The Ontology of Virtue as Participation in Divine Love in the Works of St. Maximus the Confessor

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ABSTRACT   This paper demonstrates the ontological status of virtue as an instance of love within the cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor. It shows that we may posit the real existence of a "virtue" in so far as we understand it to have its basis in, and to be an instance of love. Since God is love and the virtues are *logoi*, it becomes possible and beneficial to parallel the relationship between love and the virtues with Maximus' exposition of the Logos and the *logoi*. In particular, Vladimir Cvetković's interpretation of the circle and radii analogy will be utilized. It will be shown that when one practices a virtue, one is practicing and participating in love, and, by extension, partaking in God. Within the context of Maximus' cosmology, this means that practicing virtue and love is the ultimate purpose of humanity in its journey to gather all creation to communion with God. This paper is primarily an exposition of primary sources from St. Maximus, but discussion of the ontology of virtue is made with a view to bringing it into dialogue with modern theories of virtue ethics. This paper arises in part as a response to the August 2013 papers by Andrew Louth and Paul M. Blowers on the need for increased scholarship on Maximus and virtue ethics.

KEYWORDS   Chalcedonian definition; *logoi* theology; love; Maximus the Confessor; participation; virtue; virtue ethics

SAINT MAXIMUS   has varying lists of things he is willing to call virtues. *What* a virtue is for him, however, seems to be something more consistent. Virtues have something in common that makes them virtues. In this paper I will claim that, for Maximus, the ontological status of virtues is reliant on their participation in love.

My interest in asking what a virtue is for Maximus arises from the recent papers that present him as relevant to the contemporary philosoph-

ical field of virtue ethics. Whilst being highly theological in his writings, I think that, given the right parameters of discussion, there is much that Maximus' work has to offer philosophical debate. By philosophical debate in this instance, I mean contemporary virtue ethics. I do not however think this is to be achieved by extracting Maximus from his Christian or historical context into a contemporary secular one. Instead, virtue ethics as a discipline must have the capability to refer to philosophy within its own historical context, a task it has already begun to achieve given its continued reference to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. The context of any list of virtues only makes sense, I think, if we consider the reasons *why* that list was compiled. Whilst often overlooked in its importance, this is what virtue ethicists refer to as the *telos* of virtues.[1] The end reason and purpose towards which virtues point and why these virtues specifically they have been selected. When we talk about Maximus' virtues in context of *telos*, there is space and sense, even within a secular paradigm, to accept the importance of Maximus' cosmic and very Christian context. For Maximus the virtues bring the cosmos closer to God; they bring us closer to deification; they unite us in love. Given that these are the ends towards which the virtues in Maximus' corpus point, one can then go on to ask, "what is virtue according to Maximus?"

I propose that because some ethicists have reservations over stating the *telos* of the lists of virtues they choose,[2] there is a lack of attention to the question "why has a certain list of virtues been chosen?" And in turn, because this question has not been asked, there really seems to be very little opportunity to get to the heart of questions like, what is virtue? what is it about this specific word and activity that merits it being termed a virtue? and what do we even mean by the term *virtue*? For Maximus, it is only because the *telos* of the cosmos is to be united in love that we can start talking about what virtues are. They are only *real*, in Maximus' understanding, *within* this discussion of moving towards love. What follows is a discussion of the ontology of virtue, but very much within the context of Maximus theological cosmos. Like any philosopher, Maximus was born in a certain time and place, with a certain worldview, and certain beliefs: pretending this is not so will not help us to better understand his thought. Instead I hope to offer a study on Maximus' own terms and within the context of his rich cosmology, as to what virtue is, and to what

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1. Discussion on this in Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1981), 184–5.

2. See for example Stephen Darwall, "Introduction," in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Stephen Darwall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 2.

extent we may talk of it as real. I hope that, in articulating this, it may provide a markedly different but no less interesting contribution to the field of virtue ethics as philosophers such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. The claim I am making is that that virtue is something we can consider to be real in Maximus, only in lieu of it being an instance, an activity, partaking in love. Virtue does have existence, but that existence is tied to the reality of love. What I mean by this and how it can be possible will be shown below.

