπεισῆχθη ταῦτα, τῷ ἀλογωτέρῳ μέρει προσφύεντα τῆς φύσεως· δι' ὧν, ἀντὶ τῆς θείας καὶ μακαρίας εἰκόνας, εὐθὺς ἄμα τῇ παραβάσει διαφανῆς καὶ ἐπίδηλος ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ γέγονεν ἡ τῶν ἀλόγων ζῶων ὁμοίωσις.

⁴⁷⁷ See Aristotle, Greek and Arabic: Ἄμα δὲ λέγεται ἀπλῶς μὲν καὶ κυριώτατα ὧν ἡ γένεσις ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ χρόνῳ· οὐδέτερον γὰρ πρότερον οὐδὲ ὕστερον ἐστὶν· ἄμα δὲ κατὰ τὸν χρόνον ταῦτα λέγεται ("Logical simultaneity" is simply and most primordially called the origin of those things that [takes place] in the same time; for neither is first nor later; and "logical simultaneity" is called these things in respect of time), *Categories*, 14b24–6. For comparison, see the translation of Aristotle's *Categories* in Badawi: «معا» على الإطلاق والتحقيق في الشيين إذا كانا تكونهما في زمان واحد بعينه، فإنه ليس واحد منهما متقدماً ولا متأخراً؛ and Georr: «معا» في الزمان. يقال معاً على الإطلاق والتحقيق في الشيين إذا كانا تكونهما في زمان واحد بعينه؛ فإنه ليس واحد منهما متقدماً ولا متأخراً. وهذا يقال فيهما معاً في الزمان. See also Thawdurus Abū Qurrah's *On the Existence of God and the True Religion*, where he writes that the Father's headship over the Son and his procession of the Holy Spirit "Were not by means of a female or intercourse, and there was no pregnancy, and no upbringing, and no antecedence; on the contrary, they are in logical simultaneity" (ليس بانثى ولا جماع، ولا حمل، ولا تربية ولا سبق. ولكنهم معاً). (The addition of *tanwin fatha* on *معا* is mine). Compare to Salés, "Aristotelian as a *Lingua Franca*," notes 36–37.

⁴⁷⁸ E.g., *Difficulties to Ioannes* 7.41, DOML 28, p. 138, ll. 9–12.

theory or a potency than an actuality, and by making the Fall almost instantaneous with Adam's creation, Maximus indicates that humanity, historically speaking, has known . . . passibility *virtually* from the beginning: the ambiguity of historical human life is precisely the persistence of unnatural passion under the guise of natural passion."⁴⁷⁹ In other words, for Maximus there was never in the reality of human existence a condition in which humans knew no difference between virtue and "emotions in and of themselves." Human existence has been, for as long as we have known it, characterized by the fallibility of the emotions, which is rooted in their capacity to be otherwise.

Unlike for Gregory, these emotions "in and of themselves" pose an existential problem for Maximus. While the Nyssen was content with finding that the emotions were at a "midpoint" in the soul from which they could incline in a positive or negative direction, Maximus' complete ascetical machinery was dedicated to the struggle to attain emotionlessness. And yet, the ascetic thinker did not promote this position out of a misguided sense of "mysopathy," so to speak. On the contrary, the psychological capacities or faculties that enable emotive responses are, to be sure, an essential attribute of the human for him; indeed, they are the tripartite soul that Plato and Aristotle had already discussed at length, consisting in reason, desire, and spiritedness. The problem for Maximus, rather, is that Gregory is right: these faculties can potentially act in accordance with virtue or vice. At stake, then, is the contingency or potentiality that accompanies these so-called "emotions in and of themselves," not the negation of these existential structures of the human soul. It is for this reason that Gregory and Maximus do not speak of the elimination of the irrational faculties of the soul (desire and spiritedness), but, as Wilken has put it, of their "transformation."⁴⁸⁰

Correlatively, there is no such thing for Maximus as "just an emotion," that is, a "neutral" emotion, except in abstraction.⁴⁸¹ In *Chapters on Love* 3.71, for instance, the Confessor only envisions the emotions as irreducibly blameworthy or praiseworthy: "A blameworthy emotion of love is that which engrosses the mind in material things; a praiseworthy emotion of love is that which conjoins it even to divine things. For those things in which the mind spends time are also those in which it develops (*πλατύνεσθαι*); and to those in which it develops, it likewise turns both desire and love: whether in divine and its appropriate and intellectual things or in the fleshly things and in the passions." There is, needless to belabor, no mention here of a neutrality where the emotions can abide and be "just emotions." For this reason, it would seem to be of no benefit to speak of emotions "in and of themselves" because no such thing occurs in the embodied human existence; those considerations are only really possible via a transposition to analytical language that has little bearing on the practical concerns of the ascetic.

Rather, faculties are always already engaged in one way or another and, because they are proper to a diachronically-situated being, they are disposed to act in specific ways that have slowly become sedimented through repeated (virtuous or vicious) behavior. Put simply, one cannot extract the emotions from their personal history and assess whether they are good, bad, or neutral in isolation from the chronological entity wherein they reside. Every new present further conditions and defines the performative possibilities of every future. It is possibly for this reason that Aspasios began his *Commentary* by pointing out that the emotions and the pursuit of virtue are inescapable for all beings who are subject to corporeal existence. In taking a similar approach, Maximus is in fact assigning great

⁴⁷⁹ Blowers, "Gentiles of the Soul," 69.

⁴⁸⁰ Wilken, "Passions in Historical Perspective," 412.

⁴⁸¹ There is, of course, a difference between "emotion" and "undergoing," understood as a certain function of the soul as opposed to an external activity that happens to a subject. Bathrellos implies this distinction in "Passion, Asceticism, and the Virtues," in *OHMC*, 291. Compare to Gregory of Nyssa: ὡςπερ οὖν τὸ τῆς ζωῆς τέλος ἀρχὴ θανάτου ἐστίν, οὕτως καὶ τοῦ κατ' ἀρετὴν δρόμου ἢ στάσις ἀρχὴ τοῦ κατὰ κακίαν γίνεται δρόμου. ("Just as the end of life is the beginning of death, so also the rest from pursuit of virtue becomes the pursuit of vice"), *Life of Moses*, 1.5, ll. 16–18.

value to embodied humanity and acknowledging the various forces that exercise their pull on the deliberating agent. For these reasons, it is far more productive to investigate the intrapersonal dynamic negotiation of the patterned behaviors that enable agents to act virtuously.

So, *Apatheia*, or emotionlessness, does not refer to the extinction of certain fundamental faculties of the human soul. It is important to consider here that Maximos says that the emotions Thalassios listed “latched on to the more irrational part of nature.” Following Classical anthropological definitions, this statement would tacitly introduce a significant distinction between the non-rational faculties of the soul, desire and spiritedness, and the emotions that “latched on” to these seemingly already existing faculties of the soul. Even though Thalassios listed desire, one of the two non-rational psychological capacities of the Classical tripartite soul, among the emotions he included in his inquiry, it appears the Confessor indulges the equivocal application of the terms in order to address the general thrust of the Libyan *begoumen*’s question. As Maximos articulates his answer, it appears clear that he does not understand the ascetic struggle as an effort to suppress or eliminate the non-rational faculties of the soul, but to use them appropriately: “But even the emotions become good in the virtuous, when, having wisely turned them from corporeal affairs, they arrange them with a view to the acquisition of celestial affairs.”⁴⁸² Later he continues: “in the case of the wise . . . they use these emotions for the elimination of a present or impending vice and for the acquisition and preservation of both virtue and knowledge.”⁴⁸³

More important than good use of the psychological faculties, however, is the cultivation in virtue that makes a morally good application possible in the first place. For that reason, I would argue that emotionlessness as Maximos envisions it refers to a specific configuration of the psychological capacities (which can incline to virtue or vice) that empowers agents to act virtuously and to avoid behavior that leads to vicious character states. Maximos lets on to this understanding of *apatheia* as he defines it: “*Apatheia* is a peaceable constitution of the soul by virtue of which it [i.e., the soul] becomes hardly-moved toward vice.” (Ἀπάθειά ἐστιν εἰρηνικὴ κατάστασις ψυχῆς, καθ’ ἣν δυσκίνητος γίνεται πρὸς κακίαν). Three points about this definition need some elucidation.

First, he describes emotionlessness as a “constitution,” (κατάστασις). The ending of the noun, -σις, most often refers to a condition or state that is arrived at as the result of a process (e.g., analysis, dialysis, etc.). The prepositional prefix *κατά* most likely points to a relative fixity of this constitution, in the same way, to draw on our governing analogy, that language or ethical codes become sedimented over time, but are not, for that reason, altogether immutable. In brief, the term conveys a sense of relatively fixed arrangement or configuration after a specific pattern. Also, the prepositional prefix does not have destructive or deviating undertones, such as the prefix *ἀπό*- could potentially convey. So, it has a constructive sense, so to speak, and for that reason does not refer to a neutralization or suppression of human psychological capacities. Rather, the general sense points to a relatively stable configuration or arrangement that has as its object a morally beneficial psycho-behavioral pattern.

The second point concerns his choice of the adjective *δυσκίνητος* to describe the constitution of the emotionless soul. Quite literally, the term means “hard to be moved.” It is fair to ask why the Confessor did not describe this constitution as “unmoved” (*ἄκίνητος*) rather than “hard to be moved” given the definitiveness that the alpha privative in *apatheia* may imply. In other words, why not describe an alpha privative noun with an alpha privative adjective? I take it that emotionlessness, despite the strong sense alpha privatives often convey, is not an absolutely permanent condition, but one that is yet liable to (qualified) alteration. This may well be the case given that Maximos famously and firmly held that the complete cessation of human activity occurs only after death,⁴⁸⁴ so it would be inadequate

⁴⁸² *Thal* 1, ll. 18–20.

⁴⁸³ *Thal* 1, ll. 28–30.

⁴⁸⁴ See *Chapters on Theology* 1.50–60.

to describe a contingent terrestrial condition (which is still liable to the distension of time) in absolute, rather than qualified, celestial terms. Aristotle found that the same was true about *eudaimonia*, which should not be predicated of anyone until that person's death—and perhaps not even then, since that person's name and memory may yet suffer even after death.

Finally, Maximos juxtaposes *apatheia* to vice (*κακίαν*). It is difficult to know what precisely Maximos intends in doing so, because the diametric opposite of vice would seem to be virtue, but he was not in the custom of calling *apatheia* a virtue. The Confessor expresses a variety of relations between *apatheia* and virtue more generally, but none of these classes *apatheia* as a virtue, a point that he has in common with Evagrius. In some cases, both Maximos and Evagrius articulate a productive relationship, where love (*agape*) is engendered by emotionlessness (*apatheia*).⁴⁸⁵ They also speak of *apatheia* as a form of peaceable constitution of the soul, as in Maximos' definition above, which is similar to Evagrius' definition of emotionlessness in *Praktikos* 64 as “calm” (*ἡσυχος*) and in 67 as “unperturbed” (*ἀτάραχος*). Maximos, like Evagrius, likewise calls emotionlessness a character state (*ἕξις*), which the former often links directly to the virtues,⁴⁸⁶ whereas the latter explicitly identifies the psychological “constitution of prayer” as an “emotionless character state” (*Κατάστασις ἐστι προσευχῆς ἕξις ἀπαθής*).⁴⁸⁷ For these reasons, it does not seem that they regard emotionlessness as a virtue proper, despite having an intimate link to it. For these reasons, emotionlessness can hardly be understood in the negative senses that Berdyayev more broadly applied to ascetics, but as a certain sedimented psychological structuring of the moral self that empowers the monastic subject to act virtuously. If so, it is probably more accurate to think of *apatheia* as Evagrius and Maximos articulated it as a form of long-sedimented “moral muscle memory” that aims at preempting the fallibility of the equiposed emotive faculties of the soul. It is not in any case their negation, neutralization, or annihilation.

4.2 *Apatheia*, the Gnostic Will, and the Natural Will

The outbreak of the Monothelite controversy in the 640s compelled Maximos to articulate with greater precision why the emotions represented a significant ontological problem in soteriological perspective than the context of his previous writings required. Specifically, I would argue that one of the leading concerns during the Monothelite controversy had to do with the relationship between deliberate choice, the emotions, and emotionlessness (*apatheia*). Nevertheless, the bulk of scholarship on the Monothelite controversy is dominated by historians of dogma who have focused on Maximos' Christology and have accordingly sought to discover and express his Christological system by comparing his writings on the person of Christ to assess their consistency. No idea has garnered as much attention in this respect as his explanation of the “gnomic will” (*γνομικὸν θέλημα*), which he contrasted with the “natural will” (*φυσικὸν θέλημα*) in his later, Monothelite-era writings.

In synthesis, the indirect witness to Monothelite concerns suggests that they were uncomfortable with pronouns with the prefix “dy-” (Dyenergism, Dyothelitism, etc.) because they risked resurrecting Nestorianism. After all, it seems that the will (*θέλημα*) is specific to the person, so that if Christ had two wills, so also he would be constituted by two persons, which had long been considered a heretical proposition that originated with—or, at any rate, that was attributed to—Nestorios. Another Monothelite concern was that two wills, if radically free as human and divine wills must be, could will opposites. In other words, could the human will of Christ will something different than his divine will?⁴⁸⁸ From a Dyothelite perspective, Monothelites represented a modified form of Apollinarianism, for they denied a psychological given of Christ's soul (the will) and under Gregory the Theologian's

⁴⁸⁵ See Maximos, *Chapters on Love* 1.2; Evagrius, *Praktikos*, prol., ll. 47–51. See also chapters 66–67 and 81.

⁴⁸⁶ *Thal* 56, ll. 37–43; *Diff Ioan* 20.3, ll. 4–10.

⁴⁸⁷ *153 Chapters on Prayer* 52; PG 79.1177C.

⁴⁸⁸ See *Op* 16, PG 91:193AB.

oft-quoted aphorism, “what is not assumed is not healed,” the will would likewise need to be assumed to be saved.

Ultimately, Maximus found Monothelite arguments unconvincing due to their ontological equivocations. The core of his argument in his later *Opuscles* and the *Disputation with Pyrrhos* is that will does not belong to the level of person, but to the level of nature, which is instantiated in a hypostasis; that is, the will is a universal attribute of the human species, not a designation of hypostatic or personal particularity. Rather, the *use* of the will is that which first manifests the particular, the personal. And every human will is conditioned by the agent whose will it is; these agents, in turn, are limited, fallible, and do not possess absolute knowledge, for which reason they must deliberate about the good. The fact that humans must daily make decisions from within this context over time sediments certain behavioral patterns that further constrain or limit their range of imaginative possibilities. Humans, in brief, though universally endowed with a “natural will,” are also debilitated by the fallibility of their individual, self-conditioned finitude. The result is the gnostic will: a specific *mode* or *manner* of willing that is proper to humans only in their fallen state and that is characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, and is burdened by relatively settled patterns of behavior that constrain their possibilities to pursue virtue. We may say, then, that there are as many gnostic wills as there are human persons, as the gnostic will refers to the personal use of the natural will and the sedimented behavioral patterns that further condition its future alternatives. To be clear, then, the gnostic will is not a natural human faculty, but a quality or mode of use of the natural will itself that is inextricable from the limitations of human existence. Once understood in this sense, it is altogether predictable that the Confessor would deny that Christ had a gnostic will. In his opinion, Christ had a fully deified natural human will that according to its deified condition only ever willed in accordance with the divine will.⁴⁸⁹

Scholars of the formation of Christian dogma have expressed dissatisfaction with Maximus’ denial of a gnostic will in Christ. Raymund Schwager, for instance, concluded that this denial amounts to a crippling flaw in the Confessor’s soteriology.⁴⁹⁰ Perhaps more positively, Basil Studer thinks Maximus intentionally left certain tensions that this teaching implied without a resolution.⁴⁹¹ More recently, Paul Blowers has expressed what I consider the most insightful and frank concern about Maximus’ denial of the gnostic will in Christ. He admits that: “For years I have been perplexed as to why Maximus the Confessor, in his articulate christological [sic] formulations in the seventh century, ultimately decided that Jesus Christ, as fully human, had only a natural human will (θέλημα φυσική) [sic], and so forcefully ruled against the possibility that he also had a ‘gnomic’ (or ‘deliberative’) will (γνώμη) in the manner of fallen human beings. In the words of Maximus’ own beloved predecessor, Gregory Nazianzen, ‘what is not assumed is not healed.’”⁴⁹² By alluding to the Cappadocian here, he clearly implies that if Christ had no gnostic will, which is so characteristic of humanity, then he has not healed that aspect of human nature. This idea surfaces more definitively some pages later, where Blowers continues:

But here is the rub—and I am certainly not the first to point it out. Does this reversal in his Christology, this denial of γνώμη in Christ, do justice to the drama of Gethsemane? If, as Maximus indicates, the Christ of the passion has, in volunteering himself to die, ‘used’ fear itself in a new mode (τρόπος), redeeming those ‘natural’ passions that are intrinsic to human beings and a part of their deep-seated inclinations and aversions, can he do so without himself experiencing the

⁴⁸⁹ See *Op* 3 and 7, especially.

⁴⁹⁰ Schwager, *Der wunderbare Tausch*, 141–147.

⁴⁹¹ “Allerdings ist damit die letzte Antwort auf die Fragen, zu denen der Glaube von Chalzedon aus seiner inneren Dynamik heraus getrieben hatte, noch nicht gegeben worden.” Basil Studer, “Zur Soteriologie des Maximus,” in Heinzer and Schönborn, 246.

⁴⁹² Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus on Gnostic Will (γνώμη) in Christ,” 44.

vacillation informed by the love of life and fear of death? And on a grander scale, can a Christ without γνώμη truly redeem the tragically individuated γνώμῃ of created beings and thus achieve the ‘gnomic’ reconciliation that Maximus earlier projects as a universal goal?⁴⁹³

Blowers’ concern is, of course, well taken. It is important to note that he here refers to what has become a popular scholarly interpretation concerning Maximos’ later Christology in light of Monothelitism, that is, that he (implicitly) “retracted” his earlier belief that Christ had γνώμη (*gnome*/mindset) and προαίρεσις (*proairesis*/deliberate choice). This interpretation of Maximos’ later Christology is ubiquitous, so one can expect to encounter it in virtually any dogmatic scholarship that addresses his writings during this time frame. Blowers’ legitimate concern made him turn to the Damascene to determine whether he might provide a way forward, but concludes that he provides no real answer either.⁴⁹⁴

It is possible that a coherent dogmatic reply has already been, preemptively, offered to Blowers’ legitimate concern. Demetrios Bathrellos’ excellent study of the Confessor’s articulations of Christ’s nature, person, and will in *The Byzantine Christ* offers, I believe, a satisfactory reply to this conundrum from a dogmatic perspective.⁴⁹⁵ The riposte would go something like this: In the subject of Christ, whose hypostasis is the Logos, the human will is active; it operates by virtue of its hypostasis, which is the Logos. The human nature of Christ, including his will, is fully deified; accordingly, it willingly and rationally surrenders its natural impulses (such as the avoidance of death due to fear, as expressed in Gethsemane) in the interest of the divine plan or will (βουλή) that is identically willed by the Logos. Thus, although there is a single object that is willed (θελητόν), it is willed by two wills, thereby expressing the non-contradictoriness of the divine and human wills of Christ. To have the same object of will does not in any way negate that two wills may will the same thing.⁴⁹⁶ Therefore, Christ’s natural human will is not illusory, but real. The fact that it consistently wills that which the divine wills does not negate Christ’s human will; in effect, it calls into question the normalization of the gnomic will. From this perspective, the goal of Christ’s Incarnation is not to show us what it does not mean to be human, but what it means to be human, and that, deified. Put differently, Christ does not need to assume a gnomic will because it is not a natural characteristic of the human species; its redemption, rather, lies in the voluntary choice of humans to conform their wills to that of Christ, and to the Father’s by extension.

I would offer another, perhaps more philosophically-sensitive, reply that I have already partially suggested above. Maximos did not refuse to ascribe a gnomic will to Christ in his later Dyothelite writings solely for the reason that Christ assumed everything that is human save sin—to which the gnomic will is unavoidably interlinked, but because it is logically incoherent to say that Christ can assume a gnomic will. The gnomic will refers to a particularized and specific *manner* of willing that is attributed to the level of hypostasis. As such, there are as many gnomic wills as there are human hypostases (and we must be clear that Christ has/is no human hypostasis). The gnomic will is not, in Aristotelian terminology, a universal, but a particular instantiation or realization of a capacity that is universal. For that reason, it would not only be impossible, but non-salvific for Christ to assume a gnomic will, for which gnomic will would he assume? And in what way would that assumption be salvific, not only for everyone else’s gnomic wills which he did not assume, but for that individual? It would simply amount to Christ’s unnecessary and tragic replication of a flawed modality of using the

⁴⁹³ Blowers, “Maximos the Confessor and John of Damascus,” 48.

