

I Know You Above All; I Know You Not

St. Maximus the Confessor on Divine and Human Knowledge and Love

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ABSTRACT This essay considers distinct ways of understanding these complexities, specifically by reference to the anthropological and metaphysical thought of St. Maximus the Confessor. Maximus' understanding of human knowledge and volition and desire are interpreted in light of his commitments concerning doctrine of God, read through his systematic correction of a broadly "Origenist" aversion to metaphysical motion.

KEYWORDS Maximus the Confessor; Evagrius Ponticus; knowledge; love; will; desire; Origenism

INTRODUCTION

Humans know and love. We apprehend, and we desire. We understand, and we choose. Such capacities and activities are so integral to our existence that, despite their profundity, they are in some ways pedestrian: we rarely reflect on their complexities and ultimate ends. Yet such reflection can prove to be a window into the most fundamental aspects of the human existence, and our interpretation of the aforementioned complexities can suggest a great deal about what think the human person is and how she or he fits into the broader tapestry of the cosmos.

In this vein, consider how a person's understanding of something or someone is impacted directly by her appreciation of it. A subject apprehends the particular good. She embraces the good by means of desire or appreciation, and this moves her to choose said good. In so doing she comes to know it more deeply and intimately. In one way, that depth of knowledge is the simple result of the subject having chosen to engage the object at further length. And yet, increased exposure to the good, simply put, may not wholly account for this deepening. This is especially

true when the so good is another subject, a person. In that case, merely spending more time with the subject will not suffice to provide the depth of knowledge that could be enjoyed were the knowledge propelled by desire—in short, knowledge of *this* sort is shaped by love.

This illustration serves to point out existentially meaningful ways to think about the relationship between knowledge and love, an interplay that has captivated the attention of philosophers of various stripes. Consider Martha Nussbaum's essay, "Love's Knowledge,"¹ in which she offers a literary reflection on the roles of affection and desire in the shaping of knowledge. Along the way, she cites ancient philosophy as the source of an unfruitful perspective, laying the critique at the feet of Plato:

Desire, as Plato puts in in the *Phaedo*, binds the soul to its bodily prison house and forces it to view everything from within that distorting enclosure. The result is that intellect is "bewitched," distorted in its function. . . . In short, self-deception about our condition, when it occurs, is the result of the corruption of reason by feeling and desire. Intellect . . . is never internally corrupt or corrupting. Nor does it require supplementation from any other source. "Itself by itself" it reaches the truth. (263)

Without commenting on her seemingly harsh characterization of Plato, I submit that Nussbaum is rightly worried about thought systems that cannot meaningfully account for the scenario above. In what follows here I wish to let this scenario remain in the background of the discussion, especially insofar as I take failures to account for such existential realities to evince an unbalanced perspective one might call "intellectualism"—that is, an overemphasis upon the primacy and/or supremacy of knowledge, cognition, and apprehension over volition and desire. More specifically, I will turn to the thought of St. Maximus the Confessor as a resource for thinking about these concerns.

At first blush, Maximus might not seem to be a viable ally in this endeavor, especially to those who follow Nussbaum's tendentious reading of Plato and who understand Maximus' thought to be deeply indebted to the Platonic tradition. Still, there is an established scholarly opinion of Maximus as a thinker who ultimately reshapes aspects of the tradition that precedes him, in part by curbing an overwhelming emphasis upon knowledge. For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar has suggested that Maximus

1. In Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 261–85.

corrects the “intellectualist heritage of the school of Evagrius,” for whom “love was essentially only the more positive name for inner calm, both were thus oriented, as ways and means, toward the higher goal of knowledge (*gnōsis*).”²

Balthasar qualifies himself shortly thereafter by noting that Maximus can at times sound very much like Evagrius on this point, and he is correct. Maximus often seems quite ready to extol knowledge of God as a central feature of the human person’s growth in perfection. Such an emphasis might seem to mark Maximus as a proponent of the intellectualism highlighted above, wherein one sees love and desire as mere instruments on the way toward attaining knowledge (at best).

It is the goal of this essay to show that Maximus does not fall prey to this form of intellectualism, but instead provides a subtle and integrated understanding of the relationship between knowledge and love. More specifically, the essay will show that Maximus carves out this position by reference to his doctrine of God and in keeping with his broader, anti-Origenist³ positions in the realms of metaphysics and cosmology. To make this case, I will first show that Maximus is acutely aware of the way in which knowledge can exist in a qualitatively limited form apart from love, which can, in turn, play an integral role in giving knowledge its true shape. Second, I will contrast this with the Evagrian⁴ emphasis

2. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley, A Communio Book (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 331.