Firstly, however, it is worth noting that the particular importance of love in relation to the virtues in Maximus' thought is already an identified phenomenon that has been discussed in relation to virtue ethics by Aristotle Papanikolaou,[3] Andrew Louth,[4] and Paul Blowers.[5] My main focus will rather be on the word "participation." In looking at participation in the context of Maximus' wider theology I think it will become clear both why the ontology of virtue is reliant on the existence of love, and how virtue can simultaneously be called love and yet recognized as something distinct from love.

The emphasis of this inquiry then is on "participation" and what is meant by it in terms of love and virtue for Maximus. I wish to approach this inquiry in a very particular way, which is to explain the way Maximus understands virtue to partake in love, through his description of the Logos and *logoi*. Maximus' theology of the Logos and *logoi* is a broad field that has had a lot of attention in recent academic study. I posit that the relationship of virtue to love is identical to that of the *logoi* and the Logos, and that in explicitly making this claim we can make radical and more clear statements about what virtue is for Maximus and what is meant by its participation in love. This paper therefore has two related purposes: firstly, to establish that virtue for Maximus has ontological status by merit of its participation in love, and secondly, to establish the former premise by identifying the relationship of the Logos and *logoi* with that of love and virtue.

3. Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Learning How to Love: Saint Maximus on Virtue," in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection: Proceedings of the Symposium on St. Maximus the Confessor, Belgrade, October 18–21, 2012*, ed. Maksim Vasiljević [Bishop Maxim] (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press & Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade, 2013), 241.

4. Andrew Louth, "Virtue Ethics: St. Maximos the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas Compared," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26, no. 3 (2013): 356.

5. Paul Marion Blowers, "Aligning and Reorienting the Passible Self: Maximus the Confessor's Virtue Ethics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26, no. 3 (2013): 346–47.

I WISH to introduce Maximus' theology of the Logos and *logoi* through the definition of the Council of Chalcedon. It has been debated that the "Logic" of this Council underlies all of Maximus' theology.[6] I do not think this is necessarily true, but for our current topic, rehearsing the Chalcedonian Definition does help us better understand Maximus' choice of vocabulary and *logoi* theology itself. In the definition from 451, we read:

> one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, in two natures being recognized without confusion (ἀσυγχύτως), without change (ἀτρέπτως), without division (ἀδιαιρέτως), without separation (ἀχωρίστως), the difference (διαφορά) of the natures in no way having been taken away because of the union (ἕνωσις), but rather the individual character (ἰδιότης) of each nature being preserved and running together into one person and one hypostasis, not being parted (μεριζόμενος) or divided (διαιρούμενος) into two persons.[7]

Within the Chalcedonian definition, the divinity and humanity of Christ were *both* confirmed without implying that he had duality in person. This was done by affirming that union (ἕνωσις) could exist with difference (διαφορά), but *without* division (ἀδιαιρέτως). In other words, dual statements could be held to be true without forfeiting a belief in the unity of the subject at hand. The influence of this definition is particularly noticeable in Maximus' theology of the Logos and *logoi*. We find Maximus using this same language from the Chalcedonian definition to parallel the natures of Christ with the way in which *logoi* are gathered to the Logos:

> This is evident in the incomparable (ἀδιαιρέτως) differences (διαφορά) among created things. For each is unmistakeably unique in itself and its identity (ἰδιότης) remains distinct (ἀσύγχυτος) in relation to other things. [S/]He [the one who has learned to contemplate the *logoi*] will know that the many *logoi* are the one Logos to whom all things are related and who

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6. Known as "Chalcedonian Logic," though its existence as an all-prevailing theme in Maximus' work may have been exaggerated. On this debate see 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); Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Open Court, 1995); Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1; Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10.