⁴⁹⁴ Blowers, “Maximos the Confessor and John of Damascus,” 50.

⁴⁹⁵ See Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ*, 148–174.

⁴⁹⁶ On this point see, e.g., *Op* 15, PG 91:165A. Here Maximos argues that Christ and the Father could have the same *theleton*, that is, “the thing willed.”

natural will that has inflected a person's life with ambivalence and sedimented patterns of behavior that curb the pursuit of the good. Consequently, it is impossible for Christ to assume any gnomonic will, because there is no such thing as a "universal" gnomonic will for him to assume.

And yet, for all their logical coherence and philological subtlety, these two answers still strike me as in part unsatisfactory and, for another part, as "dodging the bullet" of what truly lies at the heart of Blowers' discomfort with Maximos' resolution to deny the gnomonic will of Christ.⁴⁹⁷ These are, nonetheless, the answers that may be produced from a dogmatic perspective and are perhaps the best replies that can be offered from within the presuppositions of this methodological framework. I believe there is another angle of approaching the matter, though it would be pretentious to call it a "fringe" or "minority" opinion, given that it has yet to be formulated and assessed by experts on these matters.

My interpretation of the Confessor's final decision to negate Christ's *gnome* differs from dogmatic theologians in two crucial regards: first, I do not think Maximos retracted anything at all, whether implicitly or explicitly, by rejecting the idea that Christ had a gnomonic will, *gnome*, or *proairesis*. To be clear, I see no radical break, no ninety-degree turn, no lack of logical continuity between Maximos' earliest writings and his Dyothelite works on the matter of the will, including Christ's will. I would argue, rather, that it was precisely the challenge of Monothelitism that compelled Maximos to crystalize and express a belief he had held all along and clear hints of which are readily apparent in his earliest works. Second, my interpretation of Maximos' articulation of the will, either in Christ or humans more generally, approaches it from an untested angle, that of moral psychology and the Confessor's ascetical context. Put differently, I believe that the dogmatic aspects of Maximos' Dyothelite writings have been emphasized at the expense of the ascetical dimensions of those works despite this simple but inescapable truth: the Confessor was an ascetic writing to ascetics about how to be ascetics through the imitation of Christ. I will argue in what follows that from this angle, Maximos' supposed "retraction" is in fact his boldest affirmation of teachings he had espoused from the very beginning of his writing career. As before, the rich and multi-layered Peripatetic—and, to a lesser and derivative but still relevant degree, Stoic—textures of Maximos' psychology of the will must be covered in critical-summary form.

4.2.1. *Aristotelian and Stoic Backgrounds of Morality and Deliberate Choice (proairesis/προαίρεσις)*

In 1954, R. A. Gauthier published a landmark essay, "Saint Maxime le Confesseur et la psychologie de l'act humaine," which traced significant parts of Thomas Aquinas' philosophy of the will to Maximos via the Damascene, elucidated the Confessor's understanding of the will, and then evidenced how it helped constitute the Angelic Doctor's own. In Gauthier's assessment, Maximos' explanation of the thelitic—or willing—faculty (θέλημα) could well be the most original aspect of his work.⁴⁹⁸ An especial strength of Gauthier's study is his nuanced contextualization of the Confessor's ideation of the will in light of the Aristotelian and Stoic analyses of action. Gauthier gives pride of place to the Stagirite himself, followed by Alexandros of Aphrodisias, Aspasios, Nemesios of Emesa, and Chrysippos.⁴⁹⁹ And while his contributions for his time were monumental and remain illuminating even today, they can be complemented through some major advances in the field of Aristotelian studies concerning the arc of decision-making, action, means, and ends in the Peripatetic ethical tradition.

⁴⁹⁷ Blowers has picked up this matter again with greater nuance and with a view to a more positive solution in *Maximus the Confessor*, 234–253.

⁴⁹⁸ Gauthier, "Saint Maxime," 53.

⁴⁹⁹ Gauthier, "Saint Maxime," 58–71.

Let us begin with Aristotle himself. The two most salient works concerning deliberate choice and the movement to enact what is chosen are *On the Soul* (book 3) and *Nikomachean Ethics* (books 3 and 6). *On the Soul* 3 can be taken as a large-scale attack on what is now termed “Sokratic intellectualism” in the jargon of historians of philosophy and scholars of ancient philosophy. Sokratic intellectualism refers to an idea that Sokrates expressed in several of Plato’s dialogues, which goes as follows: if one *knows* the good, the result is that one does it. The Peripatetic disagreed. His objections, however, were not solely based on the rather clearly counterfactual nature of the claim (for instance, a physician who smokes acts contrary to the theoretical knowledge which that physician acquired in the course of the formal education imparted in medical school); his argument exposes a critical flaw in the rationale Sokrates gave: “And generally we see that the one who possesses the healing art (τὴν ἰατρικὴν) is not [continuously] healing (ἰᾶται), so that the primordial [reason/cause] (κυρίου) for acting in accordance with knowledge (κατὰ τὴν ἐπιστήμην) is something else, but not knowledge.”⁵⁰⁰ Aristotle’s argument is clear. If knowledge is the reason for which one acts, then one would always be acting out that knowledge, rather than at certain times (or not at all). For that reason, he discounts knowledge as the primordial cause of action.

The Stagirite offers a different account of choice than that which Plato attributed to Sokrates. According to Aristotle, there is a difference between the theoretical and the practical mind (νοῦς).⁵⁰¹ As far as choice and action are concerned, the practical mind is engaged. The practical mind, as he explains it, is not itself the faculty that moves, but it is the faculty that apprehends or perceives the object of desire and is thus an unavoidable constituent of the chain of action. For this reason, he claims that: “The mind is always correct,”⁵⁰² for as long as the sensory organs of the body are working in proper order, the practical mind has a perception of the object of desire that is not subject to rightness or wrongness—it is simply there. By contrast, the faculty that causes movement itself is what he calls “appetency” (ὄρεξις), which is a form of desire (ἐπιθυμία) to pursue a certain object that appears in the practical mind of the appetent (ὁ ὀρεγόμενος). He adds, however, that the process is not always as consistent as this description might suggest. Rather, there can be a conflict of appetencies when reason (λόγος) and desire (ἐπιθυμία) have a different good in view. He attributes this truncation of the human decision-making process to the temporally distended nature of sensate beings. For that reason, something that may appear like a good in the present (and for which desire has an appetency) may not be a good in the future (to which reason has an aversion, or, at any rate, it does not have an appetency for it). Consequently, one may through reason forego a present pleasure for the sake of a future good that reason projects beyond the present.

Aristotle gives a fuller psychology of choice in the *Nikomachean Ethics* 3 that additionally takes formed dispositions into consideration. He situates his discussion in the context of voluntary actions for which one is praised or blamed. At the outset of this discussion he restates the findings of the previous book, which showed that virtue is concerned with emotions (πάθη) and actions (πράξεις), since virtues are those states that dispose one’s emotions in a certain way that translates to specific actions that are praised or blamed.⁵⁰³ Of these actions, some belong to what is voluntary (τὸ ἐκούσιον) and some to what is involuntary (ἄκούσιος), but it is only the former that are praised or blamed.⁵⁰⁴ After defining a series of acts that are voluntary and involuntary, he concludes that those acts are voluntary the origin of which lies in the agent. Accordingly, even those acts that are produced by spiritedness or desire are voluntary, for, he reasons, it would be absurd to deny that the agent is the

⁵⁰⁰ *On the Soul* 433a3–6.

⁵⁰¹ *On the Soul* 433a14–16.

⁵⁰² *On the Soul* 433a27.

⁵⁰³ *Nik. Eth.* 1109b30.

⁵⁰⁴ *Nik. Eth.* 1109b31–32.

same on the basis of the different causes (i.e., spiritedness, desire, or reason) of the agent's actions.⁵⁰⁵ Soon after he adds: "And it seems that the non-rational emotive faculties (τὰ ἄλογα πάθη) are not inferior to humanness (ἄνθρωπικὰ), so that the actions of the human also [derive] from spiritedness and desire. In effect, it is absurd to class these as involuntary."⁵⁰⁶

Having, then, classified what is voluntary and involuntary, he investigates what exactly deliberate choice (προαίρεσις) is; he determines that it belongs to the category of what is voluntary, but possesses a more restrictive sense.⁵⁰⁷ Therefore, he makes a distinction between the enkratic (continent) and the akratic (incontinent) person: the latter acts after having desired but not after having chosen, but the former acts after having deliberately chosen, but not (necessarily) after having desired.⁵⁰⁸ As a corollary conclusion, Aristotle determines that deliberate choice belongs to those things that are "up to us" (τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῶν).⁵⁰⁹ He continues by noting that all choice is then voluntary, even if not all voluntary actions are choice.⁵¹⁰ Choice is differentiated by the fact that it includes both a rationale (λόγος) and discursive engagement (διάνοια). He notes linguistically that it is for that reason that deliberate choice (προαίρεσις/*pro-airesis*) is so termed, because something has been chosen (*-aireo*) before or instead of (*pro-*) something else.⁵¹¹

Having defined all of the above, he goes on to consider the object of our deliberation and finds that we do not deliberate (βουλευόμεθα) about ends, but about means and only about those that are up to us (τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῶν) and that can be effected through our agency.⁵¹² Thus, per his examples, doctors do not deliberate about whether to heal a patient, but about how to do so, and rhetors do not deliberate about whether to convince the audience, but about how to go about it.⁵¹³ So, he concludes by claiming that deliberate choice is: "a deliberate appetency (βουλευτικὴ ὄρεξις) of that which is up to us."⁵¹⁴ This definition is followed by his most peculiar belief about decision and action: he does not intersplice a further moment in the deciding process between decision and action. One does not, in his formulation of psychodynamics, see something that is desired, choose that which is desired, and *then* do that which is desired. For him, the action is itself the choice. Nothing separates the two.⁵¹⁵ The best example he gives to illustrate this idea is found later in the sixth book of the *Nikomachean Ethics*, where he draws a parallel between the valid conclusion of a syllogism and the human action/choice that follows from the deliberative process.⁵¹⁶ The two are immediate logical corollaries mediated by nothing at all; that is, action and choice are immediate.

In light of these findings, he proceeds to a rather lengthy afterword to deliberate choice that also functions as a preface to individual virtues. The purpose, it seems, is to show that virtues and vices, as well as good or bad character states, just are natural continuations of that which is voluntary. For that reason, he claims that "And if it is up to us to do good things and bad things, and likewise not to do [them], and this is [what it means] to be good or bad [persons], consequently being upright and wicked is up to us."⁵¹⁷ Here, I take it that by "upright" and "wicked" he means the long-term

⁵⁰⁵ *Nik Eth* 1111a24–34.

⁵⁰⁶ *NE* 1111b1–4.

⁵⁰⁷ *NE* 1111b7–8.

⁵⁰⁸ *NE* 1111b13–16.

⁵⁰⁹ *NE* 1111b30–31.

⁵¹⁰ *NE* 1112a14–18.

⁵¹¹ *NE* 1112a17–18.

⁵¹² *NE* 1112a30–34.

⁵¹³ *NE* 1112b13–14.

⁵¹⁴ *NE* 1113a11–12. Compare to Maximus, *Op* 1, PG 91.16C.

⁵¹⁵ See *Nik Eth* 1113a2–14.

⁵¹⁶ See *Nik Eth* 1144a31–33. Compare to Gauthier, "Maxime le Confesseur," 60, n. 39.

⁵¹⁷ *Nikomachean Ethics* 1113b12–14.

sedimented character state of an agent. He offers a variety of examples in which persons are regularly punished because they committed a legal offense that was up to them to avoid. Curiously, however, Aristotle focuses especially on legal transgressions that are due to established character states of the agents, rather than those committed due to a so-called “crime of passion.” He reasons about offenders who violate the law due to ignorance or a moral defect of some sort “But they themselves are responsible (αἴτιοι) for having become such a kind [of person], since they live carelessly, and for being unjust or undisciplined; some acting wickedly, others leading [their lives] in binge drinking (πότοις) and the like, for the activities make everyone such as they are. This is clear on [the example] of those who are training for whatever contest or performance: they spend [their time] practicing.”⁵¹⁸ The point Aristotle is driving at is that virtues and vices must be classed as voluntary because the actions by which they are constituted are themselves individual voluntary actions that over time have a determining effect on the character state of an agent.⁵¹⁹ He argues that the difficulty of dispositions, as opposed to actions where one can see their beginning and end, is that their formation is imperceptible, like the development of a disease. It is in this sense, then, that we say that the virtue or vice of a person is voluntarily chosen and not imposed, as it were, from without, its imperceptibility notwithstanding. In other words, the psychological state that one acquires, even if it limits and largely defines one’s possible courses of actions, is freely chosen and voluntary. To become virtuous or vicious, then, does not for Aristotle entail a rejection of the freedom of the agent; rather, the acquired virtuous or vicious character state is the collective evidence of past deliberate choices.

Much of Aristotle’s account of choice has been critiqued, defended, and cautiously appropriated for the past two millennia, so that it would be impractical and indeed impossible to do justice to this immense range of opinions and hermeneutical traditions in this forum. For that reason, we will limit ourselves to that which is most immediately relevant for our understanding of Maximus himself. Two features demand special attention. The first is the ethically-inflected sense of “use” (χρήσις); the second is the relationship between emotions and deliberate choice.

Stoics have largely been credited with the invention of the category of factors that are good or bad based on the use one makes of them through one’s deliberate choice, but a closer inspection of the surviving evidence seems to contradict this widely-held opinion. The identification of a category of variables whose goodness or badness was directly linked to the use one makes of them belongs to Aristotle.⁵²⁰ Perhaps this idea has been overlooked because it only survives in fragments of the Peripatetic’s otherwise lost works, but that is no reason to credit the philosophical invention of this category to the Stoics, since our understanding of the Stoics stands to benefit by taking this factor into consideration. In a work preserved in fragmentary form by Alexandros of Aphrodisias that went by the name *The Divisions*, Aristotle in effect refers, in a larger discussion concerning *eudaimonia*, to a category of factors that are good or bad depending on use: “and the [category of] ‘potentials’ are those to which ‘using well and badly’ is proper” (δυνάμεις δὲ οἷς ἔνεστιν εὖ καὶ κακῶς χρῆσθαι).⁵²¹ The category of “potentials,” refers to things that are not intrinsically good or bad, but can be either depending on how they are employed. This idea is fully consistent with Aristotle’s logic in other works, such as the *Nikomachean Ethics*, where he likewise refers to actions that are inherently wrong and that do not, for that reason, fall within the considerations of the doctrine of the mean. He gives the example of adultery: one cannot adulterate with the right person at the right time and with the right

⁵¹⁸ *Nik Eth* 1114a4–10.

⁵¹⁹ See further, *Nik Eth* 1114b30–1115a2.

⁵²⁰ See *fr.* 113, in Valentine Rose, *Aristotelis qui ferebantur librorum fragmenta*, p. 106–107. Compare to Salés and Papanikolaou, “A Power That Deifies the Human,” 26, n. 22 and Gauthier, “Saint Maxime,” 73.

⁵²¹ *Fr.* 113, in Rose, *Aristotelis*, p. 107.

psychological disposition and expect the action to be virtuous, because adultery is by definition a negation of those variables that make actions virtuous.⁵²²

A further examination of the reception of the Peripatetic corpus likewise reveals that Stoics, even though they frequently disagreed with Aristotelians about a number of things, were neither foreign to Aristotle's ethics nor did they reject his ideas—including that of use—in their totality. Brad Inwood has already pointed out this connection in studying Seneca's definitions of anger and comparing them to those that the Stagirite expressed in *On the Soul*. He writes concerning Seneca's *De ira*: "Given the prominence of the preexisting debate between Stoics and Peripatetics on this issue [i.e., anger/*ira*/θυμός], it is only fitting and not at all surprising that at the beginning of the work, shortly after giving a Stoic definition of anger, Seneca adduces a version of Aristotle's definition from the *De Anima* (1.3). Not only is this the only other definition credited to a specific school, but Seneca introduces it by saying 'Aristotle's definition is not far from ours.'⁵²³ Specifically, the idea here is that Stoics, in line with Aristotle's earlier definition, sought to employ the emotions in such a way that they could be made morally profitable. And Seneca himself, though otherwise less than generous to his contemporary Peripatetics,⁵²⁴ acknowledges the similarity of Stoic and Aristotelian teaching concerning the emotions.

It is for that reason hardly surprising that in *De ira* 2.17.2 he writes: "'Weak' he says 'is the soul that lacks anger.' That is true, if it has nothing stronger than anger. It is advantageous to be neither thief nor prey, nor tenderhearted (*misericordem*) nor cruel (*crudelem*): this soul is far too soft, that soul far too hard; let the wise man be temperate and apply himself with strength, not anger, to deeds that must be done with resolve (*et ad res fortius agendas*).'⁵²⁵ Seneca here clearly echoes what in formula is Aristotle's doctrine of the virtuous mean. What is significant is that Seneca has subsumed it to the Stoic doctrine of *apatheia*, such that he no longer speaks of "anger" (*ira*), but of "strength" (*vis*), this latter term, of course, understood with its Latin *double entendre* as "strength of character" or "virtue." Inwood takes this passage as a rejection of so-called Aristotelian *metriopatheia* by claiming that "The mean, it turns out, is *apatheia* rather than *metriopatheia*."⁵²⁶ This moment in Stoic-Peripatetic relations is significant, because it identifies Aristotle's doctrine of the mean with the transformation of one's dispositions to the emotions into virtuous character states that fundamentally alter the character or quality of the emotions themselves. This sense of *apatheia* furthers our understanding, partially outlined thus far when we handled Gregory and Evagrius, by suggesting that the alpha-privative in *apatheia* was not meant to negate psychological *faculties*—even for some Stoics, but *qualities* that are predicated of individuals by virtue of the character states they come to acquire.

In this regard, Epiktetos (55–135 CE) offers another instance of a Stoic who was a rough contemporary of Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE) and who likewise applied Aristotle's ethical insights to a Stoic teleology. Of especial importance was his use of the Aristotelian category of "that which is up to us" (τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῶν), which functions as the determining factor in the pursuit of the good Stoic life as he envisioned it. Indeed, the whole of Epiktetos' *Handbook* gravitates toward the creation of a certain untroubled disposition that is cultivated by gaining a robust understanding of those things that are up to humans and those that are not. But the determination of that which is up to us goes beyond a simple descriptive category, since it is meant to result in a person's detachment from externals (e.g.,

⁵²² NE 1107a9–27.

⁵²³ Inwood, *Ethics After Aristotle*, 97.

⁵²⁴ See, e.g., *Letters* 85 and 116, which express dissatisfaction with the idea of *metriopatheia*.

⁵²⁵ 'Languidus' inquit 'animus est qui ira caret.' Verum est, si nihil habeat ira valentius. Nec latronem oportet esse nec praedam, nec misericordem nec crudelem: illius nimis mollis animus, huius nimis durus est; temperatus sit sapiens et ad res fortius agendas non iram sed uim adhibeat. *De ira* 2.17.2.