3. This term should be understood in its broadest and, thus, most heuristically useful sense. In this regard it denotes families of speculative thought gathered around themes including but not limited to: a pre-existent unity (henad) of intellectual entities, a subsequent “fall” into bodies, an negative assessment of metaphysical “motion” concomitant with this protological narrative, and a tendency to posit the guaranteed and full return of all intellectual creatures to a final state of unity (ἀποκατάστασις). These positions are not peculiar to Origen or to those who followed his teachings in later centuries, but his name and texts did become a focal point and cipher within later debates. Elizabeth Clark’s *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of the Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) continues to be the standard for scholarly accounts of the controversies of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Clark notes that her book could have been called “Origenisms” (6), so as to suggest the varied nature of the many positions of various figures on both sides of these earlier debates. For a summary of the key ideas common to the Origenism(s) leading up to Maximus’ day, see Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism*, *Studia Anselmiana, philosophica theologica* (Rome: “Orbis Catholicus”/Herder, 1955).

4. Highlighting Evagrius’ place in the fourth and fifth century controversies is one of Clark’s many contributions to the study of the earlier debates, though she also gestures toward the later controversies. See Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 110. For Evagrian themes in the later controversies, see Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 72–102.

upon knowledge as the archetypal feature or activity of both saintly life and divine life. Third, I will offer a brief overview of how Maximus' understanding of divine knowledge, volition, and love sets the stage for his integrated understanding of human knowing and loving.

Before beginning in earnest, a few remarks on terminology are necessary. First, whatever weight the term "intellectualist/ism" might carry for von Balthasar (and whatever broader concerns Nussbaum may have), in this essay the term "intellectualism" should be understood simply to denote the privileging knowledge or cognition over volition and desire, such that knowledge is understood to exist paradigmatically and optimally *beyond* desire, love, and volition, even if these latter capacities might be affirmed as necessary instrumental means to knowledge. This linear perspective, so to speak, would stand in contrast to an account that recognizes the ways in which knowledge exists in a perpetual, mutually enriching relationship with desire and volition, such that knowledge can be assessed as more or less beneficial / useful by reference to this symbiotic relationship. The thought experiment at the beginning of this essay serves as a kind of negative litmus test: perspectives on knowledge and love which cannot account for the positive and ongoing impact of love upon knowledge and vice versa—or which envision as the ultimate goal a bare kind of intellectual apprehension without appetitive and volitional commitment—fall short.

When this intellectualism operates within a particular metaphysical framework—which I believe Maximus is able to dismantle—it undermines the ongoing importance of desire, precisely because the goal is to curb and even cease or transcend such movement, rather than rightly order and use it in perpetuity.⁵ As will become clear below, Maximus' perspective guards against this error, primarily by showing the relationship between knowledge and appetite / volition to be more cyclical and symbiotic than linear, simultaneously emphasizing the driving, causal force of love.

Lastly, while it may rightly be argued that one should not conflate such freighted terms as "volition" and "appetition"—let alone by further conflating them with the equally ambiguous term, "love"—this approach must be granted in what follows, though not wholly without justification. In addition to the fact that Maximus does not provide narrow semantic distinctions in regard to these concepts, in his system of thought volition and

5. One might also argue that such intellectualism also undermines volition as well, insofar as it fails to give an account of how knowledge of the good can in some way fail to result in a genuine form of knowledge that is ever bound up with freely chosen love. However, that incredibly difficult question and its implications—eschatological and otherwise—are beyond the scope of this essay and its treatment of Maximus' thought.

appetition are fundamentally tethered to one another, precisely because of how they function in the system of his opponents. That is, terms such as “will” and “desire” all denote aspects of creaturely (and, specifically, bodily) motion, to their detriment in Origenist/Evagrian systems and to their credit in the Maximian system. This final caveat thus brings the discussion to the opening movement of the inquiry, Maximus’ position on the insufficiency of knowledge alone.

THE PRACTICAL PROBLEM: MAXIMUS ON “SIMPLE KNOWLEDGE”

In the second of Maximus’ four *Centuries on Charity*, Maximus states that “there are three things that move us to evil: passion, the demons, and a bad will, . . . such as when while knowing the good we prefer evil.”⁶ Such a statement suggests that Maximus recognizes the very real possibility of persons possessing some knowledge of the good but failing to move toward it appetitively and volitionally. Maximus continues: “Knowledge is good by nature, and so likewise health, but their opposites have benefited even more than have they. In the wicked knowledge does not result in good, even though, as was said, it is good by nature” (*CChar* 2.77; *SelWrts*, 58). Here Maximus goes further than merely suggesting that knowledge is a good that can be used either fruitfully or unfruitfully; rather, he also asserts that its opposite (i.e. ignorance) has been of greater use to a greater number of individuals. These statements must, of course, be read in keeping with the numerous positive statements Maximus makes about γνῶσις; however, they show that Maximus is aware of the limited value of knowledge without knowledge and the existential possibility of such a phenomenon, as well as the positive impact of love upon the quality or character of one’s knowledge.