7. ACO 2.1.2.129.30–130.1. "Chalcedonian Definition," trans. Paul Parvis (unpublished manuscript).

exists in himself without confusion (ἀσυγχύτως), the essential and individually distinctive God, the Logos of God the Father.[8]

In the above passage, that which Maximus calls the *logoi* are gathered to union with the Logos and yet still retain their distinct identity. This is after the same fashion that Christ's natures still retain their identity but are the one person of Christ. "All things are related" to the Logos through the many *logoi*, and yet the Logos himself is "without confusion." Similarly in the Chalcedonian definition, Christ's created and uncreated natures do not mix, and are "recognized without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." In the case of both the Chalcedonian Definition and Maximus' Logos and *logoi*, uncreated and created natures are totally unalike, and yet are brought into perfect communion in the person of the Logos who is Christ. This is not a coincidence of terminology, but precisely how Maximus understands the deification of the created to be possible: it is because *Christ* has brought these two natures of divinity and humanity into communion in Himself.

Logoi, for Maximus, are the principles and meaning for each creature. They are the ideas for creation that reside within the mind of God prior to creation (*AI* 7.19 = PG91, 1081A). They became instantiated and "real"-ized in the act of creation. We deviated from them in the process of choosing to sin and it is only in Christ's redemptive act that it becomes possible to again live in accordance with one's *logos*. When we do so, we live naturally and with meaning and directivity toward completion, perfection, and rest in God (*AI* 7.22 = PG91, 1084B). Maximus expresses this as the triad "creation–movement–rest" (γένεσις–κίνησις–στάσις), and depicts creaturely existence as this cosmic movement toward God.[9] According to Maximus in *Ambiguum* 7, "by constant straining toward God," one "becomes God and is called a 'portion of God' because [s/]he has become fit to participate in God."[10] "Constant straining" ("ἀποκατάστασιν κινηθῆναι") here talks of a perpetual movement through which one may ascend

8. *AI* 7.15.5–12 = PG 91, 1077C. The translation used here and afterwards is that of Paul Marion Blowers and Robert L. Wilken, in Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 54. Hereafter referred to as *CMofJCh*.

9. On cosmic movement of "creation, movement, and rest" (γένεσις–κίνησις–στάσις), cf. Maximus, *AI* 7.9 = PG 91, 1073B; also Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism*, Studia Anselmiana, philosophica theologica (Rome: "Orbis Catholicus"/Herder, 1955), 92–93.

10. Maximus, *AI* 7.17 = PG91, 1080C; trans. in *CMofJCh*, 56.

toward God. Creaturely movement strives towards well-being, virtue, and good life. "Constant straining" in particular, however, is an idea built upon the Pauline quotation in Philippians 3:13: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before (ἔμπρο- σθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος)" (KJV). This understanding of perpetual reaching toward God was expounded extensively by Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Mose*s, who interpreted Moses' theophany of the pillar of cloud in light of Philippians and the story of Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:10–19). Gregory de- scribed Moses' seeing God's back as part of the understanding that even in encounter with God there will always be part of God that is unknowable. Hence it is always the case that "the soul rises ever higher and will always make its flight yet higher—by its desire of the heavenly things *strain- ing ahead for what is still to come* (συνεπεκτεινομένη τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν), as the Apostle says."[11] Inherent in this understanding of *constant* straining however is that we will never *reach* God in the sense that we will never fully know Him or touch His essence. In this way the *Logos* as the second person of the Trinity is still ineffable and beyond participation, and yet, Maximus clarifies, He is expressed in the *logoi* which come to be instan- tiated in creation.[12] There is something of the Logos in us, when we are in harmony with *our logos*. Participating in the Logos of God through our *logoi* is explored a number of times by Maximus through the analogy of the circle and radii. In *Ambiguum* 7 Maximus writes:

> It is as though they were drawn to an all-powerful center that had built into it the beginnings of the lines that go out from it and that gathers them all together (συναγωγός). In this way the many are one.[13]

Within this analogy Maximus expresses the simultaneous unity and multiplicity of the Logos and the *logoi*. The *logoi* are dependent on the

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11. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 2.225.5. Trans. in *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York; Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1978), 113.