⁵²⁶ Inwood, *Ethics After Aristotle*, 101.

one's spouse, money, sickness) and to assess them as what they are in abstraction from their relational situatedness. For instance, he recommends: "When you are to kiss your child or your wife, [say to yourself] that 'you are kissing a human'; for after it [i.e., the human] dies, you will not be disturbed."⁵²⁷ Epiktetos here transforms the application of Aristotle's category of "what is up to us" and employs it in the formation of a distinctly Stoic worldview that operates under the widely-held Stoic assumption that only virtue is necessary for happiness. On this point, Stoics and Aristotelians disagreed, for the latter openly considered external goods constitutive of happiness. Against this background, we may see the logic behind Origen's conclusion, as previously cited in chapter 3, that the Peripatetic ethic "is most suitably human (ἀνθρωπικώτατον) and more reasonably acknowledges (εὐγνωμόνως ὁμολογοῦντα) human good things than the remainder of the <non-Christian> ways of thought (αἰρέσεων)."⁵²⁸

Aristotle promoted a different understanding of happiness that involved the training of the moral self to emote in a certain way, but not as Epiktetos articulated it here nor, despite their continuity of name and school, the way later Peripatetics expressed it through the term *metriopatheia*. The Stagirite never used the term *metriopatheia*, which appears for the first time with Krantor the Academic (4th c., BCE)⁵²⁹ and only acquired some minor currency around the first and second centuries of the Christian era.⁵³⁰ Thereafter it rapidly fizzled out and hardly enjoyed widespread use in extant Greek texts, where it counts about one hundred instances in the eighteen centuries that it was in use in pre-modern Greek times. By contrast, Aristotle employed the term *apatheia* a total of nine times. Two of these are especially relevant for us, given that they appear in his *Nikomachean Ethics* (1104b24) and *Eudaimean Ethics* (1222a13).

In both instances, Aristotle's concern is the same, that "everyone" defines the virtues as *apatheia*. Thus, he writes in the *Eudaimean Ethics*: "We say that we become wicked through pleasures and pains, by pursuing and fleeing them or as is improper or the ones that one ought not to [pursue or flee]. For this reason indeed, everyone readily defines the virtues as emotionlessness (ἀπάθειαν) and serenity concerning pleasures and pains and vices as the opposites."⁵³¹ What is peculiar about his revisiting of the theme in the *Nikomachean Ethics* is that he adds a significant qualification: "They become wicked on account of pleasures and pains, by pursuing and fleeing these, or the ones they ought not to, or when they ought not to, or in the manner that one ought not to, or in whatever other ways that logic defines the like. And for this reason, they define certain virtues as belonging to emotionlessness (ἀπαθείας) or to serenity (ἡρεμίας), but [they do] not [define them] well, because they speak without qualification and do not add 'as one ought' and 'as one ought not to' and 'when,' and the rest."⁵³² In both cases Aristotle seems to have encountered proponents of the idea that the virtues stem from *apatheia*. And what is significant here is that he does not reject the idea: in *Eudaimean Ethics* for all purposes he presents it as a logical conclusion of his presentation; in *Nikomachean Ethics* he merely

⁵²⁷ Epiktetos, *Handbook* ch. 3, LCL 218, p. 486.

⁵²⁸ *Against Kelsos* 1.10.18–20.

⁵²⁹ Krantor, *Fragments*, 8, l. 12

⁵³⁰ E.g., Philon of Alexandria, *Laws of Allegory* 3.129:4, 3.132:2, 3.144:2, *On the Virtues* 195.7, Ploutarchos, *Consolation for Apollonios* (spurious attribution) 102d7 and 13, *On Controlling Anger* 458c7, *On Fraternal Love* 489c4, *Against Kolotes* 1119c9, etc. It is further attested during this time frame in Appianos, Sextos Empirikos, Klemes of Alexandria, and Origen of Alexandria.

⁵³¹ δι' ἡδονὰς δὲ καὶ λύπας φαύλους εἶναι φασί, τῷ διώκειν καὶ φεύγειν ἢ ὡς μὴ δεῖ ἢ ἄς μὴ δεῖ. διὸ καὶ διορίζονται πάντες προχειρῶς ἀπάθειαν καὶ ἡρεμίαν περὶ ἡδονὰς καὶ λύπας εἶναι τὰς ἀρετὰς, τὰς δὲ κακίας ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων. *EE* 1222a1–5.

⁵³² δι' ἡδονὰς δὲ καὶ λύπας φαῦλοι γίνονται, τῷ διώκειν ταύτας καὶ φεύγειν, ἢ ἄς μὴ δεῖ ἢ ὅτε οὐ δεῖ ἢ ὡς οὐ δεῖ ἢ ὅσα ἄλλως ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου διορίζεται τὰ τοιαῦτα. διὸ καὶ ὀρίζονται τὰς ἀρετὰς ἀπαθείας τινὰς καὶ ἡρεμίας· οὐκ εὖ δέ, ὅτι ἀπλῶς λέγουσιν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς δεῖ καὶ ὡς οὐ δεῖ καὶ ὅτε, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα προστίθεται. *NE* 1104b21–27.

adds that if the virtues do in effect belong to *apatheia*, that it is necessary to add further qualifications to obtain a better definition. Neither case, however, demonstrates that Aristotle was averse to defining the virtues, in some sense, as related to *apatheia*.

Apatheia became a contested term, particularly among the subsequent Peripatetic commentators on the *Nikomachean Ethics* or Aristotle's philosophy more generally. For instance, Alexandros of Aphrodisias did not consider it possible to obtain a state of *apatheia*, only of *metriopatheia*, except perhaps for the divine—and this very assumption already points to a logical Christian conclusion.⁵³³ For his part, the anonymous commentator on the *Nikomachean Ethics* (2nd–3rd c.) shows uncertainty about how one may be virtuous if one understands *apatheia* as elimination of the emotions from the soul.⁵³⁴ Mercken has assessed the anonymous commentator's ideas: "The scholiast remarks on the strength of *EN* 1104b24–5 that the doctrine which defines virtue as *apatheia* is older than the Stoa, and notes Aristotle's correction: virtue is not an unqualified *apatheia*, but a qualified one, that is, only in regard to faulty passions." I am inclined to agree with these assessments, particularly that *apatheia*, as Aristotle understood it, referred to a virtuous constitution that diminished the motile effect of the blameworthy operations of the emotive faculties, but it was not, again, their unqualified negation or suppression. Thus, Mercken seems right to me in saying that he envisioned a qualified *apatheia*. Somewhat different than these two is Aspasios' *Commentary on the Nikomachean Ethics*, which elaborates at great length on how pleasure and pain are the most generic of emotions and that virtue does not entail their eradication, but disposing them to act in accordance with right reason. And based on that rationale, they are not considered contrary to reason but can even themselves be called reasonable by extension, as Aristotle had elsewhere stated.⁵³⁵ In this way, though they are non-rational movements of the soul, they can be habituated to act in accordance with right reason and to come to be known, by co-extensive predication, by the name of the virtuous dispositions associated with them.⁵³⁶

The relative ambiguity toward the term among the non-Christian Peripatetics took a different turn in the hands of the Palaiologean commentator Eustratios of Nikaia, but his comments significantly illumine various ways of regarding *apatheia* among Christians from a distinctly Aristotle-centric perspective. For example, in his *Commentary* on book 1 of the *Nikomachean Ethics*, he identifies the goal of human existence, the reason for which one leads one's life (*παράγεται*) in this present world (*ἐν τῷ παρόντι κόσμῳ*), as what the "wise men of old" (*τοῖς πάλαι σοφοῖς*) called *eudaimonia*. He curiously holds that in order to attain this state, one must first begin with a moderation of the emotions (*metriopatheia*) that ought to culminate in emotionlessness (*apatheia*), "which," he adds "is called 'blessedness' (*μακαριότης*) among us [Christians]."⁵³⁷ Later, he equates *apatheia* with the practical goal of human life that leads to the "first good" (*πρὸς τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν ἀναφέρεται*) and differentiates it from truth (*ἀλήθεια*) inasmuch as the latter is concerned with contemplative approximation to the divine.⁵³⁸ *Apatheia* is, as he understood it, concerned with actions and he notes that the actions that come from virtuous character states (he seems to consider *apatheia* a character disposition to act in accord with virtue) are in effect the better or more useful of the two.⁵³⁹

Eustratios' parting thoughts on *apatheia* prove the most insightful as a Christian take on the term, since he is one of very few writers ever to consider *apatheia* in relation to deliberate choice (*προαίρεσις*)

⁵³³ *Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, p. 239, ll. 4–8.

⁵³⁴ *Anonymous Commentary on the Nikomachean Ethics*, p. 127, ll. 5–20.

⁵³⁵ See *NE* 1102b12–19.

⁵³⁶ For Aspasios' fuller discussion, see *Commentary on the Nikomachean Ethics*, pp. 42, l. 26–45, l. 22. It bears mentioning that Aspasios never comments on the term *apatheia* itself, not, at any rate, in the surviving parts of his *Commentary*. He only once remarks on the *apathes* (the man incapable of feeling) and does so in an unflattering way.

⁵³⁷ Eustratios of Nikaia, *Commentary on the Nikomachean Ethics*, p. 4, ll. 25–32.

⁵³⁸ Eustratios, *Commentary*, p. 7, ll. 25–29.

⁵³⁹ Eustratios, *Commentary*, p. 53, ll. 30–32.

and as such offers an invaluable testament to the limited imaginative possibilities concerning the association of the two. In a longer passage concerning the virtue of prudence (φρόνησις), the Nikaian remarks on the formation of various virtuous dispositions, such as prudence and courage, where reason is yet made the “lord” (κύριον) and “master” (δεσπότην) of the non-rational emotions (τὰ πάθη . . . τῆς ἀλόγου) and, in a sense, subdues them or sets them aright (κατορθούμενα). What follows, however, is fascinating. *Apatheia* is different from these virtues, and indeed it is the “highest” (ἄριστόν) and “most prominent” (ἐξοχώτατον) of them all, inasmuch as it transcends the “flesh,” which “is yet bound (δεσμούμενον) to nature (τῇ φύσει) on account of deliberate choice (προαίρεσιν).”⁵⁴⁰ In this specific passage, Eustratios directly associates *proairesis* or deliberate choice with a constrained operation of the human will, which is “bound to the flesh.” In his calculation, *apatheia* enables the human to transcend the deliberative stage of human existence by going beyond the flesh and its desires. In other words, he likewise finds deliberate choice to be a problem inasmuch as it points to the margin for error in human calculation. While the impact on Eustratios of Maximos’ own philosophy of will could be explored further, it would take us too far afield and must be only flagged here as a down payment for a future project. But it should be enough to note the significance of such a construal of deliberate choice by one of the few Greek Christian commentators on Aristotle’s *Nikomachean Ethics*.

4.2.2. Did Maximos’ Retract Christ’s Gnome and Proairesis?

We are now in a position to consider more fully Maximos’ so-called retraction of a *gnome* (γνώμη) and deliberate choice or *proairesis* (προαίρεσις) in Christ.⁵⁴¹ To be clear, before we begin, parallels can only be drawn between *gnome* and *proairesis* in Maximos’ earlier and later writings, since he coined the term *gnomic will* only in the course of the Monothelite controversy, so that he could hardly “retract” this idea in his later writings. In his first *Opusculum* Maximos defined *gnome* and *proairesis*, along with a number of other terms.⁵⁴² For him, *gnome* indicates an appetitive and relatively settled disposition to choose that which a process of deliberation believes to be most conducive to an end. Here he replicates, nearly word for word, Aristotle’s position that we do not deliberate about ends but about means.⁵⁴³ The second term, *proairesis*, refers to the decision-making process by which one weighs different options and settles on the means that are most likely to attain an end.⁵⁴⁴ Maximos’ definition, again, is virtually identical to Aristotle’s: “They say that deliberate choice is a deliberate appetency of those things that are up to us to do” (Προαίρεσιν εἶναι φασιν ὄρεξιν βουλευτικὴν τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν πρακτῶν)⁵⁴⁵ and Aristotle defines deliberate choice as a “deliberate appetency of those things that are up to us” (καὶ ἡ προαίρεσις ἂν εἴη βουλευτικὴ ὄρεξις τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν).⁵⁴⁶ The deliberative moment in deliberate choice poses a problem for Maximos. Bathrellos adds, more generally, that “To have *gnōmē* and *proairesis* means to be subject not only to ignorance but also to mutability, to the possibility of committing evil deeds, to passions and to actual sinfulness.”⁵⁴⁷ For this reason, Maximos predictably precludes the two terms from Christ.⁵⁴⁸ The question here is whether the Confessor in fact reverses his opinion or simply expresses one of its dimensions more precisely.

⁵⁴⁰ Eustratios, *Commentary*, p. 334, ll. 6–8.

⁵⁴¹ For further discussion of this controversy, see Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 148–174; Larchet, *La divinisation*, 338–346 and 558–563.

⁵⁴² *Op* 1, PG 91:13B–16D.

⁵⁴³ See *Op* 1, PG 91:16D.

⁵⁴⁴ See *Op* 1, PG 91:17C; Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 149.

⁵⁴⁵ *Op* 1, PH 91:16BC.

⁵⁴⁶ NE 1113a11–12. Compare to Maximos, *Op* 1, PG 91:16C.

⁵⁴⁷ *Byzantine Christ*, 149.

⁵⁴⁸ Compare to *Op* 1 PG:9120A, 24B, 28D–29B in Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 149.

We must begin with the earliest writings where these terms come up. Bathrellos articulated the most recent systematic exposition of Christ’s will and deliberate choice.⁵⁴⁹ After having covered the stance Maximos “ultimately” adopted in the course of the Monothelite controversy, he notes: “But Maximus had not always thought in this way. In some of his works that pre-date the monothelite controversy, he seems to have taken a more positive stance vis-à-vis the *gnōmē* and *proairesis*. In fact, instances in which *gnōmē* and *proairesis* are considered as neutral terms or even have positive functions abound.”⁵⁵⁰ Bathrellos’ analysis of Maximos’ use of these two terms, *gnome* and *proairesis*, is certainly insightful inasmuch as he sets out to show that they “indicate particular acts of his [i.e., Christ’s] human willing.”⁵⁵¹ But this is in part an unintentional smokescreen. Even in his later Monothelite writings, Maximos was not primarily concerned with “particular acts of Christ’s human willing,” except inasmuch as they could be misinterpreted as neo-Nestorianism if unqualified by the fact that Christ acted out the human and divine wills in a single hypostasis, that of the Logos. Rather, the psychological dimension of the problem was whether Christ had a will (θέλημα)—whatever attributes one may wish to ascribe to it—that could potentially oppose the divine will or, alternatively, that could will other than the good. From this perspective, I would argue that Maximos had the same concern before and during the Monothelite controversy. Bathrellos points to three texts that presumably indicate Christ’s particularized human willing which, given his setup of the question, may imply its association with a potentially flawed *gnome* and *proairesis*: *Thalassios* 61, 21, and *Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer*.

Thalassios 61 considers the effects of the fall on the human species, with especial attention paid to the mind. Maximos plays on the sound between pleasure (ἡδονή/ *edone*) and effort (ὀδύνη/ *odyne*) to indicate how the mind’s distraction with and attention to the former immediately introduced the toils and efforts of this life for our ancestor, Adam. Christ, of course, functions as Adam’s antithesis and accordingly becomes subject to passibility in order to overturn its effects by teaching humans how to turn the mind away from sensory pleasures and to employ the natural intellectual desire of the mind (ἔφρασις νοῦ) in our longing for the cause of our being. In this regard, Bathrellos writes: “Maximos wrote that Christ accepted willingly (βουλῆσαι) that he should die.” He adds that the Confessor later defines will (βούλησις) “as a particularized will (ποιὰ θέλησις), and though he does not specify where, it is likely he has *Opuscule* 1—a Monothelite document—in mind, since Maximos does not define βούλησις in *Thalassios* 61.”⁵⁵²

It is certainly possible that Maximos here may be indicating a “particularized will” in Christ, but the context is not concerned with that question, so that inserting a definition he gives of βούλησις over a decade later may cause us to overlook the text’s internal logic. But even if we do consider this definition, it strikes me as perhaps an over-translation to render the term ποιὰ as “particularized.” This translation is very good in conveying the sense that a personal—or particular—component lies behind it, but I believe the error is to attribute that particularity to Christ’s *human will* (which Maximos never explicitly does in this passage), rather than to Christ’s hypostasis, to which level all “particularized wills” belong to begin with. And this is clear from the term ποιὰ, which perhaps more precisely means “qualified.” In other words, the βούλησις that Maximos seems to have in mind here is one that is not abstract, but is applied to a specific person, and that person is the Logos.

But that is not all. Maximos does not apply βούλησις equally to all of the agents he considers in *Thalassios* 61. In the next sentence he contrasts Christ’s βούλησις to condemn death in nature with the nature of human action to accept his grace: humans must act “in accordance with the will” (κατὰ

⁵⁴⁹ See Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 149–151. A discussion of this topic is also found in Larchet, *La divinisation*, 558–563, as well as in Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 214–218.

⁵⁵⁰ Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 149.

⁵⁵¹ Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 150.

⁵⁵² Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 150.

θέλησιν) in “preserving” (φυλάξαντες) the commandments.⁵⁵³ The natural asymmetry of the agents here considered is clear enough, but is further corroborated by the fact that in the very same sentence (in fairness, Maximos’ sentences are very long) he attributes yet again the more unstable character of the human will to those who must preserve the commandments “*gnomically*” (γνωμικῶς). The term the Confessor uses here that I roughly translate as “*gnomically*” is unequivocal: it is simply the adverbial form derived from the term *gnome* (γνώμη) that he applies to humans who strive to preserve Christ’s commandments in their fallen state. It is, of course, significant that in this passage Maximos does not employ the same term for Christ, regardless of whether the application is to him as man or God. Rather, he disambiguates Christ’s unchanging character by noting that his Incarnation is not subject to τροπή or ἀλλοίωσις, that is, to any form of variability or alteration.⁵⁵⁴

The following instance Bathrellos considers is found in *Thalassios* 21. He makes the case in this passage that “Christ moved voluntarily according to his will (κατὰ θέλησιν γνώμη).”⁵⁵⁵ Closer inspection of the passage shows that that is precisely the opposite of what Maximos says, as can be seen by reproducing the passage here below in parallel for easier comparison:

<i>Thalassios</i> 21, CCSG 7, p. 129, ll. 40–56.	
Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν ἐν τῷ παθητῷ κατὰ τὸν Ἀδάμ, ὡς ἔφην, διὰ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν αἱ πονηραὶ δυνάμεις ἔσχον τὰς ἐνεργείας ἀφανῶς ἐγκεκρυμμένας τῷ περιστατικῷ νόμῳ τῆς φύσεως, εἰκότως ἐν τῷ σωτήρι θεῷ τοῦ Ἀδάμ θεωροῦσαι κατὰ φύσιν διὰ τὴν σάρκα τὸ παθητὸν καὶ δοκοῦσαι πρὸς ἀνάγκης περιστατικῶς ὡς ψιλὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ τὸν κύριον κεκτῆσθαι τὸν νόμον τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ κατὰ θέλησιν γνώμη κινούμενον, προσέβαλον . . .	Therefore, since, because of sin, the wicked powers hiddenly held the energies concealed in the passible [part] that belongs to Adam, as I said, due to the contingent law of nature, it was appropriate that they see in the salvific God according to nature the passible [part] of Adam [that is passible] due to the flesh and that it appear to them that the Lord necessarily also was created contingently as a simple human, subject to the law of nature, but not being moved in the will (<i>thelesis</i>) by a [deliberating] mindset (<i>gnome</i>) . . .

To be clear, there is no doubt that *Thalassios* long predates the Monothelite and even Monenergist controversies. And this passage is hardly proof that Maximos held the view that Christ’s will was moved by *gnome*; in effect, it appears to be the exact opposite, for the negative particle here applies to the relation that *gnome* has to *thelesis*: the will is *not* moved by *gnome*. What follows corroborates this interpretation. The Confessor argues that it was exactly through his non-hesitation and inaccessibility to the blameworthy passions and the temptations that follow from them that Christ “triumphs on our behalf and certainly not for himself” (ἡμῶν προδῆλως ἀλλ’ οὐχ ἑαυτῷ τὴν νίκην ποιούμενος) by “remaining inaccessible and untouchable to them [i.e., the passions/temptations]” (ἀπρόσιτος μείνας αὐταῖς καὶ ἀνέπαφος).⁵⁵⁶ This pre-Monothelite document indicates that Maximos, at least by the penning of *Thalassios*, already believed that Christ’s will was not subject to a deliberative moment by which he could err.

Most indicative of this belief is his hendiadys—a rhetorical device employed to underline a central idea by repeating two similar terms—“inaccessible and untouchable” that points to the impossibility that Christ could, in the process of deliberation (which he denies he had by precluding a deliberating

⁵⁵³ *Thal.* 61, ll. 229, 234.

⁵⁵⁴ *Thal* 61, ll. 84–85.

⁵⁵⁵ Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 150.