Maximus’ impulse is easy to understand given his context in monastic life, wherein the potential for excellence to breed pride is undeniable.⁷ In this vein Maximus highlights the importance of interior disposition in the pursuit of the virtuous life (cf. *CChar* 3.48), regularly referring to the need to pursue humility and eschew pride (cf. *CChar* 1.38, 3.14). In fact, it is precisely the vice of pride that risks divorcing knowledge from love.

6. *CChar* 2.33; trans. George C. Berthold in Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Irénée-Henri Dalmis, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York; Mahwah; Toronto: Paulist Press, 1985), 51–2. Hereafter referred to as *SelWrts*.

7. Consider as a corollary (Western) example, St. Benedict’s rule, wherein he devotes an entire chapter (7) to humility.

Those caught in this vice should “expect to gather no other fruit except simple knowledge (ψιλήν γνῶσιν) with conceit” (*CChar* 3.70; *SelWrts*, 71). It is clear, then, that Maximus intends to guard against the form of intellectualism which underestimates the potential for the knowing subject to fail at completing knowledge with love. Yet it is not yet evident that he is transcending an understanding of love as a temporary and merely instrumental factor by affirming its ongoing, positive impact of desire and volition upon knowledge.

Mention of Maximus’ recourse to the concept of humility raises this very question. Maximus has already numbered passion among the three causes of evil and has suggested the primary benefit of humility is that it “cuts out the passions of the soul” (*CChar* 1.76; *SelWrts* 43). Initially, this does not sound like an integrated perspective which affirms the appetitive movement of the soul. In his previously cited treatment of Maximus’ correction of Evagrian intellectualism, Balthasar does suggest that the *Centuries on Charity* represent an earlier and thus less complete stage in this corrective endeavor,⁸ and he may well be right. Nonetheless, already in this work Maximus is making positive conceptual space for passion, desire, and love in a way that will eventually distinguish him from his predecessor: “The blameworthy passion of love engrosses the mind in material things. The praiseworthy passion of love binds it even to divine things” (*CChar* 3.71; *SelWrts*, 71).⁹ In order to see precisely how Maximus goes on to provide a fully integrated vision of desire and knowledge, it is necessary to consider the tradition he corrects, namely that of Evagrius.¹⁰

8. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 331–2.

9. Note that in addition to showing that Maximus can already give a positive “spin” on love and passion, this quotation also corroborates the notion that for Maximus the concepts of appetitive movement and volition—from passion to love—are interrelated. It may well be that in the synthetic philosophical milieu of Maximus’ day, the influence of Stoic anthropology and moral psychology would have provided the conceptual foundation for these interrelations and for the avoidance of a strict division between the movements of the passions and those of the will. One aspect of the Stoic legacy serves to correct an understanding of the passions that takes Plato’s reference to the two-horsed chariot too far and evacuates a sense of personal responsibility with respect to the movement of the passions. The Stoic emphasis upon εὐπάθεια and their reliance on prior beliefs justifies their insistence upon the subject’s responsibility and culpability vis-à-vis the movement of the passions. For an erudite study of just how deeply this aspect of the Stoic legacy affected Christian ethical ruminations as early as the late fourth and early fifth century, see Sarah Catherine Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

10. If using Evagrius as a foil for Maximus seems too predictable, the scholarship of Sherwood, Balthasar, and Thunberg has demonstrated just how fruitful this kind of contrasting

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL PROBLEM: EVAGRIUS
ON LOVE, VIRTUE, AND PASSION

In some ways, Evagrius' sheer willingness to make γνῶσις the sole apex of his account of Christian perfection seems to qualify him as a candidate for intellectualism. He states, "The wealth of the soul is spiritual knowledge, its poverty is ignorance; but if ignorance is the privation of knowledge, it is evident that richness is anterior to poverty, and the health of the soul to its illness."¹¹ This passage immediately seems to stand in sharp contrast to Maximus' statement concerning ignorance; however, it is also of note because it implicitly highlights the primary metaphysical and cosmological point of departure for Maximus' critique of Origenism which Maximus addresses—i.e., the order of γένεσις, κίνησις, and στάσις—and shows it to be inextricable from the anthropological concerns at the fore of this study. For now, it is primarily important to note that Evagrius gives sole pride of place to γνῶσις in both his anthropology and his doctrine of God. In addition to asserting that God is "essential knowledge" (cf. *KG* 1.89, 2.47) he claims, "If the intellectual part is the most precious of all the powers of the soul because it is united to wisdom, the first of all the virtues is, therefore, knowledge."¹²