12. Maximus, *AI* 7.20 = PG91, 1081B; trans. in *CMofJCh*, 57: "Although he is beyond being and nothing can participate in him in any way, nor is he any of the totality of things that can be known in relation to other things, nevertheless we affirm that the one Logos is the many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are One."

13. Maximus, *AI* 7.20 = PG91, 1081C; trans. in *CMofJCh*, 57. Circle and radii analogy also to be found in *Myst* 1, 129–206; trans. in Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Irénée-Henri Dalmais (New York; Mahwah; Toronto: Paulist Press, 1985), 187. Hereafter cited as *SelWrts*. See also *CGn* 2.4; trans. in *SelWrts*, 148.

Logos for their existence, He being their origin, but also their aim and desire (*AI* 7.17 = PG91, 1080C). Vladimir Cvetković has proposed that we may extend the analogy of the circle and radii quoted above to encapsulate Maximus' whole cosmic vision of progress towards God-the-Logos through the *logoi*.[14] One travels through more generic *logoi*, then through more specific *logoi* towards the Logos, who is the point at which the many become one, and yet is one Himself and not many.[15] This image captures the dynamism of the relation between the Logos and *logoi* which is always about the movement of creatures towards their perfection in the Logos.

Turning to look now at the relation between virtue and love, in *Letter 2*, Maximus writes:

> All the forms of virtue (ἀρετή) are introduced, fulfilling (συμπληρόω) the power (δύναμις) of love, which gathers together (συνάγω) what has been separated (μεμερισμένως), once again fashioning the human being in accordance with a single meaning (λόγος) and mode (τρόπος).[16]

Virtues are described as fulfilling (συμπληρόω) the power of love. Somehow they are love made manifest; they are demonstrative of the power (δύναμις) of love, which in itself is described as that which "gathers together what has been separated" ("τὴν τὰ μεμερισμένα συνάγουσαν"). The word "gathers together" ("συνάγω") is the same as that used earlier in the analogy of the circle and radii to describe the relation of the Logos to the *logoi*. The virtues are gathered together in the unity of love. After listing some virtues in *Letter 2*,[17] Maximus writes:

> Love is the fulfilment (συμπλήρωσις) of these, wholly embraced as the final desire (τὸ ὀρεκτόν), and furnishes them rest from their movement (κινήσεως στάσιν παρεχομένη). (*Ep2* 396C1–3; trans. Louth, 86)

14. Vladimir Cvetković, "Predeterminations and Providence in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor," in *Dionysius the Areopagite between Orthodoxy and Heresy*, ed. Filip Ivanović (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 146. This is primarily offered as an alternative to the trend of suggesting the Porphyian Tree as a means of explaining the categories and shapes of Maximus' metaphysics.

15. Ibid.

16. *Ep2* 400A. The translation used here and afterwards is that by Andrew Louth in his *Maximus the Confessor*, The Early Church Fathers (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 88.

17. Love (ἀγάπη), faith (πίστις), hope (ἐλπίς), humility (ταπείνωσις), meekness (πραότης), gentleness (πραυπάθεια), mercy (ἔλεος), self-control (ἐγκράτεια), patience (ὑπομονή), long-suffering (μακροθυμία), kindness (χρηστότης), peace (εἰρήνη) and joy (χαρά). *Ep2* 393C–6C; trans. Louth, 86.

Love both is virtue, and yet is greater than all the virtues. It is their fulfillment and final desire. In our description of the *logoi* earlier, we noted that creatures are created, moved and have rest in God. This triad of γένεσις–κίνησις–στάσις is implicit again here in this discussion of love and the virtues. "Fulfillment" and "desire" both suggest that virtues move *towards love*, and perhaps indicate that love itself is the *cause* of this movement in the first place. We find κίνησις and στάσις present directly in the above phrase "κινήσεως στάσιν παρεχομένη" ("furnishes them rest from their movement"). This means we are caused to move by love, towards love; that is, by God, towards God. We can already begin to see the way in which the Logos and love share identity and that the *logoi* and virtues too are identical.