⁵⁵⁶ *Thal* 21, ll. 55–56.

mindset/*gnome* in his will/*thelesis*), go astray. And yet, for all this, Maximos is explicit about the fact that Christ assumes the passible element of human nature, that is, the non-rational faculty that we associate with emoting. According to the dramatization he recreates, the blameworthy passions and their temptations attempted to seize on the opportunity that presented itself when Christ became subject to the passible element of human nature, even if their hopes turned out to be unfounded. Put differently, Maximos has yet again not denied here the passible—or emotive, if one will—element of Christ’s nature; he emphatically asserts that Christ assumed all that belonged to the contingent (i.e., fallen) state of nature save sin. By this he is clear that Christ could suffer pain, thirst, and such non-blameworthy affections; but he does not deliberate about the good or the means to accomplish it, since this position would impute ignorance or a conflict of wills to him. Considered from this perspective, he is not, in the end, inconsistent with his later Christological positions.

Bathrellos points to a third passage which, as I interpret it, further indicates that Maximos had long held the view that Christ’s choices were not the result of deliberation that would be liable to error. The passage in question here comes from the *Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer*, one of his earliest works. To be clear, the Confessor explicitly attributes a *gnome* to Christ in this passage and this has been taken as proof that he earlier held the belief that Christ deliberated. There is no denying that the ascetic thinker attributes a *gnome* to Christ, but this fact in itself is hardly remarkable and cannot on its own be pressed into the service of the “retraction thesis.” Years later, in the Monothelite-era *Disputation with Pyrrhos*, Maximos presents the fruit of his diligent study and reflection, over years, on the nature of *gnome* in the Scriptures and ecclesiastical authorities and he presents the unsettling conclusion that the term has twenty-eight different meanings in the Scriptures and Fathers.⁵⁵⁷ Bathrellos claims that Maximos “unwittingly and unnecessarily mentioned” this foregoing point,⁵⁵⁸ but I consider this assessment unfair and, frankly, incorrect, as a careful analysis of the passage in question shows.

The text that immediately precedes this discussion of the twenty-eight senses of *gnome* attempts to define the elusive term. The conclusion is that it is not a substance, by which I take it the conversation partners mean an actually existing thing that is itself subject to predicates, which should be clear from the fact that Maximos foregoes attributing to *gnome* the initial predicates listed in Aristotle’s *Categories*. Therefore, Pyrrhos claims that the *gnome*, according to Cyril of Alexandria is a “manner of life” (τρόπος ζωῆς).⁵⁵⁹ Maximos partially accepts the definition, but expands it by interjecting in a highly telling way: “It bears mentioning that it is the manner of life in accordance with virtue or vice . . .” (Ὁ τρόπος τῆς κατ’ ἀρετῆν, φέρε εἰπεῖν, ἢ κακίαν ζωῆς . . .).⁵⁶⁰ By inserting this caveat, he makes it clear that *gnome* is that mindset that is disposed to act in ways contrary to or according with nature. Accordingly, he defines it as “nothing other than a will [subject to] qualification” (ἡ γνώμη οὐδὲν ἕτερός ἐστιν, ἢ ποιὰ θέλησις).⁵⁶¹

Soon after they discuss whether the virtues are natural or acquired. In a nominal, but not substantial, departure from Aristotle,⁵⁶² Maximos defines the virtues as natural, as we had seen in the previous chapter, but subsequently makes space for, if not their “acquisition,” the fomentation of that state that enables them to come forth. He explains that the reason they do not appear universally in all humans is because humans do not practice equally those things that belong to nature; it is for this reason that the ascetic discipline has been developed as a means to return the human to a natural state of being that is free from not only the blameworthy passions, but the equiposed ability of the

⁵⁵⁷ *Disputation with Pyrrhos*, PG 91:312A–C.

⁵⁵⁸ Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 152.

⁵⁵⁹ *DP* PG 91:308B.

⁵⁶⁰ *DP* PG 91:308B.

⁵⁶¹ *DP* PG 91:308C.

⁵⁶² See *NE* 1103a18–23. See Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 271–283.

emotions to incline in opposing directions, by accomplishing which states, one is able to reflect the natural state of being. It is precisely in response to this claim that Pyrrhos asks (seemingly rhetorically) whether it is a blasphemy to impute a *gnome* to Christ, since he would, accordingly, be liable not just to deliberation, but to going astray. And the hypothetical error here is not just the *possibility* of going astray, but what it implies: a denial that Christ's human will is perfectly deified and, accordingly, that it could will contrary things than the divine will. In *Opuscule* 16, another Monothelite-era document, Maximos had made it clear that the difference of substance (divine and human) does not necessarily express opposites: “if they [the wills are] different according to substance, [this] I too accept, but the rationale that says they are opposed is false.”⁵⁶³ It is therefore not necessary to oppose human and divine wills simply on account of their ontological differences. Rather, Maximos continues in the *Disputation with Pyrrhos*, it depends on the sense in which one understands *gnome*. Here, then, Maximos explains that he has found twenty-eight different senses of the term and that it is crucial to determine what the orthodox contingent means by denying that Christ has a *gnome* and why one should exercise this nuance in Christological discourse. Therefore, I do not think the Confessor's answer is either “unwitting” or “unnecessary.” On the contrary, it reflects his philological sensitivity to the hermeneutical range of a contested term.

In light of this discussion, we can now return to Maximos *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, where he does in fact attribute a *gnome* to Christ. The passage reads as follows:

Having restored nature to itself, not only because, having become human, he [i.e., Christ] kept his *gnome* emotionless and untorn by [divine or human] partisanship in relation to nature—not even being shaken from its [i.e., *gnome*] absolute fixedness to accord with nature against those who crucified [him], but rather choosing the opposite instead of life, death on their behalf, as also his voluntary suffering demonstrates, [this suffering] being attained in the human-loving disposition of him who suffered, but also because *he abolished enmity* when he *nailed* the ownership title of sin to the cross, by reason of which nature indefatigably waged war against itself, and *calling those from afar and near*, that is, those under the law and those outside the law, and *obliterating the wall of partition*, *he made manifest the law of the commandments in teachings*, *making the two into one new human*, *making peace and reconciling us through himself with the Father and to one another*, keeping our *gnome* no longer in opposition to the principle of nature, but just as we are unchanging in respect to [our] nature, so also we are [to be] in respect to [our] *gnome*.⁵⁶⁴

The most significant aspect of this passage is not that it attributes a *gnome* to Christ, but, explicitly, an “emotionless” *gnome*, that is, the *gnome* that reflects the state of *apatheia* after which ascetics strive. In other words, the *gnome* that Maximos here envisions is one that is not liable to those psychological or deliberative pitfalls that later became the contentious staples of the Monothelite controversy. Thus, a *gnome* qualified in this way is entirely different than that which concerned Maximos the most during

⁵⁶³ εἰ μὲν ὡς κατ' οὐσίαν διάφορα, κἀγὼ δέχομαι, εἰ δὲ ὡς ἀντικείμενα, ψευδῆς ὁ λόγος. *Op* 16 PG 91:193A.

⁵⁶⁴ Τὴν φύσιν δὲ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἀποκαθίστησιν, οὐ καθότι μόνον, γενόμενος ἄνθρωπος, ἀπαθῆ τὴν γνώμην πρὸς τὴν φύσιν ἐτήρησε καὶ ἀστασίαστον, μηδὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς τοὺς σταυρώσαντας τῆς κατὰ φύσιν οἰκειίας σαλευομένην τὸ σύνολον βάσεως, τούναντίον δὲ μᾶλλον αἰρουμένην ἀντὶ ζωῆς τὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν θάνατον, καθὸ καὶ τὸ τοῦ πάθους ἐκούσιον δείκνυται, τῇ τοῦ πάσχοντος φιλανθρώπῳ διαθέσει κυρούμενον, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ τὴν ἐχθρὰν κατήργησε, προσηλώσας τῷ σταυρῷ τὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας χειρόγραφον, δι' ὃ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἀσπόνδως εἶχεν ἡ φύσις τὸν πόλεμον, καὶ τοὺς μακρὰν καὶ τοὺς ἐγγὺς καλέσας, τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον δηλαδὴ καὶ τοὺς ἔξω νόμου, καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὸν νόμον δηλονότι τῶν ἐντολῶν σαφηνίσας ἐν δόγμασι, τοὺς δύο ἔκτισεν εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, ποιῶν εἰρήνην καὶ ἀποκαταλλάσων ἡμᾶς δι' ἑαυτοῦ τῷ Πατρὶ καὶ ἀλλήλοις, οὐκ ἔχοντας ἔτι τὴν γνώμην ἀνθισταμένην τῷ λόγῳ τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ τὴν φύσιν, οὕτω καὶ τὴν γνώμην ὄντας ἀναλλοιώτους. *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, ll. 135–153. Compare with Eph 2:14–17.

the Monothelite era. Significant in this regard is that Maximos refers to Christ's *gnome* as not only "emotionless" (ἀπαθῆ), but as *astasiaston*, certainly a curious word for this context. The main sense of this term is drawn from the political strife that results when warring factions want to accomplish different objectives. As such, it intrinsically refers to a division of opinions or wills. The term here, needless to say, refers to the opposite of this political strife on account of the alpha privative. It is almost certainly an over-translation to render the passage, as I have, as "untorn by [divine or human] partisanship in relation to nature," because the "sides" are unclear here, given that they could refer to conflicting goods in Christ's will or a conflict between his human and divine wills. Regardless, Maximos denies this option, so it really does not matter what the hypothetical factions are. In effect, the conclusion of this passage is striking, because it already points to the fact that our *gnome* is meant to follow the pattern Christ offers by making our own *gnome* unchanging, that is, as his, emotionless.

We should also consider a relevant passage beyond those to which Bathrellos pointed that is found Maximos' reply to the forty-second question in *Thalassios*. The question here concerned how Christ could have been *made* sin without *knowing* sin. Maximos takes this opportunity to make two claims that are significant for our present analysis. The first is the affirmation that humanity in the (virtually hypothetical) prelapsarian state was, in fact, emotionless by grace.⁵⁶⁵ The Confessor expands on this idea further. In articulating the means by which Christ healed human nature after the fall, specifically with regard to *gnome* and *proairesis*, he argues that Christ by nature became passible on our behalf and thus "became sin," but, he adds, "not knowing *gnomic* sin on account of the unchangeability (διὰ τὴν ἀτεργίαν) of his *proairesis*."⁵⁶⁶ True, Maximos here attributes *proairesis* to Christ, but not without qualification. As in the passage we analyzed above from the *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, where Maximos qualifies Christ's *gnome* as "emotionless" (*apatheis*), here also he qualifies his *proairesis* so as to show that it was not liable to that dangerous alterity that characterizes human fallibility. To claim, then, that Maximos "retracted" his earlier ascription of a *gnome* and *proairesis* to Christ is to overlook the unambiguous qualifications he had already added to both these terms across his earlier writings.

In light of the four texts we have analyzed here, it becomes apparent that he did not, in effect, retract his position concerning the *gnome* in Christ. In some texts, as in *Thalassios* 21, he explicitly denies that Christ was moved in his will by *gnome*. By contrast, where he does refer to Christ's *gnome*, as in the *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, he qualifies it in such a way that he reflects a continuity of concern that Christ's will must not be changing, not, at any rate, in the sense that the emotions or non-rational part of his human soul can be liable to error. Thus, when viewed from the perspective of his moral psychology and especially by focusing on the threat that he believed the ambivalence of the emotions posed to humanity, it is clear that the Confessor did not retract his initial position with regard to the *gnome* or *proairesis* of Christ. Rather, from his earliest writings Maximos believed that Christ's human will was not liable to the equivocal movements of non-virtuous human emotions. I would conclude, therefore, that it is at best imprecise to say that the Confessor "retracted" his earlier positions. We should also note in closing here, that this may not be surprising because the question of Christ's immutable character had already come up before in the writings of several authors whom the ascetic intellectual knew well. In the wake of Origen's famed passage in *On First Principles* that described the fall of minds on account of satiety—save one, who was Christ—the course was set for determining what it means that the immutable God became a human. Perhaps in this regard the most eventful discussion that took place was between Areios and Athanasios in the fourth century and the questions

⁵⁶⁵ *Thal* 42, ll. 7–9.

⁵⁶⁶ *Thal* 42, ll. 23–24.

they posed there echoed in posterity.⁵⁶⁷ I would add that these concerns yet again reared their heads in Maximos' writings, both in the earliest and in the latest.

⁵⁶⁷ This much can be appreciated from a seemingly real question Areios posed to the Nikaian faction: Καὶ τῇ μὲν φύσει, ὥσπερ πάντες, οὕτως καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος ἐστὶ τρεπτός, τῷ δὲ ἰδίῳ αὐτεξουσίῳ, ἕως βούλεται, μένει καλός· ὅτε μέντοι θέλει, δύναται τρέπεσθαι καὶ αὐτὸς ὥσπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς τρεπτῆς ὢν φύσεως. διὰ τοῦτο γάρ', φησί, 'καὶ προγινώσκων ὁ θεὸς ἔσεσθαι καλὸν αὐτὸν προλαβὼν ταύτην αὐτῷ τὴν δόξαν δέδωκεν, ἣν ἂν καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἔσχε μετὰ ταῦτα'· ὥστε ἐξ ἔργων αὐτοῦ, ὧν προέγνω ὁ θεός, τοιοῦτον αὐτὸν νῦν γεγονέναι. *Against the Arians*, 1.5.8, PG 26:21C.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DAY AFTER THE SABBATH: VIRTUE, ACTIVE PASSIVITY, AND DEIFICATION

He who carries out the sixth day in accord with the Gospel, having already mortified the first motions of sin, through virtue reaches the state of emotionlessness, deserted by every vice; he keeps the Sabbath in the mind, even from the very simple impression of the passions. And he who has crossed the Jordan is transferred into the land of knowledge, wherein the mind, a temple mystically built by peace, becomes the abode of God in the Spirit.

—Maximos the Confessor, *Chapters on Theology* 1.53

Introduction

This chapter articulates virtue’s relation to what I will call the paradox of “active passivity” and deification. The concluding section of the previous chapter argued that Maximos had denied, throughout his career, a *gnomic* or *proairetic* element in Christ’s volitional faculties, which earned him considerable scholarly criticism. This chapter investigates a further dimension of this conclusion. Specifically, Maximos did not stop at denying a *gnomic* element in Christ, but promoted this condition as ideal for *all* humans. In effect, his entire eschatology and doctrine of deification is predicated precisely on his controversial assertion that the *gnomic* or *proairetic* will must ultimately be transcended. For instance, in *Difficulty* 7.11, he paints an “image” of the age to come by explicating 1 Corinthians 15:28. His interpretation of what it means that “the Son subjects” those who are willing “to the Father,” which brings about the destruction of death, the “last enemy” is as follows:

that which is up to us (τοῦ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν), that is, self-determination (αὐτεξουσίου), (through which death made its entry among us) . . . will have voluntarily and wholly given way (ἐκχωρηθέντος) to God, rightly subjecting itself to [his] ruling by abstaining from willing anything else than what God wills, as the Savior himself says to the Father, typifying in himself our [future] condition: ‘Yet, not as I will, but as you [will].’ And after him the God-honored Paul, as if having already *denied himself* and being no longer cognizant of his own life, [says]: ‘And I live no longer; rather, Christ lives in me.’⁵⁶⁸

The monastic intellectual anticipated a scandalized response to what seems to be the loss of human self-determination, long valued as an axiom of patristic ethics. He attempted to appease the reader by using Aristotle’s set phrase, common among the commentators: “Do not be disturbed (Μὴ ταραπτεύω) at what is said.”⁵⁶⁹ The allegedly assuaging argument that follows concludes with the phrase that his

⁵⁶⁸ *Diff* 7.11, DOML 28, p. 88.

⁵⁶⁹ See *Cat* 3a29. Compare to Didymos the Blind, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 7–8:8, 232, l. 26; Evagrius, *Praktikos* 46, Ammonios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories*, p. 46, l. 20n and p. 47, l. 9; Simplicios, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* CAG 8, p. 97, l. 4 and p. 147, l. 7, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* CAG 9, p. 141, l. 35; Ioannes Philoponos, *Commentary*

Monenergist detractors would later adduce as evidence for his earlier espousal of Monenergistic views:⁵⁷⁰

For I am not saying that the destruction of self-determination takes place, but rather [that] a both firm and unwavering disposition that accords with nature [takes place], that is, a *gnomic* surrender, so that we may desire to receive being moved from the same [place] from which we have being, as when the image ascends to the archetype . . . and thereafter it [i.e., the image] is not in the condition nor has the ability to be moved elsewhere (καὶ ἄλλοθι φέρεσθαι μήτ' ἐχούσης λοιπὸν μήτε δυναμένης); or, to speak more clearly and truly, it [the image] is not capable of willing [to be moved elsewhere], since it has received the divine energy, and better yet, it has become God by deification and delights all the more in the ecstasy from those [properties] that are and are thought to be its own by nature, on account of the grace of the Spirit that has overcome it; and it shows that God alone acts [when it is in this condition], with the result that through all there is one sole activity of God and of those worthy of God, or rather, of God alone, since—as befits his goodness—he wholly interpenetrates the worthy (μόνον ἔχουσιν ἐνεργοῦντα τὸν Θεὸν δείξασαν, ὥστε εἶναι μίαν καὶ μόνην διὰ πάντων ἐνέργειαν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀξίων Θεοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ μόνου Θεοῦ, ὡς ὅλον ὅλοις τοῖς ἀξίοις ἀγαθοπρεπῶς περιχωρήσαντος).⁵⁷¹

Maximos clearly thought this passage would reassure a disturbed reader. But on first glance, his elaboration of the will's voluntary surrender makes things worse. Now self-determination is not only surrendered, but it is altogether robbed of any activity whatever; humans lose all agency through a radical inability to act and it is God, rather, who acts in them. And yet, Maximos signals in the first phrase his departure from the idea that self-determination is destroyed (“I am not saying that the destruction of self-determination takes place”) and employs a perplexingly positive tone throughout this passage to describe future events that apparently sideline human action completely (“one sole activity of God and of those worthy of God, or rather, *of God alone*”).⁵⁷²

Thus, at least two tensions emerge. First, how can Maximos hold that human self-determination is not destroyed when humans have neither the condition nor the ability of willing? Second, it is not contextually clear how passivity and the surrender of the will are related to deification.⁵⁷³ Maximos only says that the image (here simply a circumlocution for a person) *has become* (γεγεννημένης) God by deification, but does not spell out by whose agency, God's or the human's, nor does he express whether a relationship holds between the agency of the two. To address these tensions is to address the central conundrum of our investigation, raised in the introduction to chapter three. These tensions can only be discussed by building on several key findings from the previous chapters, by putting Christ and virtue at the center of this chapter, and, to be more specific, by articulating the relationship between virtue and deification made possible in Christ. Accordingly, I argue that human preservation of and perseverance in virtue are the conditions of and for deification, respectively.

on *Aristotle's Categories*, CAG 13.1, p. 66, l. 18 and p. 69, l. 7; Olympiodoros, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* p. 70, l. 25n; Elias, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*, p. 174, l. 18.

⁵⁷⁰ Maximos refers back to this phrase in the long citation from *Opuscula* 1, PG 91.33A–36A, reproduced in the introduction to chapter three.

⁵⁷¹ *Difficulty* 7.11.

⁵⁷² See Blowers, “Maximos the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of Perpetual Progress,” 158.

⁵⁷³ See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 581, n. 215. See his references to Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, 480 and Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 145, especially n. 40.

1. Virtue, Part Two: Christ, the Substance of the Virtues

The incidence of the term “virtue” (ἀρετή) in Maximos’ corpus is astounding. This term registers more instances than nearly any other, with the few and predictable exceptions of God (Θεός), *logos* (λόγος), nature (φύσις), and soul (ψυχή). For example, in the *Questions and Answers to Thalassios*, virtue appears 368 times, in the *Difficulties to Ioannes* 187 times, and it can be found over 100 times in both the *Chapters on Theology* and in the *Questions and Doubts*. That is, in just four works, Maximos uses the term “virtue” more than 700 times. By way of comparison, he employs the term more frequently than the terms Jesus, Christ, or their combination. This statistical comparison, however, hardly points to the Confessor’s subordination of Christology to aretology (an odd thing to suppose about a man who died due to his adamant opposition to Imperial Christology). On the contrary, virtue and Jesus Christ are two sides of the same coin.