work can be. Yet these writers have also shown that such contrasts are most meaningful when they account for just how similar the two systems of thought are. Indeed, Maximus is at his best when he is borrowing terms from Evagrius and reshaping them ever so deftly. It should also be noted that the points of contrast drawn here between Maximus' statements and select statements from Evagrius are not intended to portray a thorough account of Evagrius' own theology. That is, one might object that the views Maximus is correcting are not thoroughly Evagian in and of themselves. However, the very fact that Maximus, in light of his own concerns and in light of the sixth centuries controversies over "Origenist" teachings, is concerned to make such corrections is itself testimony of a perspective that was on offer in his time. Insofar as this perspective can be drawn from certain statements in Evagrius' writings and insofar as Maximus thought it worthwhile to engage in such deft reshaping of Evagrius' thoughts, the points of contrast remain worthwhile. Indeed, we need not be concerned with convicting Evagrius himself of the most noteworthy positions and tendencies corrected by Maximus, simply because it suffices to note that clearly *someone* in Maximus' day had taken Origenist/Evagian ideas to such extremes. Additionally, it is important to note that Evagrius' most extreme positions, including the kind of negative claims highlighted here, are most clearly visible in the speculative treatise addressed below. His ascetical treatises tend to evince a more positive assessment of desire and volition, for example, and do not reveal the metaphysical and cosmological underpinnings of his system.

11. Evagrius Ponticus, *Kephalaia Gnostica*, edited and translated by Antoine Guillaumont, in *Les six siècles des Kephalaia gnostica d'Évagre le Pontique*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 28.1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958), 2.8 [62–3 in translation]. Hereafter cited as *KG*. This text exists only in Syriac, and translations from the French are my own.

Based on the terms set out above, such a strong emphasis upon knowledge might not seem so damning, so long as Evagrius' anthropology allows for appetitive and volitional movements of the soul to have a positive impact upon the subject's knowledge. This is exactly what appears to be the case in certain Evagrian locutions. Evagrius often lauds love (cf. *KG* 3.58) and even goes so far as to ascribe a causal role to love with respect to knowledge, which would seem to counter the problem of a necessary linear movement from knowledge to love: "*Gnosis* heals the *nous*, love the *thymos*, and chastity the *epithymia*. And the cause of the first is the second, and that of the second, the third."¹² Yet it is important to dig deeper.

The above Maximian quotation concerning the need to "cut out" the passions (*CChar* 1.76; *SelWrts*, 43) is of interest precisely because it seems to suggest that passion and desire do not have a positive and ongoing impact upon human knowledge, but that they should instead be halted. This would seem to make love and virtuous use of the passions a merely preparatory step to be transcended along the way. Consider the question in terms of an analogy: Is the appetitive and volitional force of love like a moving projectile that, once it hits its target—say, a light-switch—is no longer needed and its motion halted? Or is it rather like movement of the heart, always pumping and empowering the body—even when the body has reached a state of rest—giving necessary support *to* the brain while simultaneously and continuously receiving necessary support *from* the brain?

Due consideration must be given to the positive statements Evagrius makes concerning the movements of passion and desire. Consider *KG* 4.22 [145]: "Just as those who offer to God symbolic sacrifices cause the bestial movements of the soul to burn by means of the virtues, so those who sacrifice to demons destroy by means of the vices the natural activities of the soul." Evagrius also states quite plainly that "there is a good love which is eternal, which true knowledge chooses for itself, and it is said that it is inseparable from *nous*" (*KG* 4.50 [158–9]). Finally, recall Evagrius' assertion about the healing power of love with regard to the *thymos*. These state-

12. *KG* 6.51 [239]. On the opposing page, Guillaumont gives a reading from an alternate Syriac text: "If the reasonable part is the most precious of all the powers of the soul because it is that which participates in the wisdom of God, then the superior of all the gifts is the gift of spiritual knowledge" (238).

13. *KG* 3.35 [110–1]; note that the transliterated Greek terms are Guillaumont's chosen renderings from the original Syriac. For a fully developed account of Evagrius' trichotomous anthropology in view Maximus' and that of the broader Hellenic tradition, see Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 188–90.

ments would appear to undermine the claims of Thunberg¹⁴ and Balthasar concerning the ultimately negative value Evagrius places on love.¹⁵ However, those claims begin to seem tenable when one understands the underlying anthropological and metaphysical logic of Evagrius' system. While virtuous right use of the passions is necessary in the practical stage of Evagrian ascent, these movements of the soul are fundamentally provisional, precisely because of their being rooted in bodily existence: "If all the powers that we and the beasts have in common pertain to the corporeal nature, it thus is evident that the *thymos* and *epithymia* do not seem to have been created with the rational nature before the movement."¹⁶

This statement, subjunctive as it may be, sheds light on how one should understand the place of the passions and the concept of love within the Evagrian perspective on creaturely motion. It provides clear context for Evagrius' other statements concerning the accidental (and not essential) nature of virtue (*KG* 1.59) and suggests that the entire Evagrian anthropology is to be distinguished from the Maximian on this point: that is, if the passions and movements of the soul in general are necessarily related to embodiment, then even the virtuous use of these capacities must ultimately be construed as tending toward their own cessation, rather than continuing in an ongoing, symbiotic relationship with knowledge, each faculty—the volitional/appetitive and the intellective—being nurtured by and in turn nurturing the other.¹⁷