LET US go on more specifically to look at the identification of the Logos with love. Maximus reminds us in *Letter 2* when he recalls 1 John 4:8: "Indeed, love is said to be God himself" (*Ep2* 404C; trans. Louth, 91). It is through love and because God is love, that

> God takes form in each, through his great love for humankind, out of the virtue that is present in each through the ascetic struggle (πρᾶξις) in accordance with virtue, in which and through which God receives his likeness to human beings. (*Ep2* 401B; trans. Louth, 90)

God's contact with us and what we know of him *is* love. When virtue is present in us, God and his love are present in us. In practicing ascetic struggle, virtue becomes manifest within us. The actual presence of virtue is God in his love taking form in us. When this occurs, as Maximus goes on to elucidate, God is said to have

> granted to you the splendor of virtue, which deifies you by grace, by sublimating your human characteristics. In you virtue also makes God condescend to be human, by your assumption, so far as it is possible for humans, of divine properties. (*Ep2* 408B; trans. Louth, 93)

This sublimating of the human in so far as it possible, is deification. This in itself can only occur through grace from the Holy Spirit:

> The Logos bestows adoption on us when He grants us that birth and deification which, transcending nature, comes by grace from above through the Spirit. The guarding and preservation of this in God depends on the resolve

of those thus born: on their sincere acceptance of the grace bestowed on them and, through the practice of the commandments, on their emptying themselves of the passions they lay hold of the divine to the same degree as that to which, deliberately emptying Himself of His own sublime glory, the Logos of God truly became man.[18]

So both human endeavor as ascetic struggle and divine grace through the Holy Spirit seem to enable love as the virtues to become present in us. This is not a contradiction, but rather indicates that the virtues are instilled as part of a reciprocal relationship. Human "acceptance" of the virtues is only possible when there is space within the human to receive. We, like Christ, must first empty ourselves before we can be filled with the other. There is not space for the other when we are filled with the passions of self-indulgence. As such, for God to take form in us, that is, for *love*, which is also the virtues, to take form in us, we must allow space within us to receive. When the virtues become clear within us, the love of God is within us and we share likeness with God. We are become like Him, in so far as it is possible for humans, and He is become like us, without ceasing to be ineffable, unique, unparticipable, and divine (*AI* 7.19 = PG91, 1081B). Virtue *is* the sublimating of human characteristics. We are becoming more as God when we actualize them. Virtues move towards love *because* all things move towards God, and God is love. When the Logos, as one of the persons in the Trinity, goes out and makes Himself known through the *logoi*, He also is love. The practice of the virtues clears space for the Holy Spirit to instill virtue within us, which draws us closer to likeness with the Logos. At the moment virtue is present we partake in divine love. Virtue means *participation* in that which is of God.

Let us turn to the virtues and their identity with the *logoi*. Maximus is quite explicit that virtues are *logoi*. We see this in *Ambiguum* 7, when Maximus writes:

One who has learned to think devoutly about the *logoi* of existing things can explain this matter in another way. There can be no doubt that the one Word of God is the substance (οὐσία) of virtue in each person. For our Lord Jesus Christ himself is the substance of all the virtues, as it is written: "This one God made our wisdom, our justice, our sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). These things of course are said about him absolutely, since he is wisdom and righteousness and sanctification itself. They are not, as in our case, simply

18. *PN* 1.97–106; trans. Andrew Louth, in "Virtue Ethics," 33–34.

attributed to him, as for example in the expression, a "wise man," or a "just man." It is evident that every person who participates in virtue as a matter of habit unquestionably participates in God, the substance of the virtues.[19]