In the *Difficulties to Ioannes*, the Confessor calls Jesus Christ the “*ousia* of the virtues,”⁵⁷⁴ which suggests the inseparability of Christ and virtue in his thought:

For if the *ousia* of virtue in each person is not doubted to be the one Logos of God—since the *ousia* of all the virtues is our Lord Jesus Christ himself, as it is written: *who by God became wisdom, justice, holiness, and redemption for us*⁵⁷⁵ (he evidently has these things said about him absolutely, as being wisdom itself, justice, and holiness, and not as [said] about us qualifiedly, as in [saying] “a wise human” or “a just human”)—evidently every human participating in virtue according to a steady character state (ἐξιν παγίαν) undoubtedly is participating in God, [who is] the *ousia* of the virtues.⁵⁷⁶

This passage needs several points of clarification. The opening lines follow an important three-fold progression consisting in (1) Logos of God, (2) Jesus Christ, (3) God. The *ousia* of virtue in each person is the (1) *Logos of God*; this is so because (2) *Jesus Christ* himself is the *ousia* of all the virtues, as Scripture says (“who . . . became wisdom, justice, etc.”); accordingly, those who participate in virtue participate in (3) *God*, who is the *ousia* of the virtues. Is this change of divine referents significant? It is clear that Maximos assumes the fluid identification of Logos of God, Jesus Christ, and God as the *ousia* of the virtues. Less clear is why he introduces the distinction of three divine referents at all.⁵⁷⁷ He does not explicitly make anything of the distinction—in effect, the second term, Jesus Christ, sounds like a parenthetical aside.

Yet, this parenthetical aside is crucial. In the previous paragraph, Maximos denied that the Logos can be participated in, nor in fact be related to anything whatever: “. . . he is neither called, nor thought, nor is in his entirety anything else among recognizable things, since he is beyond substance (ὑπερούσιος), and he is not participated in at all by any being whatsoever.”⁵⁷⁸ In *Chapters on Theology* 1.7, Maximos likewise precludes any relationship between God and anything else: “God, however, incomprehensibly being infinitely above absolutely every relation, is evidently neither first principle, nor intermediate state, nor end, nor altogether anything else of those things in which the category of

⁵⁷⁴ See *Difficulties* 7.21.

⁵⁷⁵ 1 Cor 1:30.

⁵⁷⁶ *Difficulty* 7.21.

⁵⁷⁷ See Salés, “Divine Incarnation,” 168–169.

⁵⁷⁸ . . . οὔτε λέγεται οὔτε νοεῖται οὔτε ἔστι τὸ σύνολόν τι τῶν ἄλλω συνενγνωσμένων, ὡς ὑπερούσιος, οὐδὲ ὑπό τινος οὐδαμῶς καθ’ ὅτιοῦν μετέχεται. *Amb.* 7.20; *DOML* 28, 100 (emphasis mine).

‘to something’⁵⁷⁹ can be envisioned as corresponding with the category of relation.’⁵⁸⁰ God, accordingly, is also imparticipable. In light of these caveats, the intercalation of Jesus Christ—the Incarnate Word of God—as the *ousia* of the virtues between two imparticipable divine referents (who are also the *ousia* of the virtues) is understandable.⁵⁸¹ Maximos likely identified the cognitive dissonance in claiming in the previous paragraph that the Logos is imparticipable, and in stating, immediately after, that the virtue in each person is the Logos of God. What matters here is that Maximos includes Jesus Christ in the equation and attributes to him the same title, “*ousia* of the virtues.”

The sequence Logos of God—Jesus Christ—God is illumined by Maximos’ well-known phrase in the next paragraph: “For the Logos of God, who is also God, wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of his embodiment.”⁵⁸² Here again the Logos of God and God appear together, but so does the concept of embodiment or incarnation.⁵⁸³ The most likely explanation for why Maximos carries on with these distinctions is to underscore the central role that Jesus Christ plays in the drama of salvation and deification.⁵⁸⁴ In effect, structurally that is precisely where Maximos puts him in the longer citation above. The imparticipable Logos of God wills to be incarnate in all things; this becomes fact in the person of Jesus Christ through whom the Logos can be Incarnate in all things and, concomitantly, through whom all things can participate in God and be elevated to deification. The sequence of the divine referents, in other words, reflects the sequence of salvation and deification.

We are still left with the question: what does it mean that Jesus Christ is the *ousia* of the virtues? The answer may not be self-evident. Perhaps the most intuitive interpretation of the phrase, “*ousia* of the virtues” is to interpret *ousia* as “essence,” understood as what Aristotle called τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι or, put differently, “what it means for *x* to be *x*.” This interpretation is not unlikely given Maximos’ further clarifications. First, he says that Jesus Christ is the virtues and they are not predicated of him in a qualified way as they are of other humans. That is, Jesus Christ is “wisdom itself” and “justice itself” and “holiness itself;” other humans are “wise,” “just,” and “holy.” Thus, it seems Maximos understands Jesus Christ as the essence in the sense of form (of the virtues) that is attributable to particulars, but none of which exhausts the absolute.⁵⁸⁵ Accordingly, this “essence” or “form” of virtue becomes instantiated in the virtuous.⁵⁸⁶ Second, the monastic intellectual claims that the virtuous “participate” in God. This phrase would again suggest that God is the form or essence of the virtues and that humans only have them by extension, that is, by participation. The same logic demands the conditionality of human virtue. Humans can be not virtuous. By contrast, what characterizes Jesus Christ, as we had seen in chapter four, is the unconditionality of his goodness and virtue through a

⁵⁷⁹ The fourth category of Aristotle. *Cat* 4, 1b27.

⁵⁸⁰ Ἀρχὴ πᾶσα καὶ μεσότης καὶ τέλος, εἰς ἅπαν τὴν σχετικὴν δι’ ὄλου κατηγορίαν οὐκ ἤρνηται: Θεὸς δὲ, καθόλου πάσης σχέσεως ὑπάρχων ἀπειράκις ἀπείρως ἀνώτερος, οὔτε ἀρχή, οὔτε μεσότης, οὔτε τέλος εἰκότως ἐστίν, οὐδέ τι τὸ σύνολον ἕτερον τῶν οἷς ἐνθεωρεῖσθαι κατὰ τὴν σχέσιν ἢ τοῦ πρὸς τι δύναται κατηγορίαν. *Th. Ec.* 1.7. PG 90.1085.

⁵⁸¹ See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 96–97, 460, and 474; Salés, “Divine Incarnation,” 166–169. Compare to Dionysios, *On the Divine Names*, chapters 5–6.

⁵⁸² Βούλεται γὰρ αἰεὶ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγος καὶ Θεὸς τῆς αὐτοῦ ἐνσωματώσεως ἐνεργεῖσθαι τὸ μυστήριον. *Amb.* 7.22; *DOML* 28, 106. See also Blowers, *Maximos the Confessor*, 73–78.

⁵⁸³ Contrast with the stark examples Maximos offers in *Difficulty* 33.2.

⁵⁸⁴ See Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy*, 205.

⁵⁸⁵ It is certainly true that Maximos has taken over, in part, Gregory’s idea that God is absolute virtue. Gregory expresses this idea in his *Life of Moses*, GNO 7.1, p. 4, ll. 10–15. Compare to Sheldon-Williams, “The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition,” in Armstrong, 502–503 and Blowers, “Maximos the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of Perpetual Progress,” 151–171.

⁵⁸⁶ See Salés, “Divine Incarnation,” 167–169.

thoroughly deified human will. Because Jesus Christ cannot be other than good on account of his deified will, he can be identified with the unconditional.

This interpretation satisfactorily explains everything except what it means that *Jesus Christ*—a human—is the “essence” (understood as form) of anything other than himself. We may grant that “God” or even the “Logos of God” can be “instantiated” in the virtuous. We might even grant that “Christ,” in some highly qualified sense, can be “instantiated” in the virtuous, as martyrologies often describe. But how can one particular human, Jesus Christ, be “instantiated” in any other human? Regardless of this apparent paradox—or perhaps contradiction—Maximos does not equivocate on this point: he explicitly refers to “our Lord Jesus Christ” in the passage from *Difficulty* 7.22 we are considering. No other term could more expressly refer to the humanity of the Incarnate Logos of God, which was in everything save sin identical to humankind. The interpretation of *ousia* as “essence,” understood as form, though partly illustrative, conceals a different and more radical aspect of Maximos’ Christology.

The express identification of God or of the Logos—let alone Jesus Christ—as the *ousia* of the virtues is unprecedented in Greek. We can hardly determine what the ascetic intellectual means by looking for a parallel expression in the writings of his predecessors. Gregory of Nyssa comes closest, when he refers, in the *Life of Moses*, to God as absolute virtue.⁵⁸⁷ It is not the same, however, to identify God and virtue and to call God (or any other divine referent) the *ousia* of the virtues. Only a few late ancient thinkers explore the relationship between *ousia* and virtue or the Platonic ideas and virtue and none of them is particularly illuminating for our discussion.⁵⁸⁸ The expression that God (or any divine person) is the substance of the virtues appears for the first time in Greek with Maximos. We are dealing, in brief, with a proposition that is peculiar to the Confessor. So, the question remains, how can a human be the *ousia* of the virtues? And what does *ousia* mean in this context if the explanation I have offered above is unsatisfactory?

In elucidating the Christology of Leontios of Jerusalem and Leontios of Byzantium,⁵⁸⁹ Maximos foregrounded his axiom that Jesus Christ’s human nature was enhypostatized in the Logos and accordingly encompassed the totality of human nature. Larchet has elucidated the implications of this Christological position: “Once enhypostatized, [Jesus’] human nature receives hypostatic particularities, but it receives them from the divine hypostasis, that which particularizes it, that is to say, distinguishes and differentiates it, but does not individualize it. The fact that the human nature of Christ does not have a human hypostasis but exists enhypostatized in the divine hypostasis of the

⁵⁸⁷ *Life of Moses*, GNO 7.1, p. 4, ll. 10–15.

⁵⁸⁸ (Pseudo-)Alexandros of Aphrodisias refers to the virtues as the telos of substance (understood as an individual) in his (spurious?) *Problems of Ethics*, p. 131, ll. 15–17. Elsewhere he denies that the virtues are *ousiai* (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, p. 88, l. 14), on which see also Syrianos’ *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, p. 183, ll. 31–34. Later in the same work Alexandros argues against the ideas or forms in relation to the virtues as *ousiai* (p. 823, ll. 4–8). The closest any author, to my knowledge, comes to discussing the “*ousia* of virtue” is Iamblichos, in the *Protreptikos*, p. 8, ll. 10–14 and Hierokles in the *Commentary on the Golden Pythagorean Verses*, 21.4, ll. 6–8. Syrianos (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* p. 114, ll. 4–5) and Damaskios (*Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* p. 122, ll. 27–28) both discuss how virtue *perfects* a substance, but here they both have in mind particular individuals in the Aristotelian sense of *ousia* and are not concerned with defining what the “essence” of virtue is. The closest, perhaps, that anyone comes to a similar identification around Maximos’ time is Ioannes of Skythopolis in his scholia on Dionysios’ works, where he writes that God is the *ousia* of the good (scholion to the *Divine Names* 144.1, l. 10).

⁵⁸⁹ See especially Leontios of Byzantium, *Nest. et Eutych.* PG 86.1280 and Adv. arg. Sev. PG 86.1945) and Leontios of Jerusalem *Adv. Nest.* 1.11; PG 86.1445 and 2.1; PG 86.1532.

Word, allows him to include in a certain way in itself all individuals encompassed by human nature.”⁵⁹⁰ What Larchet points to here is that Jesus Christ is not a composite of two hypostases, a divine and human hypostasis, but rather that the single hypostasis of Jesus Christ is the Logos of God, who has assumed all of human nature. The position Maximos espouses here is not simply that long encapsulated by Gregory of Nazianzos’ oft-quoted aphorism in the *Letter to Kledonios*, “what is not assumed is not healed;” rather, Maximos takes this theological tenet to its logical conclusion and sees in Christ’s assumption of the totality of human nature his assumption of the nature of each and every individual of the species. The Confessor doubtless means precisely this, since he uses himself as an example: “He [the Logos] assumed me whole (ὅλον) with what is mine.”⁵⁹¹

So, we return to the question at hand, what does it mean that Jesus Christ is the *ousia* of the virtues? In chapter three we had studied the conceptual richness of the term *ousia* in Aristotle and Maximos and we can extend those findings to our present discussion. One would be pressed to articulate a different interpretation of *ousia* in the case of the Logos and God that does not just mean “essence” in the Aristotelian sense of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι. But the case of Jesus Christ cannot have this restrictive sense, even if it is one of its senses. So, I would argue that *ousia* in the case of Jesus Christ also refers to his psychosomatic substrate. That is, Jesus Christ is the psychosomatic being, the body-soul entity, of virtue in an absolute, but embodied, sense. This much is clear in that both the Logos of God and God are the *ousia* of the virtues by derivation *because* Jesus Christ is the *ousia* of the virtues. That is the logical sequence in *Difficulty* 7.21, quoted above: the *ousia* of virtue in each person is the Logos of God *because* “our Lord Jesus Christ himself” is the *ousia* of the virtues; therefore, anyone who participates (first) in virtue (which is only possible through the psychosomatic complex that constitutes the human species) through a steady character state participates (second) in God.⁵⁹² Virtue must occur in a human substratum, given that it is a particular form of psychosomatic self-configuration. And this is why Jesus Christ must come first in the equation, the Logos and God second.

Jesus Christ is thus the ontological and ethical vinculum that in himself unifies humanity and divinity. Because he did not assume a human hypostasis but human nature whole, he is the substance or substrate (*ousia*) of the virtues in each human nature.⁵⁹³ That is, the virtuous just are Christ in substance or substrate, if not in hypostasis. We already saw that virtue is attributed to humans in a qualified way and to Jesus Christ in an absolute way. Ironically, the predicates of absolute virtue do not result from his divinity, but from his assumption of the whole human nature. In other words, because Jesus Christ has no human hypostasis, human nature as assumed and deified in himself extends to all humankind and is not individuated by a human hypostasis. The Logos of God, in turn, can take flesh in all of humanity on condition of virtue through his hypostatic union to human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. In this way the Logos of God is incarnated in the virtuous without violating either nature or hypostasis.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁰ “Une fois enhypostasiée la nature humaine reçoit des particularités hypostatiques, mais elle les reçoit de l’hypostase divine, ce qui la particularise, c’est-à-dire la distingue et la différencie mais ne l’individualise pas. Le fait que la nature humaine du Christ n’a pas d’hypostase humaine mais existe enhypostasiée dans l’hypostase divine du Verbe lui permet d’inclure d’une certaine façon en elle-même tous les individus qu’englobe la nature humaine.” Larchet, *La divinisation*, 371.

⁵⁹¹ ὅλον με προσλαβὼν μετὰ τῶν ἐμῶν. *Op.* 9; PG 91.128.

⁵⁹² See Salés, “Divine Incarnation,” 168–169.

⁵⁹³ For further instances where Maximos refers to Christ’s assumption of human nature in general see, *Op.* 3, PG 91.48B, 4, PG 91.61B, 7, PG 91.81CD, 8, PG 91.105C, 16, PG 91.189C, 20, PG 91.237A; *Thal* 61, CCSG 22, p. 91, ll. 106–108; *Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer*, 30, SC 250, p. 248, etc.

⁵⁹⁴ See *Difficulty* 5.24, 31.7, 42.26, and 63.2.

This interpretation of Maximos may be striking, but there is much in his corpus to support it. Throughout his works the Confessor reiterates the idea that God or the Logos of God takes body, form, or flesh in the virtuous.⁵⁹⁵ And it should not be otherwise, for human restoration should be an operation as if “from within”⁵⁹⁶ by virtue of which nature remains inviolate. For example, in the *Chapters on Theology*, the ascetic intellectual explains: “In Christ, since he is God and the Logos of the Father, *the whole fullness of divinity dwells in bodily form by ousia*;⁵⁹⁷ in us, however, the fullness of divinity dwells by grace whenever we gather all virtue . . . in ourselves.”⁵⁹⁸ Here Maximos again invokes Christ, God, and the Logos in the same breath that he does *ousia*, and unsurprisingly attributes the fact that “the fullness of divinity dwells” in us through grace to the virtues. The Confessor draws a direct link between Christ and the virtuous human, in both of whom *the fullness of divinity* dwells in bodily form. As before, the virtues form the bond that unites Christ and human.

Later in the same work, Maximos makes this bond explicit: “In the man engaged in the practical life, the Logos, being thickened by the ways of life of the virtues, becomes flesh.”⁵⁹⁹ The corporeality that virtues confer upon the Logos in a human subject is again noteworthy.⁶⁰⁰ Elsewhere, in the *Questions and Doubts*, Maximos offers an extended allegorical interpretation of the Logos’ body parts and makes this fascinating connection: “So, the body of the Logos is the substance (*ousia*) of the virtues, such as goodness, meekness, and the like.”⁶⁰¹ What is peculiar about this passage is the corporeality of the virtues; virtues, in other words, do not exist *ad abstractum*, but must always and in particular ways be instantiated in human hypostases. This idea is not inconsistent with the rest of Maximos’ theology, since we had already seen that the Logos of God wills to be embodied always and in all things. By his assumption of human nature whole, the Logos can be embodied in each instantiation of that nature. In other words, God *becomes* the flesh of every human whose nature is receptive to the divine by means of the virtues.⁶⁰² In such cases, Jesus Christ becomes the substance of the virtues as the substrate wherein they reside and are manifested in bodily form.⁶⁰³ All of human nature is the body and soul of the Incarnate Logos of God, but not every hypostasis is necessarily Christified, since Christification hinges on the human voluntary self-configuration on the divine pattern of Jesus Christ.⁶⁰⁴

2. The Paradox of Active Passivity and the Identity of Divine-Human Action

In the introduction to this chapter we noted that Maximos, despite his protestations to the contrary, seemed to eliminate human activity, even the volitional faculties, in deification. To address this difficulty, we must return to the same passage where the Confessor called the Logos, Jesus Christ, and

⁵⁹⁵ *Ambigua to Thomas*, prol. 2; *Ambigua to John*, 7.21–22; 10.2, 4, 9, 27, 35, 41, 85, 119; 48.6; *Qu. Thal.* 8; *CCSG* 7, 77.6–15, etc.

⁵⁹⁶ See Larchet, *La divinisation de l’homme*, 227.

⁵⁹⁷ Colossians 2:9.

⁵⁹⁸ Ἐν μὲν τῷ Χριστῷ, Θεῶ ὄντι καὶ Λόγῳ τοῦ Πατρὸς, ὅλον κατ’ οὐσίαν οἰκεῖ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς· ἐν ἡμῖν δὲ κατὰ χάριν οἰκεῖ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος, ἡνίκα πᾶσαν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀθροίσωμεν . . . ἀρετὴν. *Th. Ec.* 2.21; PG 90.1133. See also Larchet, *La divinisation de l’homme*, 469.

⁵⁹⁹ Ἐν μὲν πρακτικῶ τοῖς τῶν ἀρετῶν τρόποις παχυνόμενος ὁ Λόγος γίνεται σὰρξ. *Th. Ec.* 2.37. PG 90.1141.

⁶⁰⁰ See Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 58.

⁶⁰¹ *Questions and Doubts*, section 191, l. 54.

⁶⁰² Compare to Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 190–191.

⁶⁰³ Compare to Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 215–216.

⁶⁰⁴ See *Difficulty* 6.3 and 7.31–32.

God the substance of the virtues. Following the threefold progression that we examined, Maximos describes what happens to him who participates in God through a steady character state:

... he has sincerely and by deliberate choice cultivated the natural seed of the good and has shown the end to be identical to the beginning and the beginning to the end, and better yet, that beginning and end are identical, since he has become a genuine advocate of God (given that the goal of each thing is believed to be its beginning and end—the former as that wherefrom he has received being and participation in the good, and the latter as conforming to it [i.e., beginning]); by *gnome* and by deliberate choice he has completed through diligence the praiseworthy course that undeviatingly leads to it [i.e., beginning]; accordingly, he becomes God, receiving from God to be God, because to the beauty that belongs to the *image* by nature he, by deliberate choice, has added the *likeness* by means of the virtues through both the natural ascent and affinity to his own beginning.⁶⁰⁵

Maximos includes *gnome* and deliberate choice as intrinsic to the “praiseworthy course” that leads to God by cultivating the “natural seed of the good.” This last phrase is similar to the Confessor’s assertion in the *Disputation with Pyrrhos* that virtue is natural to humans and can be revealed through ascetic practice.⁶⁰⁶ And here, as in *Pyrrhos*, the risk recurs that deification (if the virtues are deifying) may result from human effort. Maximos does little to discourage this interpretation. He expressly says that humans are able through *gnome* and deliberate choice to complete the praiseworthy course that leads to God. But he does not quite articulate the relationship between *gnome* and deliberate choice and the subsequent step, “becoming God.” The lack of clarity may be attributed to the words that follow, καθ’ ὅν, which I have idiomatically rendered as “accordingly” to reflect their ambiguous character.