It is clear, then, that these issues are as much metaphysical and cosmological as they are anthropological. Desire, movement, and embodiment

14. Cf. *ibid.*, 302–17.

15. Cf. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 331.

16. *KG* 6.85 [252–3]; cf. Guillaumont's rendering of the Syriac variant: "Si nous posédons l'*épithymia* et le *thumos* en commun avec les animaux, il est évident que ceux-là n'ont pas été créés avec nous au commencement de notre création, mais qu'ils ont fait irruption dans la nature raisonnable après le mouvement." Again, while elsewhere Evagrius can uphold the usefulness of a passion such as anger (cf. *Praktikos* 24), these more extreme statements—keyed to Evagrius' eschatological and metaphysical commitments—appear to have shaped the thinkers whom Maximus is concerned to engage.

17. Thus, Thunberg, explicating Maximus' position (in contrast to Evagrius'): "Charity is thus not presented as a perfect 'substitute' for the lower virtues, which 'excludes' them in principle since it makes them unnecessary, but as their fulfillment, which includes the other virtues in its higher unity and supports them with their strength." Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 311. Whatever "eternal love" is in Evagrius' system, it has at the very best a tenuous relationship to the embodied virtue of love experienced here and now. Note also that in Evagrius' statement concerning the love that is "eternal," the emphasis is still on reason to "choose" this love for itself, suggesting that the impact of desirous love upon knowledge is at least subordinate to the impact of knowledge on its "chosen" love.

are for Evagrius necessarily related problems. Maximus differs from Evagrius significantly on these points, as is provisionally evidenced by the quotation above concerning the good passion of love and by his concomitant affirmation that, far from being accidental, the virtues represent a primary means of human participation in deification: “[T]he essence of every virtue is the one Logos of God. . . . [A]nyone who through fixed habit participates in virtue participates unquestionably in God.”¹⁸ With this in mind, the present study appropriately moves into a study of *Ambiguum* 7, a text widely understood to refute Origenist metaphysics and cosmology. It is now possible to show how a seemingly digressive treatment of the *logoi* as “divine wills” and of divine knowledge fits right into the broader scope of Maximus’ refutation. Indeed, to address the matter of knowledge and love is to touch upon the very center and extremes of Maximus’ system all at once.

THE SOLUTION: DIVINE INTELECTION AND VOLITION

In the very middle of his treatment of St. Gregory the Theologian’s statement concerning humanity’s being “a portion of God that has flowed down from above,” Maximus points out that St. Dionysius and the disciples of Pantaenus had a habit of referring to the *logoi* of creatures as “divine wills.”¹⁹ As Eric Perl has shown, this terminology provides yet another way in which Maximus can show how God’s very self-presence to creatures creates and sustains them.²⁰ However, as is sometimes the case with Maximus, the excursus is not prefaced by any meaningful explanation of its place within the discussion. Given that much has been made here of the connection between volition and motion, the possibly implications of the excursus should be at least partly apparent: could it be that the term “divine wills” deliberately challenges the Origenist aversion to motion? In order to see the full impact of what this passage goes on to say concerning both divine volition and knowledge, it is important to account for some aspects of the previous sections of *Ambiguum* 7.

18. *AI* 7.21 = PG91, 1081C–D; trans. in Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, edited and translated by Nicholas P. Constatas, vol. 1: *Ambigua to Thomas; Ambigua to John* 1–22; vol. 2: *Ambigua to John*, 23–71, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 28–29 (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1:103. Hereafter cited as *Difficulties*.

19. *AI* 7.24 = PG91, 1085A; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:107.

20. Eric David Perl, “Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus Confessor” (PhD Thesis, Yale University, 1991), 147–79.

The truth is that Maximus has God's volition and foreknowledge in view throughout the seventh *Ambiguum*. This is evidenced by his reference to the Origenist interpretation of Gregory as an instance of unsophisticated philosophical borrowing:

Some people . . . have resorted to a rather facile interpretation, which in fact is derived largely from the doctrine of the Greeks. According to the opinion of these people, there once existed a unity of rational beings (τῶν λογικῶν ἐνάδα), by virtue of which we were connatural with God, in whom we had our remaining abode. In addition to this they speak of a "movement" that came about, as a result of which the rational beings were variously dispersed, prompting God to look toward the creation of this corporeal world, so that He could bind them in bodies as a punishment for their former sins. (AI 7.2 = PG91, 1069A; *Difficulties*, 1:77)

Already at the beginning of the refutation Maximus is concerned about what Origenist cosmology and metaphysics implies concerning God—namely, that God could be prompted to "look toward" a future event.

In the very next passage, Maximus goes on to highlight the connection between desire and motion, the central feature of his refutation of Origenist ideas concerning satiety and a subsequent "fall" into motion (AI 7.3). In AI 7.9, Maximus buttresses his important claim about creaturely motion necessarily preceding (and not following) creaturely rest with the assertion that "it belongs to God alone to be the end, and the completion, and the impassible, since He is unmoved, complete, and not subject to passion." Such an assertion comports with his previous worries about predicating adventitious events vis-à-vis the Divine; however, it also prepares the way for a subsequent discussion of the character of divine knowing and willing.