Christ is the substance, the essence, of all virtue. Like the radii that both are and are not the center-point of the circle, love, as Christ Himself, both is and is more than the *logoi*. Similarly, love, too, is virtue and is *more* than the virtues. Christ, as love, is the source and the perfection and end of all virtue and hence is virtue absolutely rather than attributively. To partake of virtue is to partake of the Logos. We might be able to become a "just [wo/]man," but Himself Christ is "justice." We can be a "wise [wo/]man," but Christ is wisdom. Our very partaking in these respective virtues causes Him to be manifest in us and we in Him. We are being deified by grace when we partake of a virtue, *since* in so doing we are partaking of God Himself. Virtues, as *logoi*, are an essential and *natural* part of our relation with our Creator (*DP* 309BC). To live in accord with them is to live in accord with the intended natural beauty envisioned for us. It is to be gathered to oneness in love, in Christ. So the virtues are never foreign to us in the sense that they are something divine that is unattainable. The virtues were meant to be chosen by us and are in fact something divine that *is* attainable.[20] The emphasis for Maximus is always however on *choice* being involved. In *Ambiguum* 7, Maximus writes that "That which is in our power, our free will, through which the power of corruption entered into us, will surrender voluntarily to God and will have mastery of itself because it had been taught to refrain from willing anything other than what God wills".[21] Virtues are *logoi* that we *choose* to turn towards, and in so doing we have already become receptive to the Logos. This is because the Logos and the *logoi* simultaneously exist as one and many, without ceasing to be either. And yet the *logoi* are of, point towards, and in a way *are*, the Logos (*AI* 7.20 = PG91, 1081BC). So too is virtue of, leading us to, and partaking of, the Logos. And so also is love, the gatherer and origin of all virtues, God Himself. To partake of virtue is to partake of divine love. As Maximus writes, there is not "one form of love [assigned] to God and another to human beings, for it is one and the same and universal" (*Ep2* 401D; trans. Louth, 89). The processes of deification—the human becoming like God—is the reconciliation of creaturely *logoi* to the Logos—it is the movement of humans

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19. *AI* 7.21 = PG91, 1081CD; trans. in *CMofJCh*, 58.
20. Cf. Louth, "Virtue Ethics," 356.
21. *AI* 7.11 = PG 91, 1076AB; trans. in *CMofJCh*, 52.

through virtues towards perfect love. All these things are expressions of that singular movement of the creature towards God—deification.

What I hope I have demonstrated in this paper is that virtues are *logoi*. They are the way in which God intended us to live. What *logoi* are is necessarily tied to the person of Christ. They are who we become when we choose to move towards Him. By grace and ascetic struggle, virtue is instilled in the human and we then display divine love. This is why Cvetković's use of the circle and radii analogy is particularly useful—it helps us see the Logos and *logoi* as dynamic relation between Creator and creature, and in turn perfectly exemplifies the movement Maximus' is talking about between virtue and love. Virtue for Maximus cannot be considered without love and without this cosmic paradigm of creaturely movement towards God. Just as there are no radii if we have no center point of a circle, just as there are no *logoi* if they are not gathered by the Logos, so we cannot begin to conceive of virtue if we do not understand the manner in which it partakes in love. Ontologically grounding virtue in love and understanding love to be the same act as that performed by the Logos for all creation allows us to begin making statements about what virtues must be within the context of Maximus' thought. First and foremost, they must be acts of love. It is this that defines them, and this that allows us to talk with any certainty of their existence. Virtues are different instances of love—of acting in accord with divine will and so manifesting God's presence on earth.

This is perhaps a world away from the ontology of virtue that a contemporary, secular virtue ethicist might arrive at, but Maximus nevertheless provides a cohesive picture of where virtues fit into his world view, why they are important, what they consist of, and a commonality of more than just subjectivity that links one virtue to another. Because Maximus understands the reality of love through the economy of the Logos and the mystery of God, and because he understands virtues through the reality of love, he has a means of talking about virtue that he may share with any other Christian, and give them reasonable grounds for also considering this particular list of virtues to be optimal. Additionally, whilst I do not go into the subject in this paper, the grounding of virtues in this divine love also serves a very practical role in understanding what good living is—we know what virtues are *because* they look like love (*LA* 92–131 = *MAS* 6–7). The soundness of Maximus' philosophical grounding of virtue should at least serve to call contemporary ethicists to give an ontological accountability of their own choice of virtues.

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