There are two possible interpretations of this ambiguity and neither discourages misreading Maximos as claiming that deification results from human action. First, καθ’ ὅν might refer to the only likely grammatical antecedent, δρόμον (course). This interpretation is supported by the translations that both Robert Louis Wilken and Fr. Maximos Constas provide of the passage. Wilken renders it “And through this course one becomes God”⁶⁰⁷ and Fr. Maximos “Having completed his course, such a person becomes God.”⁶⁰⁸ If so, the Confessor could be interpreted as saying that when the human completes the course, the human becomes God *as a result of* completing the course, which is manifestly the consequence of human effort. On this reading, it is simply unclear where human action ends and divine action begins or which action is responsible for what—this uncertainty is rooted in the verb, γίγνομαι, which needs to specify no active agent, only the subject of transformation. Thus, is deification just completion of the course? That is, is deification obtained when the course is complete, like a trophy for running well? Or is deification a natural potential attainable by human effort? Undoubtedly, Maximos would disagree with either proposition.

The second alternative is both grammatically unlikely, and theologically hardly any better than the first. On this count, καθ’ ὅν, where ὅν is taken as a neuter (rather than masculine) relative pronoun, could refer to the entire preceding phrase as its antecedent, as if saying, “in accordance with everything that we have said above.” Grammatically, this would be unusual. And conceptually, it hardly relaxes

⁶⁰⁵ *Diff* 7.21.

⁶⁰⁶ See Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 121–122 and 217; Larchet, *La divinisation*, 382.

⁶⁰⁷ Wilken and Blowers, *Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 59.

⁶⁰⁸ Constas, *Difficulties*, DOML 28, 105.

the tension, since the basic drift of the preceding phrase is virtually the same as in the first interpretation: by *gnome* and deliberate choice one completes the praiseworthy course that leads to the beginning, that is, to God. Here, again, the lines between human and divine agency with regard to deification are blurred. My take on this passage is that Maximos did not anticipate that someone would misunderstand his argument, because proposing that divinity can be attained through the realization of one's natural potentialities would be incoherent. For this reason, he says with detectable irritation as he boards the topic in *Opuscule 1* (about fifteen years later) that in this passage "the sense (λόγος) is clear."⁶⁰⁹ And yet, his realization that the words in question lent themselves to this unplanned ambiguity can be detected as he incisively and repeatedly iterates that deification is neither the result of the natural realization of a human potentiality nor the reward for good deeds, as we saw in chapter three. In this sense, *Opuscule 1* reiterates the same argument that he had already expressed in *Difficulty 20.2–3*.

The clue to explicating this passage lies in Maximos' following addition, that humans "receive from God to be God." This verb can signify two different forms of agency. Transactions that involve "receiving" usually involve an active giver and a passive recipient. Here, naturally, God is the active agent who bestows deification, humans the passive subjects who receive it.⁶¹⁰ Nevertheless, I would argue that God's conferral of deification does not minimize or eliminate the significance of human involvement. It is one thing to claim that humans *deserve* deification or that they *actualize* deification as a natural potentiality of their substance and another that humans must *prepare to receive* deification. Maximos hints at human involvement in the deified state in *Difficulty 7.11* and *7.21*, cited above, by referring to the role that deliberate choice plays. While he writes that the activity belongs to God and to those worthy of God, or rather, only to God, this last addition does not, as I will show, minimize the relevance of human action for attaining deification.⁶¹¹ As he considers the case of Paul, Maximos underscores the apostle's transcendence of all cognitive activity and his attainment to a steady spiritual state that was followed by his passive experiencing of the "assumption" to the third heaven.

Larchet has eased the foregoing tension by articulating the two-sided dimension of deification that consists in the Logos of God willing always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of his embodiment but doing so only in the worthy.⁶¹² According to him, there is no contradiction in Maximos' belief that God will be, in Paul's words, "all in all" but also that he only takes a body in the worthy, because God's presence in the unworthy does not mean his energy is active in them. Rather, he attributes this dissonance to the difference implicit in nature being deified *totaliter*, and the individual hypostasis that instantiates nature rejecting the operative capacity that its nature, deified in Christ, offers it as a possibility.

Therefore, being the recipient of deification does not entirely cancel out the necessity of human action. Being "worthy of God" presupposes a preformed capacity to undergo deification. This preformed capacity originates in the free exercise of the human volitional faculties. Maximos makes this much clear in *Difficulty 7.11* and *7.21*, where he explicitly identifies self-determination, *gnome*, and/or deliberate choice as the psychological faculties by which humans configure themselves to

⁶⁰⁹ Op 1, PG 91.33A. See also Conostas, *Difficulty 7*, n. 16.

⁶¹⁰ See Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 132 and especially 138–139, 148–169.

⁶¹¹ Compare to Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 170–171.

⁶¹² Larchet, *La divinisation*, 474 and especially 659, see footnote 84. See *Difficulty 7.11* and *7.21–22*; compare also to *Thalassios 22*, CCSG 7, p. 143, ll. 102–104 and *Thalassios 62*, CCSG 22, p. 135, ll. 301–306.

receive deification.⁶¹³ Concurrently, this means that God does not deify humans against their wills. Rather, the degree to which one is deified is contingent upon one's virtuous and self-configured receptivity to the divine energy. Maximus suggests these degrees again in his exegesis of Paul's rapture to heaven in *Difficulty* 20, as well as the psychological dispositions at play.⁶¹⁴ And yet, we should be clear that being virtuous is not identical to deification, nor does virtue realize a natural potential by which one becomes divine; rather, virtue configures the self in such a way as to be receptive to deification, as Paul was according to Maximus. We might say that virtue is a necessary but insufficient condition for deification. The sufficient condition is the Logos' gracious self-giving in the Incarnation and subsequent embodiment in the virtuous who can receive him.⁶¹⁵

These findings lead us to consider the paradox of passive activity. From the foregoing it is clear that humans play a role in deification, even if it is not active understood as an operation of the self on the self that results in deification. Rather, humans are passive in the sense that they receive deification; they do not deify themselves, nor do they naturally realize deification as a potentiality of their substance.⁶¹⁶ But humans are active inasmuch as they are responsible for the virtuous self-configuration through which they can undergo deification. In this light, it is clear what Maximus means in claiming that virtues are natural in the *Disputation with Pyrrhos*.⁶¹⁷ Humans have the natural capacity, not for deification, but for reaching the state, by according to nature through virtue, in which they can undergo deification. Even though this state is not an action, but rather a condition or character state (ἕξις) that renders the human receptive to deification, that does not mean it is not voluntary nor that the human is not actively responsible for it.

At this stage, we must recollect Aristotle's argument, overviewed in the previous chapter, that persons are responsible not only for their actions, but for the voluntary character states from which their actions originate and which their actions themselves create. Let us look at Aristotle's argument again. First, he writes that "And if it is up to us to do good things and bad things, and likewise not to do [them], and this is [what it means] to be good or bad [persons], consequently being upright and wicked is up to us."⁶¹⁸ He offers the example of those who commit legal offenses on the basis of their character states and argues that: "But they themselves are responsible (αἴτιοι) for having become such a kind [of person], since they live carelessly, and for being unjust or undisciplined; some acting wickedly, others leading [their lives] in binge drinking (πότοις) and the like, for the activities make everyone such as they are. This is clear on [the example] of those who are training for whatever contest or performance: they spend [their time] practicing."⁶¹⁹ Aristotle's point is that the voluntary does not refer solely to individual actions, but, because actions are voluntary and the repetition of voluntary actions forms character states, that character states are themselves voluntary by extension.

Maximos assumes a similar version of Aristotle's notion of the voluntary. Even if deification is not a human activity, undergoing deification still implies human voluntary consent, since deification operates through the human character states that are developed by the exercise of the volitional faculties. The ascetic intellectual clarifies this idea in *Difficulty* 7.26–27. Here he is speaking about three

⁶¹³ Compare to Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 159–165.

⁶¹⁴ See *Difficulty* 20.2–4. See also Larchet, *La divinisation*, 480 and 583.

⁶¹⁵ See Blower's fascinating exposition of this theme in relation to Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of the gift. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 257–258.

⁶¹⁶ See *Op.* 1, 91.33A–36A and *Difficulty* 20.2–4.

⁶¹⁷ See *Pyrrhos*, PG 91.309B. Compare with Tollefsen's commentary in *Christocentric Cosmology*, 121–122.

⁶¹⁸ *Nikomachean Ethics* 1113b12–14.

⁶¹⁹ *Nik Eth* 1114a4–10.

modes of understanding deification: as pleasure, passivity (or susceptibility), and joy. We will focus on the second. Concerning passivity, Maximos writes: “And [it is called] passivity (πεῖσειν), since it is an ecstatic power (ἐκστατικὴν δύναμιν) that makes the passive active (πρὸς τὸ ποιῶν τὸ πάσχον ἄγουσαν).”⁶²⁰ Fr. Maximos Constatas has already identified the Aristotelian subtext of this passage in his edition, pointing to *On the Soul* 425b–426a, where the Peripatetic discusses the various sensory capacities of the soul and the ways in which these become active through external factors.

This particular formulation of active passivity—though Aristotle only considered it from a biopsychological perspective—attracted the attention of a number of late Platonists and of Dionysios the Areopagite. For these thinkers, the soul could acquire a certain form of suitability or fitness (ἐπιτηδειότης) that enabled it to receive the divine,⁶²¹ whereas for Dionysios, it commonly referred to an ability to participate in existence in a way appropriate to each being.⁶²² Maximos continued this tradition by paradoxically attributing an active role to the passive. For this reason, he finds a logical (though not ontological) line of continuity between human action (of self-configuration that disposes the self to receive the divine) and divine action (that confers deification upon those capable of receiving it), without confusing the two activities.⁶²³ Immediately following, in 7.27, he adduces as an example the familiar image of iron in the forge. According to this metaphor, the fire makes the iron “active.” The iron does not by nature burn, but by proximity to the flame (i.e., through a virtuous character state) it exercises the same activity as the fire, even if it is, in another sense, the passive recipient of the heat that it is capable of receiving. Accordingly, when humans undergo deification, they play a part in it inasmuch as they are the voluntarily self-constituted subject wherein deification takes place in and through their virtuous character states.⁶²⁴ And through deification they are elevated to the status of an active agent, where their activity is identical to God’s, just as fire and red-hot iron are identical in the action of burning.

For Maximos, the divine-human identity of action was more than metaphorical. We have now laid the ontological and Christological foundations for the possibility of identity of divine-human action, but should explore further the embodied dynamics that Maximos envisions as constituting this dialectic. A telling passage can be found in his *Chapters on Theology* 1.57, which reads: “Knowing the sixth day to be the symbol of the accomplishment of the practical life, let us fulfill every requirement of the deeds of virtue in it in such a way that the passage ‘and God saw as many things as he did, and look, they were very good’ might also be said of us.” In this highly allegorical passage, Maximos explicitly identifies, through a citation from the opening creation sequence in Genesis 1, the action of God and the virtuous actions of humans. When humans act in accordance with virtue, their action is identical to the divine action.

In *Difficulty* 8.4, Maximos applies this idea to the inequality that exists in the world. God does not intervene in the world to change inequality, Maximos tells us, not because he is reticent—he wills always and in all things to be embodied—but because humans fail to embody the divine in themselves through virtue. Elsewhere, in *Questions and Answers to Thalassios*, Maximos boards a similar idea when prompted to interpret John 5:17: “My Father until now is working and I am working.” God has not

⁶²⁰ *Diff* 7.27, DOML 28, p. 114.

⁶²¹ See Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 37–39. Especially important here are Iamblichos (*On the Mysteries* 105.1), Proklos (*Elements of Theology* 132, *Platonic Theology* 69), and Damaskios (*Doubts and Solutions* 1.27.9–10).

⁶²² See *Divine Names*, p. 148, ll. 17–18.

⁶²³ See Tollefsen’s detailed discussion in *Christocentric Cosmology*, 138–169.

⁶²⁴ Compare to *Difficulty* 6.3.

only brought the world into existence, according to the Confessor, but is also seeking to gather back together all things in himself by overcoming *gnomic* difference (γνωμικὴν διαφορὰν).⁶²⁵ When *gnomic* difference is overcome, the grace that can deify all things is made manifest and “through it God becomes a human (δι’ ἣν γενόμενος ἄνθρωπος ὁ Θεός).”⁶²⁶ It is especially important to highlight in this passage that the Confessor attributes the operating grace to the divine *in* the human. Thus, in both of these instances we see that for Maximos the identity of divine and human action in deification is not simply an anticipated eschatological factum, but an existential dimension of this life. This brings us to our final question.

3. Evermoving Rest: An Eschatological Reflection of Virtue?

What relationship is there between this world and the next, between virtue in this life and the human condition in the next? Some insinuations to this question can be found in *Questions and Answers to Thalassios* 22. This question receives a relatively brief response that elucidates 1 Cor 10:11 by asking “If in the upcoming ages God will show us his wealth, how is it that we have encountered the end of the ages?” Maximos’ strategy is to divide the “ages” in two: the first age leads to the incarnation of God, the second to human deification. These two ages, as Maximos expositis them, evidence spatio-temporal aspects and are related to history, but history and the ages are not entirely coextensive.⁶²⁷ The two ages also refer to a singular movement of divine condescension and human deification that crisscrosses the fabric of time and eternity.⁶²⁸ Accordingly, human deification and divine incarnation are coterminous. When the divine is instantiated in the human and the human instantiates the divine, the chasm between created and uncreated, between heaven and earth is bridged. Even so, these instantiations are partial and occur only when humanity incarnates the divine through virtue. The implication seems to be that there is, as it were, a “final” stage that is the fulfillment of these partial occurrences.

In *Chapters on Theology* 1.51–60, Maximos investigates the relationship between deeds, virtue, and a finality to human action, understood both as an end that is sought out and as the terminus of action. This decade is especially difficult because the Confessor articulates the relationship between deeds done in this world and their repercussions for the afterlife through a multilayered allegorical interpretation of Israel’s inheritance of the Promised Land in tandem with an expanded version of the Genesis creation narrative. It is likely that the Confessor’s allegorization of this speculative subject is a deliberate strategy to avoid hard lines of eschatological demarcation, as he does in other works more explicitly.⁶²⁹ Here we will limit ourselves to chapters 1.51–55, which form a tight-knit unit.

Maximos begins the decade thus: “The sixth day, according to Scripture, presents the completion of beings [that are] subject to nature; the seventh circumscribes the motion of what is of a temporal character; and the eighth hints at the manner of the condition beyond nature and time” (1.51). Here the sixth day alludes to the opening creation sequence of Genesis, which ends with the completion of all existing things. The seventh day, the day on which God rested, similarly suggests the necessary ontological limits of all things that have come into being by pointing to the end of their natural

⁶²⁵ *Thal* 2, l. 17.

⁶²⁶ *Thal* 2, l. 21.

⁶²⁷ See Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 58 and 67.

⁶²⁸ I have made a similar point before: see Salés, *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*, p. 26. See also Cooper, *Holy Flesh*, 99.

⁶²⁹ For his own reticence to make “categorical assertions,” see *Difficulty* 71.5.

motion.⁶³⁰ We should note here that Maximos is intimately linking time and motion in a way that calls Aristotle's *Physics* to mind.⁶³¹ The point is to introduce a terminus of creaturely motion that assumes the dialectic between the first mover and all subsequently moved beings. Finally, the eighth day is a vague placeholder for what happens to creatures once they have ceased from their natural motion.⁶³² Maximos will elucidate the eighth day in the following chapters.

Maximos continues: "He who carries out the sixth day only in accord with the Law, fleeing the tyranny of the passions actively oppressing the soul, crosses fearlessly through the sea into the desert, keeping the Sabbath by rest from the passions only. But he who crosses the Jordan, also leaving behind this very state that rests only from the passions, comes into the inheritance of the virtues" (1.52). This chapter marks a slight shift away from the Genesis creation narrative and allegorically considers what the results of adhering solely to the Law are. He presents this state that only rests from the passions or vices as incomplete, needing yet to cross over into the Promised Land through the Jordan. It is there that one "comes into the inheritance of the virtues." It is possible that Maximos is making a psychological distinction here between simple observance of the Law as a helpful, but not altogether satisfactory, strategy of self-configuration and virtue as a more developed modality of self-transformation that enables human reception of the divine in the "Promised Land."

This interpretation is confirmed in the following chapter, where the Confessor presents the Gospel as the completion of the Law and the perfection of the human on a higher level: "He who carries out the sixth day in accord with the Gospel, having already mortified the first motions of sin, through virtue reaches the state of *apatheia*, deserted by every vice; he keeps the Sabbath in the mind, even from the very simple impression of the passions. But he who has crossed the Jordan is transferred into the land of knowledge, wherein the mind, a temple mystically built by peace, becomes the abode of God in the Spirit" (1.53). It is clear here that Maximos considers the Gospel to take the believer further than the Law. First, this person is able to mortify the "first motions of sin" and even to reach the state of *apatheia*. This person goes beyond the one described in 1.52, who only rests from the passions but does not altogether transcend them in the mind. Second, the Sabbath of this person is not just a rest from the passions, but it is a rest of the mind itself that is even beyond "the very simple impression of the passions." The importance for the cessation of noetic activities will soon become apparent. Thus, the person who lives in accordance with the Gospel can enter the Promised Land; there, that person's mind becomes the residence of God in the Spirit through peace.⁶³³

The next two chapters are the culmination of the themes that the decade handles. The Confessor writes:

He who divinely has completed the sixth day in himself with presentable deeds and thoughts, and who with God rightly has concluded his deeds, has transcended in his understanding every subsisting thing subject to nature and time and has transposed himself into the mystical contemplation of the ages and eternal things. He is keeping the Sabbath not knowing with his

⁶³⁰ Compare with *Difficulty* 10.41–44, 17.3 and 9, and 20.5.

⁶³¹ See Aristotle, *Physics* 218b21–222a9. Compare to Plato, *Timaios* 38a–c; Plotinos, *Enneads* 3.7.2; Dionysios the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 10.3, PTS 33, pp. 214–216. See also Maximos, *Difficulty* 10.73 and *Thalassios* 65, CCSG 22, p. 285, ll. 532–4.

⁶³² See further, Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 173–175; Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 318–319; Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology*, 92.

⁶³³ Here Maximos is likely punning on the name of Solomon (peaceful), who built the first temple in Jerusalem. Special thanks to Fr. Joshua Lollar who first pointed out this parallel.

mind, in the total abandonment and transcendence of beings. And he who has also been deemed worthy of the eighth resurrects from the dead, I mean, from all things after God, sense-perceptible and intelligible, words and thoughts, and lives the blessed life of God—since he is both called and is life in the true and proper sense—so much so that he even becomes God by deification (1.54).

The first two lines resume some of the themes we had previously covered, and especially the idea that the virtuous who act with “presentable deeds and thoughts” act just as God (“with God rightly has concluded his deeds”). But what is striking here is that this person is capable of transposing himself into the “mystical contemplation of the ages and eternal things.” The idea here is that such a human has come to know the *logoi* of beings and no longer sees the world as it is familiar to us, but rather, sees God in all things through their *logoi*. This interpretation is based on Maximos’ identification of the *logoi* as the eternal principles behind existence that can only be seen “mystically,” an idea that had surfaced earlier in the *Chapters on Theology* 1.49–50.

What follows in this chapter, however, is striking. Now, this person keeps the Sabbath by not knowing with the mind. Dionysian echoes, particularly from the *Mystical Theology*, are clearly audible here.⁶³⁴ There is more, however. It appears that Maximos has reintroduced the idea that the human can only undergo deification through an utter passivity that entails—or rather, results precisely from—the *gnomic* surrender, as he claimed in *Difficulty* 7.11. Because the divine cannot be apprehended by the senses, or even the intellect,⁶³⁵ the only manner of union with the divine is through susceptibility to it; noetically, it is only possible by the cessation of the intellect’s natural activity.⁶³⁶ This state of utter passivity opens, in turn, the way to—but does not directly bring about—deification.⁶³⁷ Only those who keep the Sabbath in the mind are susceptible to deification on the eighth day. And yet, there is an express continuity between the eighth day and the sixth. Maximos implies that those worthy of the eighth day are those who have “rightly concluded their deeds with God.” This phrase signals the familiar idea of divine-human identity of action we have previously analyzed.⁶³⁸ Finally, the context suggests that deification, or the eighth day, is both a direct continuation of God’s creative activity as begun in Genesis 1 and 2 and its exaltation to a higher state that is not contained in nature.