Prior to arriving at that discussion, Maximus makes the statement quoted at the outset of this essay concerning creaturely motion, knowledge, and love: "If an intellective being is moved intellectually . . . then it will necessarily become a knowing intellect. But if it knows, it surely loves that which it knows."²¹ That statement is nonetheless followed up by an equally interesting and pregnant assertion about the restful τέλος of creatures who move in the appropriate manner:

21. AI 7.10. One might fruitfully wonder about the exact meaning of this claim. Does knowledge necessarily evince a prior, motivating love, or does knowledge of the good necessarily result in love? Or is it better not to ask and to allow the interplay of the two faculties to remain less than mechanistically predictable?

If [the intellective being] suffers this ecstasy, it obviously urges itself onward, and if it urges itself onward, it surely intensifies and greatly accelerates this motion. And if its motion is intensified in this way, it will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it, willingly receiving the whole saving circumscription by its own choice, so that it might be wholly qualified by the whole circumscriber, and, being wholly circumscribed, will no longer be able to wish to be known from its own qualities, but rather from those of the circumscriber. (AI 7.10 = PG91, 1073C–D; *Difficulties*, 1: 87–9)

Despite the central place the will undoubtedly has throughout Maximus' writings, the emphasis upon creaturely volition is particularly striking in this passage, not least because of how Maximus describes the final state of rest in relation to the will. Here he suggests that the rational creature's end is to will herself toward the point of *no longer being able* to will in particular ways—namely, no longer being able to be able to will *to be known* from her own qualities, but only from those of God. After offering extended reflections concerning creaturely and divine willing and the union thereof, Maximus makes his most daring statement in the next passage. He states that in the deified subject the union of will with God so closely identifies the creature with the Creator that the creature “has God alone acting within it, so that through all there is only one sole energy, that of those and those worthy of God, or rather of God alone.”²²

Finally, Maximus returns to the theme of divine knowledge in AI 7.19. At this point he is building upon his previous treatment of the *logoi* and its relation to the one Logos, and he asserts that, insofar as the former are “steadfastly fixed” in God, “it is on the basis of these that God is said to know *all things before they come into being* (Dan 13:42 = Sus 42).”²³ This claim serves as an immediate preparation for the following statements concerning divine knowledge, while also hearkening back to the beginning of the *Ambiguum*. It is through the doctrine of the *logoi* that Maximus guards against the Origenist mistake concerning adventitious occurrences, since in being able to know creatures through their eternally pre-existent *logoi*,²⁴ God's knowledge of creatures need not be de-

22. AI 7.12 = PG91, 1076C; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:91.

23. AI 7.19 = PG91, 1081A; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:99.

24. It is essential to remember that the *logoi* of creatures are not “parts” of creatures, nor are they created realities in themselves. Otherwise, Maximus' doctrine of the *logoi* would fall prey to the same tendencies as his Origenist opponents, and the tendencies of Hellenistic monism and dualism. On Maximus' synthesis, see Perl, “Methexis.”

pendent on their actual creation in time, as Maximus goes on to point out in *AI* 7.19. This issue of time-bound existence cuts to the heart of the Creator/creature distinction, since “God is eternally an active creator, but creatures exist first in potential and only later in actuality.”²⁵ Maximus then makes his programmatic claim about the ubiquity of God’s incarnational, theophanic presence to Creation, again highlighting the matter of divine volition: “For the Logos of God (who is God) wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment.”²⁶

It is in light of these statements that Maximus turns to offer a further explication of the doctrine of the *logoi*, one which reveals the intrinsic connections between metaphysics, anthropology, and cosmology. After attributing to Dionysius and Pantaenus’ disciples the apposition “divine wills” for the *logoi*, Maximus continues:

For when they were approached by some of those who boast in their secular learning, and were asked what Christians believed about the manner in which God knows beings (for they themselves believed that God knows intelligible things by intellection and sensory things by sensation), they answered that God neither knows sensory things by sensation, nor intelligible things by intellection (for it is not possible, as has been demonstrated, that He who is beyond all beings should know beings in a manner derived from beings), but we say that He knows beings as His own wills, after which they added the following logical proof: If God created all things by His will—which no one denies—and if it is always pious and correct to say that God knows His own will, and that He willingly made each of the things that He made, it follows that God knows beings as His own wills, for He willingly brought them into being. Based on these considerations, I think Scripture, consistent with these same principles, says to Moses: “I know you above all” (Ex 18:11); and concerning some others: “The Lord knows those who are His own” (2 Tim 2:19). To still others it says: “I know you not” (Mt 25:12). In each case the voluntary decision to move either in accord with the will and *logos* of God or against it prepared each person to hear the divine voice. (*AI* 7.24 = PG91, 1085AC; *Difficulties*, 1:109)

Again, immediate context does not make it clear why Maximus is citing this interchange on the matter of divine intellection. In the broader context of the entire *Ambiguum*, however, one recalls that Maximus’ is concerned

25. *AI* 7.19 = PG91, 1081A; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:100.