Maximos interprets these ideas for us in the next chapter: “The sixth day is the absolute fulfillment of practical natural activities concerning virtue; the seventh is the completion and cessation of all natural contemplative concepts concerning ineffable knowledge; and the eighth is the transposition and transcendence to deification of the worthy” (1.55). Here the parallel between God’s completion of his creative activities in Genesis 1 and humanity’s completion of the activities concerned with virtue recurs. As concerns the seventh day, the Confessor corroborates that it brings about the complete cessation of noetic activity, as seen in the previous chapter. Curiously, however, he cautions in this same chapter that: “Not one of the heavenly or earthly powers will be able to know such things in any way at all before experiencing passivity, except for the blessed divinity itself, maker of these things” (1.55). This passage insinuates again a final condition that comes to term due to passivity. And yet, we have previously noted that Maximos does not entirely consider this passivity without activity. How does he explain the tension?

⁶³⁴ See Dionysios, *Mystical Theology* 5.

⁶³⁵ See *Difficulty* 20.2–3.

⁶³⁶ See *Difficulty* 15.8 for an in-depth explanation of this dynamic.

⁶³⁷ See Blowers, “Maximus and Gregory,” 161–162.

⁶³⁸ Compare also with *Difficulty* 65.2–3.

The Confessor’s eschatological vision may be closely associated with his paradox of “evermoving rest,” which occurs in several works. For our purposes, two passages are especially relevant. In one segment of *Questions and Answers to Thalassios* 59, Maximos interprets what the phrase, inspired in 1 Peter 1:9 “The *salvation* of the *souls* is properly *the end of faith*” means. This phrase leads him to an extensive chain of definitions defined by other definitions. I have indexed this citation by definitional sequences to facilitate commentary:

(1) And the end of faith is the true revelation of the one believed in; (2) and the true revelation of the one believed in is the ineffable interpenetration of the one believed in in proportion to the faith in each; (3) and the interpenetration of the one believed in is ascent of the believers to the beginning that is in accordance with the end; (4) and the ascent of the believers to the proper beginning in accordance with the end is the fulfillment of longing; (5) and the fulfillment of longing is the evermoving rest of those longing around that which is longed after.⁶³⁹

Several points of clarification are in order. The first sequence introduces the virtue in question, faith, and claims that its end is the revelation of God (the one believed in). Perhaps Maximos means that faith passes away,⁶⁴⁰ though it seems more likely that “end” refers to the objective of faith, as Sherwood has suggested about Maximos’ linguistic usage in a different context.⁶⁴¹ The second sequence gives weight to this interpretation, because faith is the means by which God subsequently interpenetrates believers.⁶⁴² Some earlier themes recur here. Specifically, God’s interpenetration of believers presupposes their passivity; nevertheless, their passivity does not invalidate their actions, such as those that lead to the virtue of faith. The importance of actions is reflected in that God interpenetrates the worthy in proportion to their faith.⁶⁴³ Here, as elsewhere, Maximos upholds the importance of both poles in deification, human and divine; their interdependence is strict.⁶⁴⁴

The fourth sequence calls to mind some of the themes in *Difficulty* 7, such as the contradiction of the Origenist scheme of rest—motion—origin. Like in *Difficulty* 7, Maximos thinks that rest is only possible in the presence of the object of one’s longing. One, however, does not simply come to rest. Rather, the Confessor speaks in the fifth sequence of a paradoxical “evermoving rest.” In the absence of this paradox, it would seem reasonable to suppose that one could tire or come to satiety. Gregory of Nyssa had famously expressed the idea of an eternal *epektasis* in response to satiety in his *Life of Moses*. Maximos retains the element of eternal motion that staves off satiety, but also embraces rest as a logical correlate of nature.⁶⁴⁵ So, on the one hand, all beings reach their natural creaturely limits and come to rest. On the other hand, due to their preformed (virtuous) character states—in this passage

⁶³⁹ τέλος δὲ πίστεως ἐστὶν ἢ τοῦ πιστευθέντος ἀληθῆς ἀποκάλυψις· ἀληθῆς δὲ τοῦ πιστευθέντος ἐστὶν ἀποκάλυψις ἢ κατὰ ἀναλογίαν τῆς ἐν ἐκάστῳ πίστεως ἄρρητος τοῦ πεπιστευμένου περιχώρησις· περιχώρησις δὲ τοῦ πεπιστευμένου καθέστηκεν ἢ πρὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν κατὰ τὸ τέλος τῶν πεπιστευκόντων ἐπάνοδος· ἢ δὲ πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν κατὰ τὸ τέλος τῶν πεπιστευκόντων ἐπάνοδος ἐστὶν ἢ τῆς ἐφέσεως πλήρωσις· ἐφέσεως δὲ πλήρωσις ἐστὶν ἢ περὶ τὸ ἐφετὸν τῶν ἐφιεμένων ἀεικίνητος στάσις· *Thal* 59, ll. 123–131

⁶⁴⁰ See *Difficulty* 21.8–9.

⁶⁴¹ See Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, 95. See also *Difficulty* 15.6–7, but contrast with *Op.* 20, PG 91.228B. Compare also to Riou, *Le monde et l’Église*, 53.

⁶⁴² See also *Difficulty* 7.32, 10.32 and 48, and 31.2.

⁶⁴³ See *Difficulty* 7.16, 10.85, 21.16. Compare to Dionysios, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* 6.3.6, PTS, pp. 119–120, *Celestial Hierarchies* 7.2 (PTS, pp. 28–29), and *Divine Names* 4.1 (PTS, p. 144, ll. 3–5).

⁶⁴⁴ See also *Difficulty* 42.17.

⁶⁴⁵ See *Difficulty* 15.8–10 for further elucidation of this theme.

faith specifically—humans undergo eternal motion around the subject of their longing, God.⁶⁴⁶ Further, the motion they undergo belongs to them as the subjects wherein it occurs and which their virtuous self-configuration makes possible by rendering the self susceptible to the divine.

The next five sequences bear out these dynamics:

(6) and evermoving rest is the both continuous and unintermittent enjoyment of that which is longed after; (7) and the continuous and unintermittent enjoyment is participation in the divine things beyond nature; (8) and participation in the divine things beyond nature is the likeness of the participants to that which is participated in; (9) and the likeness of the participants to that which is participated in is the participants' identity of activity received through likeness to that itself which is participated in; (10) and the participants' identity of activity received through likeness to that which is participated in is the deification of those deemed worthy of deification.⁶⁴⁷

In the sixth sequence, Maximus tells us that the eternal aspect of “evermoving” derives from the “continuous and unintermittent enjoyment” of what humans long after. In speaking about “enjoyment,” the Confessor implies the psychological disposition of a human that conditions the experience of God as “enjoyable” (or its contrary).⁶⁴⁸ Here, then, we see that the virtuous character states that humans develop over the course of their lives are of great importance for the afterlife. By extension, it does not seem that the Confessor would leave much space for a “change of heart,” so to speak, in the afterlife. Because humans have ceased from any natural activity and only undergo the divine energy in themselves—Maximos is unequivocal on this point, there appears to be no real opportunity for changing one's character states to alter the positive or negative experience of the divine. If there is to be a universal hypostatic deification, its conditions must somehow be met before the natural cessation of individual, hypostatic activity.⁶⁴⁹ The Confessor, however, rarely entertains such speculative possibilities, so any conclusion will at best be tentative.

The next four sequences establish the link between enjoyment of the divine, participation in the divine, likeness to the divine, and becoming the divine. This sequence will be familiar from our earlier analyses of the *Difficulties*. These four sequences (onto)logically follow each other. To be in the state where one enjoys the divine is to participate in that which is beyond nature; to participate in what is beyond nature results in likeness to the divine.⁶⁵⁰ Here, as before, Maximus links human and divine activity through their mutual similarity. This identity of activity, in turn, just is deification. The Confessor identifies deification more expressly here than elsewhere with the divine activity—or energy—at work in those who participate in God. In this way he can account for the eternity of action that undergirds this paradoxical state of evermoving rest: “rest” refers to the cessation of every natural

⁶⁴⁶ Compare to *Difficulty* 10.10, 32, and 106–116, 13.3, and 21.5.

⁶⁴⁷ ἀεικίνητος δὲ στάσις ἐστὶν ἢ τοῦ ἐφετοῦ διηνεκῆς τε καὶ ἀδιάστατος ἀπόλαυσις· ἀπόλαυσις δὲ διηνεκῆς καὶ ἀδιάστατος ἢ τῶν ὑπὲρ φύσιν θεῶν καθέστηκε μέθεξις· μέθεξις δὲ τῶν ὑπὲρ φύσιν θεῶν ἐστὶν ἢ πρὸς τὸ μετεχόμενον τῶν μετεχόντων ὁμοίωσις· ἢ δὲ πρὸς τὸ μετεχόμενον τῶν μετεχόντων ὁμοίωσις ἐστὶν ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειαν πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ μετεχόμενον τῶν μετεχόντων δι' ὁμοιότητος ἐνδεχομένη ταυτότης· ἢ δὲ τῶν μετεχόντων ἐνδεχομένη κατ' ἐνέργειαν δι' ὁμοιότητος πρὸς τὸ μετεχόμενον ταυτότης ἐστὶν ἢ θέωσις τῶν ἀξιουμένων θεώσεως· *Thal* 59, ll. 131–141.

⁶⁴⁸ See especially in this regard *Difficulty* 10.108.

⁶⁴⁹ Compare to Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 251–252, von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy* (trans. Daley), 358, and Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 183.

⁶⁵⁰ Compare to Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 168–169.

human activity; “evermoving” refers to the never-ending operation of God in those worthy of God. What is significant here is that this activity belongs properly to God but becomes the activity of humans by extension inasmuch as they have configured themselves to be no different than God save in substance.

In *Thalassios* 65, Maximus puts the paradox of evermoving rest in cosmological perspective. Here, all beings subject to creation, and thus to motion, must also come to a standstill. He claims: “For this reason, nature (since it exists temporally in the cosmos) has altering change due to the terminal rest of the cosmos and to the tendency of time to alteration; and when it [nature] comes to be in God, on account of the natural singularity of him in whom it has come to be, it [nature] will have an evermoving rest and a stability of identical motion, coming to be eternally around what is identical and one and unique, which [rest/stability] reason knows to be the immediate, steady foundation around the first cause of those things made by him [i.e., God].”⁶⁵¹ In this passage, Maximus zooms out in order to attribute the finitude of nature to the limitations of all creaturely existence. All nature must come to rest because it is ontologically circumscribed by its own insufficiency.

What is especially salient about this passage is that Maximus qualifies evermoving rest further through an apposite phrase: evermoving rest is a rest that is ever in motion by means of the identity of nature’s activity to God’s activity. It is clear that the Confessor has in view deified nature (specifically within the human agent), wherein the divine activity is operative. As before, however, the activity of (human) nature is not, strictly, its own, since it has fully come to rest and occurs, as it were, from without. Rather, activity is attributed to human nature for the two reasons we have previously proposed: it takes place in a human as its subject and it does so through *gnomic* inclination to do what the divine wills. Humans thus conform their wills completely to the natural, deified will of Jesus Christ by which humans become Christ, the substance of the virtues, and say: “Yet not as I will, but as you.” The final point we must consider is how Maximus came to the conclusion of an “evermoving rest.”

While Maximus developed this idea in part as a response to Origenism, its complexity presupposes a wider theological vision that was not constrained to the Origenist controversy, a point Tollefsen has already partially made.⁶⁵² Rather, I would argue that the paradox of evermoving rest is a natural continuation of the dynamism that characterizes virtue in this life. On this reading, the condition of evermoving rest is the (eschatological) conclusion of the dialectics of virtue by which one is assimilated and becomes susceptible to the divine activity, that is, to deification.

In *Chapters on Theology* 1.35, partially analyzed in chapter four, the Confessor contrasts the finality of nature with the endlessness of virtue: “Whatever things exist in time are being fashioned in accordance with time and, having been perfected, they are brought to a standstill, thereby having ceased from growth according to nature. Whatever things God’s science effects in the realm of virtue, when they have been perfected, they move again for increase, for their ends have established the starting points of further ends.”⁶⁵³ In chapter four, we had already explained the tension inherent in further perfecting something perfected. What is important to us about this passage is its reference to

⁶⁵¹ Διόπερ ἐν μὲν τῷ κόσμῳ ὑπάρχουσα χρονικῶς ἡ φύσις ἀλλοιωτὴν ἔχει τὴν κίνησιν διὰ τὴν τοῦ κόσμου πεπερασμένην στάσιν καὶ τὴν καθ’ ἑτεροίωσιν τοῦ χρόνου φορὰν, ἐν δὲ τῷ θεῷ γινομένη, διὰ τὴν φυσικὴν τοῦ ἐν ᾧ γέγονε μονάδα, στάσιν ἀεικίνητον ἔξει καὶ στάσιμον ταυτοκινήσιαν, περὶ τὸ ταῦτόν καὶ ἐν καὶ μόνον αἰδίως γινομένην, ἣν οἶδεν ὁ λόγος ἄμεσον εἶναι περὶ τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ πεποιημένων μόνιμον ἴδρυσιν. *Thal* 65, ll. 541–549.

⁶⁵² See Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 75.

⁶⁵³ *Chapters on Theology* 1.35.

a paradoxical interplay between perfection that is achieved (the end) and the infinitely elusive object that is striven after (further ends).⁶⁵⁴ Nature must eventually come to rest. Virtue, by contrast, when perfected, moves to further perfection. This process is never-ending for an apparent reason: the complete identity of the finite to the infinite will never take place; the two are incommensurable.⁶⁵⁵ Thus, nature and virtue are not the only points of contrast in this chapter: virtue itself manifests an internal dialectic of stability and movement. We should call to mind the metaphor of de Certeau's tightrope that we offered in chapter four. In de Certeau's analysis, stability is preserved by the unintermittent renegotiation of an everchanging balance. There, I argued that virtue for Maximus can be understood similarly. Missing from our analysis then was the Christological reason for why the negotiation of virtue is endless. Since Christ is the substance of the virtues, the act of preserving likeness to him—or to the divine, which is the same—must be endless. The absolute will always transcend its qualified instantiations that configure themselves on its elusive patterns.

Thus, if the preservation of virtue is a self-configurative exercise in Christo-/Theomimesis what differentiates virtue in this life from evermoving rest in the next? While both exhibit the same dialectic, a stability that is preserved through eternal motion, the key difference is the activity of the agent. In this life, humans are responsible for how they employ their natural activity as a process of self-transformation and for the ensuing, voluntary inclination of their will that results from these activities;⁶⁵⁶ in the next life, humans cease from any natural activity altogether and are moved, rather, by God. The point of continuity between the two is the never-ending motion around an unattainable object of desire that forever assimilates to itself those who long after it, but remains eternally transcendent.

Conclusion

The object of this chapter was to explore the precise relation between virtuous human actions and deification. That is, do human virtuous deeds have any bearing on deification? The response to this question concludes the investigation of this study by bringing the findings of the previous chapters together and articulating a possible resolution to the central tension first identified in chapter three. We found that Maximus held human activity and passivity in simultaneous tension as the condition of and for deification, an idea we termed the “paradox of active passivity.” This paradox holds simultaneously that human deeds do not actualize deification but nevertheless are its precondition. In this respect, Aristotle's understanding of character state formation by the repetition of voluntary actions informs Maximus' description of the will that, through virtue, becomes receptive to the divine and indeed does not will differently than the divine.

Accordingly, the divine activity and the human activity coincide on the level of intentionality and become identical. To have the divine activity operative in the self just is deification. And while that activity is, after the cessation of human activity, not the activity of the human properly speaking, agents that make themselves passive and receptive to the divine are elevated to the status of active agents through the divine activity that operates in them. The divine and human activity are thus identical, even if they belong to two different subjects. This differentiation in union and union in differentiation

⁶⁵⁴ See Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of Perpetual Progress,” 161.

⁶⁵⁵ See *Op* 1, PG 91.9A and especially 24C, where Maximus refers to satiety as the infinite satisfaction of enjoying the object of desire.

⁶⁵⁶ See *Difficulty* 71.5.

is possible through Christ, the substance of the virtues, who in himself unites, but keeps distinct, human and divine nature. God is thus embodied in all the virtuous, for it is no longer God alone who wills always and in all things to be incarnate, but also those humans who have acquired an identity of will with the divine and are accordingly deified to the degree that God is humanized in them.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation illumines the understudied vinculum between virtue and deification in the thought of Maximos the Confessor. Given the current landscape of Maximian studies, this dissertation was faced with a two-fold task to accomplish this objective. The first step was to promote a radical revision of Maximos' socio-intellectual background, both generally as concerns the relevant strands of late ancient philosophy that informed his ascetic teaching and specifically as concerns his early career and scholarly formation. Within this contextual thick description, the second part of the dissertation analyzed a perplexing tension that arises from three interrelated claims Maximos made over the course of his writing career. First, he generally qualified the virtues as deifying; second, he asserted that the virtues are natural to humans; and third, he categorically denied that deification results from actualizing a natural human potentiality. Thus, the question we posed was whether Maximos was inconsistent or perhaps, within the imaginable horizons of his thought world, whether these tensions pointed to a subtle but creative distinction concerning the will and the ethics of self-formation that established a new spiritual-ascetic paradigm for future Roman intellectuals and monastics. The vast corpus of writings that engaged his thought, particularly during the humanistic renaissances under the Komnenoi and Palaiologoi suggest that the latter option was the case. In brief, then, we have considered the formation of a historically determinative moment in the conceptualization of asceticism and human-divine relations through a thick description of one of the Roman Empire's most celebrated thinkers.

Part one of this dissertation offered an extensive revision of Maximos the Confessor's background that primarily challenges two fronts. Chapter one engaged a historiographical front in the modern representation of late ancient philosophy. I contended that modern western European scholarship exhibits numerous crippling colonial assumptions about "Neoplatonism" that continue to distort or limit our understanding of a remarkably complex constellation of philosophical movements and counter-movements that spanned the better part of four centuries. I likewise considered alternative, non-western scholarly sources, such as the historical-philosophical work of the Russian scholar Vasiliy Polisadov, who painted a different picture of Neoplatonism's status in the course of Greek philosophy and its continuity with the classical tradition. Far from being an embarrassing moment of a discursively-bygone era, the interrogation of early modern western scholarship in a postcolonial light in effect illumines the often-invisible thread that even now unites past and present logics of exclusion. The decolonization of western curricula in order systemically to transform its assumptions about what passes for valid or critical scholarship, as well as what constitutes philosophy, is still pending. Put differently, decolonial theory is not a lens that magnifies past imperfections, but an indelible tint that highlights the continuity of chronologically and discursively transmuted prejudices and assumptions.

The findings of chapter one are significant for various reasons and fields. Perhaps the most immediate consequences may be felt in sub-branches of philosophy and religious studies, such as late ancient philosophy and early Christianity. How do colonial prejudices inform not just the study of a figure like Maximos, but that of most early Christian thinkers, indeed, of most late ancient thinkers? If, in fact, Aristotle's philosophy was far more prevalent during this time frame than scholarly consensus currently suggests, what implications would that entail for fields like New Testament studies (which are currently dominated by Stoicizing interpretative lenses), early Christianity (dominated by Platonizing and Stoicizing interpretative lenses), and late ancient art history? How, in turn, does that affect the telling of Christianity's early encounters with Islam and its continued exchanges with Judaism? What role did Aristotle's philosophy play in interreligious and intercultural dialogue? Put

differently, what is the significance of a common philosophical current in politically-shifting new matrices of power and the imaginable limits of religious self-representation? Questions like these lead to broadening concentric circles of intellectual crosspollinations and the complexity of early Christianity that decenters the prevalent assumption that Christianity was and is, primarily, a “western” phenomenon. In this regard, Syriac, Arabic, Coptic, and Ethiopic Christianity, to name a few, have yet to be given their due. The availability of opportunities and resources to promote research of understudied Christianities points to the enduring legacies of what Ramón Grosfoguel calls a state of *colonialidad* (coloniality) that can only with great difficulty and concerted effort be gradually destabilized and transformed.