26. *AI* 7.22 = PG91, 1084C–D; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:107.

not only with Origenism's adherence to Hellenistic cosmology more generally, but also with the way in which Origenist cosmology impacts its doctrine of God. From Maximus' viewpoint, that cosmological narrative implies that God is prompted by an event, thereby also implying God's being moved in a manner improper to divinity.²⁷ Moreover, Maximus shows that Pantaenus' students prove their opponents wrong in this matter on the basis of shared presuppositions. The philosophers with whom the disciples are arguing do *not* formally hold the position that God made Creation unwillingly; nevertheless, the disciples point out that to hold the position that God knows things by intellection is to undermine one's ability to posit God's creation as a free act. By affirming that God's act of knowledge proceeds in and by way of God's will, one can rightly understand God's relation to the world. And, insofar as Maximus is undoubtedly engaged in the project of dismantling Origenist metaphysics and cosmology, it is by no means a stretch to suggest that he is here showing his own opponents how they, too, lie open to such charges.²⁸

One may search in vain, then, for explicit claims against divine volition with respect to creation in the writings of Origenists such as Evagrius. However, it has already been shown (at least preliminarily) that knowledge enjoys sole pride of place in the Evagrian version of Origenism. In Maximus' estimation the intellectualism of his opponents put them on shaky ground with respect to the doctrine of God, and he worked hard to correct this overemphasis by inscribing love and volition more deeply into his own anthropological and metaphysical system. And yet in his refutation of this erroneous conception of the divine, Maximus is simultaneously correcting his opponents' anthropology.²⁹ Consider the above passage in further detail.

27. Cf. *AI* 7.2 = PG91, 1069A–B. That Maximus is perpetually concerned with this issue may be evidenced by his tendency to couch statements about God's interaction with humanity and Creation with the cautious suggestion that certain realities could have been either a result of God's decision after a creaturely occurrence or the result of God's foreknowledge of such occurrences. Cf. *AI* 8.2 = PG 91, 1103D–1104C, wherein Maximus asserts that matter's corruptibility could be the result of divine action after the Fall, "or because God created matter in this way from the beginning, according to his foreknowledge, in view of the transgression He had already seen in advance" (trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:143–5).

28. Note that Maximus also asserts that divine intellection happens by way of the divine will in *AI* 42, another key explication of the doctrine of the *logoi* and refutation of the doctrine of preexistence.

29. For a recent and helpful study of Maximus' anthropology in light of the Monothelite controversy, see Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, The Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Because Maximus moves seamlessly from a discussion of divine willing to that of creaturely willing, it is clear on a surface level that Maximus is preparing to highlight once again the centrality of choice in the rational creature's movement according to its *logos*. At a deeper level, however, Maximus is grounding humanity's order of intellection and volition in God's own act of intellection and volition vis-à-vis His creation. That is, if for God "to know" is in some sense "to will," it is reasonable to think that this would also be the case for rational creatures. This may not seem apparent at the outset, since an objection could here be raised concerning the Creator/creature distinction, a valid objection which is only partially addressed by recourse to a programmatic statement of Maximus' from his tenth *Ambiguum*—namely, that God and the human are "paradigms of each other."³⁰ Beyond such proof-texting, one finds deeper insights into the structure of Maximus' thought concerning creaturely and divine knowledge and volition.

Recall that Maximus has made the divine will a central and necessary factor in the operation of the divine intellect, not only in the eternal activity "prior" to creatures' actual creation in time but also in an ongoing sense: "but we say that He knows beings *as His own wills*."³¹ Again, this statement asserts an interdependence between the acts of volition and knowledge, at least on the level of divine activity. What makes the discussion even more interesting in light of Maximus' anthropology and cosmology is the seamless transition he makes from *divine* volition to *creaturely* volition. That is, a discussion that opens with the assertion that God knows being "as His own wills" concludes with the assertion that God's propensity to say to rational creatures either, "I know you above all," or, "I know you not," depends in some way upon the *creatures'* "voluntary decision to move either in accord with the will and logos of God or against it."³²

In addition to highlighting the concept of creaturely cooperation with divine agency inherent to Maximus system,³³ this suggests that for Maximus willing or volition is central to the process of knowing, both in the

30. AI 10.9 = PG 91, 1113B; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:165.

31. AI 7.24 = PG, 1085B–C; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:109, emphasis added.

32. AI 7.24 = PG91, 1085C; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:109. This would presumably be due to humans' tending toward nothingness and, therefore, unintelligibility, a phenomenon logically supported by explicit statements Maximus makes about creatures tending toward nothingness and by the dictum, "to be is to be intelligible." For a helpful treatment of this theme and its roots in the Platonic dialogues, Eric David Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, SUNY Series in Ancient Greek Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 5–16.

33. A theme which Perl treats masterfully in his discussions of divinization and creation.

sense of the creature's ability to enjoy genuine (and not merely "simple") knowledge—funded by its rightly ordered will—and in the intersubjective divine-human relationship of knowledge. That is, Maximus is helpfully conflating the creature's knowledge of God with God's knowledge of the creature, while correlating all of it to the will of both knowing agents. While God undoubtedly and only knows the creature *in* His will and *as* his will, genuine reciprocal knowledge between God and the creature in some way depends also on the creature's willful movement according to the *L/logos*. In this way Maximus' treatment of divine and human activity goes daringly beyond a mere assertion that the latter is patterned after the former; rather, he posits that the divine and human forms of intellectual and volitional activity are intertwined.

And lest it seem as though the interplay between knowledge and love in at the level of human activity is lost amidst talk of the interplay between divine and human forms of activity, consider how Maximus characterizes the human's ultimate *telos* of knowledge and love. The desire that marks the divinized human will is a desire fixed on wishing to be *known* in a particular manner:

And if its motion is intensified in this way, it will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it, willingly receiving the whole saving circumscription by its own choice, so that it might be wholly qualified by the whole circumscriber, and, being wholly circumscribed, will no longer be able to wish to be known from its own qualities, but rather from those of the circumscriber. (*AI* 7.10 = PG91, 1073C–1076A; *Difficulties*, 1:87–9)

Genuine, teleological movement according to one's *logos* thus involves a fundamental movement toward being wholly known—even knowing oneself—not as an autonomous subject but as a fundamentally dependent subject whose subjectivity is only truly fulfilled in becoming known with reference to the Other. This is to be caught up in a cyclical movement of loving and knowing, and, more precisely, willing to be known as *given*. While the grammar of will is not explicit in such a locution, the logic and sense of will is. Here we find the doctrine of the *logoi* and of participation, more generally, culminating in a metaphysics of gratitude, the cyclical movement of knowledge and love finding its τέλος in the στάσις that comes from loving fully, knowing fully, being loved fully, and loving fully the One to whom all is owed.

CONCLUSION: ETERNAL, MOTIONLESS MOVEMENT

For Maximus it is the goal of the human person to imitate God by grace in such a way that identification all but eradicates distinction. It makes sense, then, to find insight into Maximus' understanding of rightly ordered human intellection, appetition, and volition by reference to his understanding of divine activity, and to see his correction of Origenism as fundamentally dependent upon corrections made concerning the doctrine of God. It is in being conformed to the character of the "eternally an active creator"³⁴ who "neither moves nor is stationary" and is "beyond all motion and rest"³⁵ that the rational creature's movement of love and desire can continue in the final state of stasis, which, unlike total cessation from motion, is an "identical, endless, motionless movement around God."³⁶ It seems that, in Maximus' estimation, through a cyclical process of apprehension and desire these souls "surely love"³⁷ what they know, precisely because their knowledge is ever confirmed by the movement of love. Having "drawn near to God cognitively through love,"³⁸ they will experience in the eschaton not an "independent motion"³⁹ but that of a will fixed in love of the Good.⁴⁰

Maximus' ability to address anthropological concerns by correlating them to his metaphysics, cosmology, and doctrine of God suggest that his engagement with issues of knowledge and love is by no means a simple reflection upon existential questions of the sort raised by the thought experiment at this essay's outset. And yet it is precisely for this reason, among others, that Maximus proves to be a fruitful resource for modern inquiry. For those who, like Nussbaum, wish to consider how philosophical inquiry can do justice to the lived experience of human desire and intellection, Maximus offers a robust account of how various philosophical and theological commitments will necessarily impact how one can or cannot account for the existentially evident fact that knowing and loving are distinct but nonetheless deeply related faculties.⁴¹

34. *AI* 7.19 = PG91, 1081A; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:101.

35. *AI* 15.11 = PG91, 1221A; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:375–7.

36. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 291, citing *Myst* 19, 749–50 = PG 91, 696C.

37. *AI* 7.10 = PG91, 1073C; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:87.

38. *AI* 10.50 = PG91, 1184A; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:229–31.

39. *AI* 7.31 = PG91, 1092C; trans. in *Difficulties*, 1:121.

40. It is Berthold who makes this insightful connection between "inflexible" or "motionless movement" and the fixity of will (*SelWrts*, 222 n.109). That is, when the *gnomic* will is subsumed by the natural will; cf. Thunberg, *Microcosm*, 213–30, for a very helpful treatment of the *gnomic* and natural wills (or aspects of the will) and their important place in Maximus' thought.

41. I would like to express gratitude to Fr. Maximos Conostas and my colleague Jordan Wood for engaging this paper, without thus implicating them in any of its weaknesses or missteps.

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