It is truly difficult to envision, for instance, a collective scholarly dismissal of the term “Byzantine” to describe the Roman Empire between Constantine I and Constantine XI. While this term may be convenient for scholarly discourse, that convenience underpins colonial assimilatory strategies. Perhaps the same can be said about how names are rendered in English from their originals. It is, for example, as unthinkable to refer to John Sebastian Bach, Michael of Cervantes, Nicholas Machiavelli, or John-Jake Rousseau as it is to speak of Aristoteles, Platon, Gregorios of Nazianzos, or Emperors Konstantinos, Ioustinianos, or Eirene. And at the same time, Arabic and Syriac names are preserved—as far as possible—in their Orientalized state to make a clear demarcation between easterners and westerners: Yaḥya ibn ‘Adī (not John son of Adī) and Hunayn ibn Iṣḥāq or Hunayn bar Iṣḥāq (not Johnny son of Isaac). The addition of special Latin characters to represent the various Arabic and Syriac letters (here ح ع ي ا), while useful for philological reasons, further entrenches the division by otherizing even the representation of these names.

Chapter two promoted a radically new assessment of Maximos the Confessor’s early and formative years. In part, this chapter incorporated the findings of chapter one by underscoring the socio-intellectual salience of Aristotelian philosophy in the curricula of the late-sixth century, a testament to which can be found in Maximos’ notes on David’s lectures. But the bulk of the chapter was concerned with challenging the straightforward historical or biographical validity of the *Syriac Life (SL)*. I contended that scholars have not yet adequately illumined the literary and linguistic pliability of *SL*, with the result that its claims have largely been assessed on a historical-factual continuum to which they are inadequately adapted. Rather, the account is rich in metaphors, tropes, and numerous other literary devices that signify more than may appear on first inspection.

My analysis and interpretation concluded that *SL* is not a reliable authority for piecing the Confessor’s early years together—the fact that it omits nearly forty years of his life, of course, is one of its major shortcomings. Its limitations, however, do not entirely foreclose its possible uses. After all, metaphors can be literarily true inasmuch as they point to certain social realities or class dynamics. In this case, several symbolic events in Maximos’ early years could be taken as veiled references to his wealthy provenance and the distinguished pedigree of his philosophical formation. These two pieces of information, of course, cannot be conclusively demonstrated and must be assessed, in turn, by specialists in Syriac literary conventions. Nevertheless, I would hold that a literary approach to *SL* does greater justice to its genre and illumines the internal nuances of a cultural production that emanated from a rich tradition of Syriac *belles lettres*.

A strategic withdrawal from both hagiographical traditions, Greek and Syriac, concerning the Confessor’s early days opens a critical space for considering his educational options. As stated in chapter two, Maximos’ *actual* place of birth (irretrievable, in my opinion) would not have determined the range of educational opportunities available to a youth of, ostensibly, wealthy extraction. Gregory

of Nazianzos and Basil of Caesarea, it is well known, hailed from Cappadocia, and nevertheless received professional education in Athens and the latter ascetic inspiration in Egypt. Accordingly, the question was whether anything about the Confessor's education could be determined.

To be sure, Maximos himself affords us very little autobiographical evidence and not much is otherwise available to pin down his early movements. Nevertheless, I argued in chapter two that the most plausible theory places him in Alexandria during his formative years. Three major pieces of evidence would hint in this direction. First, the majority of his correspondence was with Alexandrians. This correspondence, moreover, engaged several social tiers—aristocrats, bureaucrats, clergy, scholars, and male and female ascetics—which would suggest an extensive network of relations formed over time. His letters also exhibit remarkable *parrhesia*, especially if we consider that he (a monk) boldly addressed illustrious figures like Peter in order to request very particular favors (e.g., the reinstatement of the deacon Kosmas). Similarly, he was invested, in abortive circumstances, with unprecedented political authority when official functionaries were summoned to the capital “to explain themselves.” That Roman officers would put such power in the hands of a monastic is not only remarkably unprecedented, but may well hint at his earlier involvement in the bureaucracy; in effect, this theory would account for his demonstrable knowledge of Roman law if we trust the exchanges represented in the record of his trial.

Second, Maximos' modes of inquiry and technical philosophical-theological vocabulary are most consistent with an Alexandrian intellectual idiom, as our numerous philological analyses in the body of the dissertation strongly suggest. While one might argue that he could have acquired this *modus operandi* indirectly through a mentor trained in this methodology, a compelling reason should be articulated for evincing my simpler, Occam's razor-abiding explanation. Moreover, such an account would also have to consider the presence of particular Alexandrian expressions in Maximos' works, expressions, we should note, that were well known in other parts of the Empire, such as the capital, as consistent with the “manner of speech of the Alexandrians” (τῶν ἀλεξανδρέων γλώσση).⁶⁵⁷

Third, the dossier of notes on David of Alexandria's lectures that survives under Maximos' name should be studied with greater care to determine its authenticity. This is especially pressing if no compelling reason remains—other than two questionable pseudo-biographical infancy accounts—for situating him in Palestine or Constantinople. If this dossier is, in fact, by Maximos, it is quite possible that an intellectual biography of the man in a new key will need to be written. The implications would have substantial bearing on contextual interpretations of his liturgical, ascetical, and speculative writings. Perhaps this revision would especially affect work of scholars who have promoted the relevance of (a Neo-Thomistic) Aristotle for interpreting Maximos work, but only inasmuch as he foreshadowed Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. In brief, the Confessor's own scholarship could benefit from decolonizing strategies.

Part two is a constructive evaluation of the Confessor's work in this new key. The interpretation of the monastic intellectual's work with a view to Aristotle's philosophy and the subsequent developments of the commentators not only aided in the identification of certain tensions in his thought, but also offered the internal resources by which to address them without necessitating extrapolations from other time periods and frames of thought.

⁶⁵⁷ A humorous reference to this “manner of speech of the Alexandrians” appears in the *Miracles of Saint Artemios*, which was written during Maximos' lifetime. See *Miracle* 45, p. 18, ll. 15–16. Special thanks to Anthony Kaldellis for pointing out this reference.

Chapter three considered the relevance for understanding Maximos' doctrine of virtue and deification by studying the multivalence of Aristotle's *ousia*. Two of Aristotle's works are especially important to exposit the various senses of *ousia*: the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics*. *Ousia*, as we noted, could certainly denote, in some cases, an ontological fixity that Aristotle more commonly expresses as form, entelechy, or, through the unwieldy phrase τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι. But that was not the sole, and often not even the primary, meaning of *ousia*. The term could also refer to a really existing substrate with teleologically-oriented realizable potentialities. In this case, *ousia* signifies a specific something (τόδε τί) and the scope of its ontological possibilities. Additionally, Aristotle employed *ousia*, primarily in the *Categories* (though we noted instances in the *Metaphysics* where the meaning of *ousia* from the *Categories* is at play) as the subject of predication.

These various conceptualizations of *ousia* were particularly important for determining the semantic and conceptual range of Maximos' own use of the term. Our analysis showed that the Confessor fluidly moved through the various senses that Aristotle had established and even made his own contributions to a revised Aristotelian metaphysics, particularly through the doctrine of the *logoi*. This contextualization of *ousia* matters as we try to ascertain what or who precisely undergoes deification and on what ontological level deification is predicated. In other words, when someone is deified, what exactly is the passive subject of deification? In this line, deification (following Hausherr's and Larchet's arguments against the Neothomistic interpretative tradition of the Confessor's thought) is not simply a conditional predicate of the human subject. That is, deification does not take place purely on an imitative moral plane, as Garrigues, Riou, and others in their tradition have held. Rather, ontology and an *ousia*'s very *mode of existence* are, in Aristotelian (and Maximian) philosophy, indissociable. *To be something—anything—means to be in a way.*

The relevance of this particular exposition of Aristotle's *ousia* is the ontological dynamism it implies. Accordingly, it would be inaccurate to speak of an absolute "essentializing" impetus in either Aristotle or Maximos. Rather, *ousia* thus conceptualized recognizes certain limitations and constitutive necessities of created beings (embodiment, chronological distension, finitude), but precisely by not framing these *ousiai* in absolute terms invites exploration of the existential dynamism of *be-ing*. In their own way, Aristotle and Maximos did conceive of what poststructuralism has called the "transcendental signified," in this case as an ontological, rather than grammatological, referent. Nevertheless, on both counts these philosophers eschew a particularly strong version of it. For Aristotle, the phrase that Latin Scholastics rendered as *essentia* or *quidditas* (e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *ST I.84.vii*; compare with ibn Sina's ماهية (*mahiyyah*) in *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Šifā'* 1.5 and 6.2) should not be abstracted from its dynamic modalities. The phrasal construct τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι literally means "the what it was being for it to be existing." The openness of the grammatical tenses here employed does not foreclose ontological liminality. Similarly, for Maximos the *logoi* of creation certainly are "essentializing" inasmuch as they refer to a certain creaturely fixity that is situated in the divine. And yet, here too if the *logoi* are "essentializing" they are also personalizing by virtue of the uniqueness of each individual whose *logos* they are. Thus, the *logoi* do not so much point to *essential* fixity as much as they refer to a *dialectic* of universality and particularity in and through which creatures return to the divine source of their origin.

It is exactly in this dialectic that ethics are both founded and negotiated: the active being of a substance cannot avoid existential modalities. All being, in as much as it is *be-ing*, must also be in some way. If chapter three had inquired about Aristotle's and Maximos' articulation of the *whatness* that is both the locus and substrate of subjectivity, chapter four explains salient features corresponding to the dynamic configurations of its *howness*. The guiding image for practices of the self was inspired by

de Certeau's description the act of tightrope walking. On this account, fixity or stability is interstitially attained by incessant interventions that preserve a balance that is never attained. Simultaneously, we expanded this metaphor to include the constitutive sedimentations of behavioral particularities that form what Maximos called "divine configurations" that, when they have come—in respect of virtue—to perfection, move to further perfections in the never-ending process of striving after the divine.

In this regard, we especially explored the features of Aristotle's moral psychology that informed Maximos' volitional theory, particularly as the Confessor developed his distinctive teaching on the natural and gnomic will and the slight adjustments he made to Aristotle's *proairesis* (προαίρεσις) or deliberate choice to accommodate his contextual Christological expedencies. The volitional nature of character states as the Peripatetic articulated it was especially important to Maximos. According to both thinkers, human dispositions are themselves voluntary and constitutive aspects of the decision-making self. These dispositions are formed through sustained repetition of actions of similar moral value (e.g., acting courageously, kindly, mercifully, wisely, etc.) that in turn determine new interstitial negotiations of virtue (to continue with de Certeau's tightrope metaphor).

Thus, we could speak of a dialectic of fixity and fluidity with respect to virtue as Maximos understood it. But we should be clear about what each of these references. Fixity does not refer to the social conditions that contextualize moral axiology, especially since these social conditions are constantly shifting; rather, fixity (and it is a qualified fixity at that) refers to the behaviorally-sedimented patterns humans create in their moral self when they *exist in a certain way* over time. I say this fixity is qualified because the psycho-ontological dynamism of the human substance is liable to change. Simultaneously, the liability to change of these sedimented patterns does not foreclose their determinative effects for the horizon of operable human possibilities. Humans do not act *hors-contexte*, indeed, there is no *hors-contexte* of selfhood. Rather, moral possibilities are negotiated from within the intricacies and depths of ethical subjectivity.

This final point is especially important for Maximos' denial of a *gnomic* will in Christ. Salvation and progress in divine matters cannot be accomplished through a *Deus ex machina* moment that cancels out the embodied experience of the moral self but by a reintegration and renegotiation of the moral self's complexity and orientation toward the divine from *within* the moral self. Far from the pitfalls some scholars noted in the Confessor's denial of this *gnomic* will in Christ, it would be difficult to conceptualize a more robust soteriological affirmation of the inviolability of chronologically- and socially-situated personhood. Salvation, for Maximos, operates from within the incarnated limits of human existence, not from without. Hypostatic particularity must here remain the inner sanctum wherein the divine and human coincide.

Chapter five explored this dialectic between divinity and humanity further by drawing some logical conclusions from Maximos' denial of Christ's *gnomic* will. I especially drew attention to the paradox of active passivity that I argued was both the condition of and for deification. In the face of certain death at Gethsemane, Jesus voluntarily surrendered his will to the Father's. This gesture becomes a symbol for human subjection to the divine will. As the human will surrenders to the divine will, however, the two wills become one: the human will is deified, the divine will humanized. "Those who bring themselves low will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). By this coincidence of activity, the human makes the self increasingly susceptible to undergo more fully the divine activity or energy. The deifying energy, we found, elevated the passive human subject to the state of an active agent. Here again Maximos had drawn on Aristotle's articulation of active patients, though in a different context. We note that the cessation of human activity, by which deification is undergone, negates neither the volitional character

of deification nor the disposition-forming force of human actions that determine the experiential quality of deification. Rather, the final state of the human being is one of passive activity framed by a paradoxical “evermoving rest” that preserves humanity fixed in the divine through an infinite approximation to the unattainable.

We have thus addressed this study’s central conundrum. It is natural, that is, in keeping with the divine plan, for humans to be deified. Deification is not to be found within human nature. The virtues, however, are and are natural in the sense that they enable humans to cleave to the divine will (βουλή). So, humans cannot operate deification in themselves through ascetic practice, but they can structure their psychosomatic susceptibility to the divine energy to undergo, in a way appropriate to themselves, the deifying grace that God universally grants. Whether the divine energy remains active or inactive in each person is a matter of quotidian choice through which the infinity and uncircumscribability of the divine can be seen in the human body “as in a mirror, enigmatically” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

To conclude, the implications of this study’s findings may be outlined here in summary form to point to further research. The relevance of this dissertation may extend to the various fields that intersect herein. Theology and religious studies will benefit from an in-depth case study of a seventh-century articulation of Christian morality that, to judge by the bulk of monastic engagement with the Confessor’s writings, exerted considerable force on medieval and modern articulations of Greek asceticism and its bearing on divine-human relations. Certainly, one of the most important appropriations and expansions of Maximos’ monastic philosophy occurred some seven centuries later as Hesychasts sought the sources from which their contemplative practices had originated. For Gregory Palamas, it was Dionysian spirituality in a Maximian key that stood behind the way of life he ardently championed in the *Triads*.

The history of (western) philosophy may likewise benefit from this study. Maximos’ growing reputation as possibly the greatest premodern Greek Christian philosopher should draw the attention of a field that has traditionally sidelined nearly all “Byzantine” philosophy. It is especially telling here that standard history of philosophy courses only consider Dionysios (and, far more rarely, John of Damascus) from among “Byzantine” thinkers and only because of his importance for Thomism. Presumably, this curricular choice reflects the assumption that Europe was submerged in the dark ages and accordingly that little good could possibly emanate from its impoverished state. Regardless, to sidestep a figure like Maximos in the trajectory of western philosophy is not an innocent preference for certain philosophical emphases and accents, but systemic myopia.

We may add that the bulk of John of Damascus’ work, particularly his scholastic compilations, like the *Source of Knowledge*, have often been approached with a blind spot the size of Maximos the Confessor. Not only does the Damascene directly reference Maximos by name repeatedly, but substantial portions of his most characteristic doctrinal conclusions are lifted directly from the Confessor’s works. It is difficult to estimate the impact that the Damascene had in the Arabic Christian world on account of the contemporary nascent state of Arabic Christian studies as a field in its own right. The immense majority of Arabic Christian manuscripts, such as those housed in Saint Catherine’s monastery on Mount Sinai, and indexed nearly a century ago in Georg Graf’s monumental *Geschichte der Christlichen arabischen Literatur* (1944–1953), have not yet been edited, translated, or published. And yet, the few works that have seen light, particularly the treatises of Thawdurus Abū Qurrah and Yahya ibn ‘Adī, already hint at strong methodological connections, possibly through the Damascene, to the Confessor’s own creative synthesis of philosophy and theology.

In effect, the Confessor’s synthesis of religious motifs with the philosophy and methods of Aristotle and the commentators extends beyond the Christian fold. For instance, the *Letters* of the great Persian Sufi master, Abū al-Qasim ibn Muḥammad al-Junayd al-Baḡdādī evidence strong conceptual and formulaic parallels to Maximos’ articulations of oneness (ένότης) and union (ένωσις) with the divine. The Persian’s compelling vision of توحيد (*tawḥīd*/oneness) with God through محبة (*mababbah*/love) is predicated on a rigorous philosophical apparatus that overlaps with numerous Maximian theses. For example, a similar idea to the Confessor’s Neochalcedonian formulation of “union without confusion” (ένωσις ἀσυγχύτως) with God emerges transmuted in al-Junayd’s *Kitāb al-fanā’ fī al-mušābadab* (*Book on Annihilation through Contemplation*), where he intimates that following فناء (*fanā’* / “loss of self”) there is بقاء (*baqā’* / “subsistence of self”). In brief, the link between Christian and Islamic spirituality through figures like Dionysios and Maximos who digested and “monotheified” late Platonic/Aristotelian categories deserves further exploration.

Finally, an intellectual biography of Maximos has long been needed. One could rightly despair of writing a historical account of his life—nearly half of it, I believe, is irretrievable. But if my contention that the Confessor received philosophical training in Alexandria has merit, a substantially thicker and more programmatic account of his intellectual trajectory is thinkable. Such a reconstruction of his intellectual trajectory would be no less significant in view of the fact that he had one foot in the pre-Islamic and one foot in the post-Islamic Roman Empire. We should recall that his long-term mentor, Sophronios of Jerusalem, surrendered the city to the Rashidun caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in April of 637 and succumbed to grief, the story goes, the following year. As such, Maximos stands as the latest witness—known to Greeks, Syrians, and Arabs—to the Aristotelian tradition in the Roman Empire before the study of the Peripatetic in Baghdad eclipsed the dwindling cultural influence of the lands where specters of Aristotle paced back and forth, lost in the depths of thought.

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“The Substance of the Virtues”: Deification according to Maximos the Confessor and the Transformation of Aristotelian Ethics

Dissertation directed by George Demacopoulos, PhD and John Behr, DPhil

This dissertation investigates the relationship between virtue and deification in the thought of Maximos the Confessor (580–662) by re-contextualizing his work in an Aristotelian trajectory of development characteristic of the Alexandrian philosophers. The dissertation exposes colonial prejudices in modern historiography that first divided Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy into two neatly defined schools of thought and interrogates the validity of holding that Aristotelian philosophy had all but disappeared from late antiquity in the Greek tradition. I contend, instead, that multilateral interest in Aristotelian philosophy had peaked around the time of Maximos. By repositioning Maximos in Alexandria, in a radical revision of the two prevailing theories—that he was from Constantinople or Palestine—the dissertation seeks to draw attention to Alexandrian nuances of his thought, particularly with regard to Aristotle’s philosophy, that have been neglected. Thus reframed, the dissertation examines a tension at the heart of Maximos’ teaching of virtue and deification: if the virtues are natural to humans and they are instrumental in humanity’s deification, why does Maximos hold that deification is not the result of the actualization of potentialities of the human substance? The dissertation moves to show, instead, that Maximos had appropriated Aristotle’s ethics and metaphysics to explain this tension. The creation of habitual dispositions in the human psychosomatic compound through actions does not invalidate the non-contingency of God’s gift of deification;

rather, these dispositions are the necessary condition for human susceptibility to God's gift of deification. The dissertation thus seeks to affirm both poles: the necessity of human striving and non-contingency of God's gift of deification.

VITA

Luis Josué Salés, son of Sergio and Janice Salés, was born on March 19th, 1987 in Mexico City, Mexico. After graduating in 2006 from the Colegio Alemán Alexander von Humboldt in Mexico City, he entered Wheaton College in Illinois, where he received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and English Writing and a Master of Arts in Systematic and Historical Theology in 2010. In 2011 he entered Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, where he received a Master of Theological Studies in Early Christian Ethics in 2012. That same year he entered Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, where he received a Master of Theology in Patristics in 2013. He then entered Fordham University in 2013. While working toward his doctorate under the supervision of George Demacopoulos and John Behr, he earned numerous prestigious fellowships and awards, published two book translations and five articles or book chapters, presented nearly twenty conference papers, and taught at Fordham University and Mount Holyoke College.