

**POSSESSION OR WHOLENESS?
ST. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR AND JOHN
ZIZIOULAS ON PERSON, NATURE, AND WILL**

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Abstract: *The past few years have seen the awakening of a serious attempt to re-evaluate the personalist/subjectivist hermeneutic and its influence on contemporary theology. One of the foremost representatives of theological personalism is Metropolitan John Zizioulas, a theologian and ecclesiastical writer whose thought has influenced many scholars from his own generation as well as the one following. The endeavour to examine the legitimacy of the supposed patristic foundation of Zizioulas and his fellow personalists' presuppositions has spawned both fruitful scholarship and acrimonious debate. At the recent International Symposium on St. Maximus the Confessor in Belgrade, Serbia, the Metropolitan set out to clarify his views and reaffirm his presuppositions as being patristic in origin, using the texts of St. Maximus as proofs of his position. This essay aspires to contribute to the ongoing debate by critically evaluating the Metropolitan's views in light of a close reading of some of Maximus' texts, especially those which Zizioulas considers to provide evidence of his own views. The focus of our critique will be the dichotomy of person versus nature in Zizioulas' thought – a question first posed to Zizioulas by T. F. Torrance in the 1970's and raised again since by a number of other commentators, and now extended further to include the issue of will in its relationship to nature. Our essay seeks to challenge Zizioulas' claim that we can find support for the priority of person over nature in the writings of Maximus, and further confronts certain general problems posed by the projection of existentialist/subjectivist criteria onto the patristic tradition.*



Metropolitan John Zizioulas is perhaps the most influential Orthodox theologian of the last quarter century, whose influence has expanded far beyond the Orthodox Church. The broad appeal of Zizioulas' theology, however, has not stilled certain questions from being raised, both regarding its supposed patristic support as well its existential implications regarding the Church and human life. One of the first theologians to raise a serious criticism of Zizioulas' theology, already in the early to mid-1970's, was T. F. Torrance. Torrance was responsible for bringing Zizioulas to Great Britain, where he served as Torrance's assistant in teaching dogmatics at Edinburgh between 1970-1973, before moving to the University of Glasgow. At the heart of Torrance's critique was a concern with Zizioulas' prioritization of "person" over against "nature," which Torrance believed indicated the influence of an unwholesome existentialism. Torrance also took particular objection to the understanding of the monarchy of the Father that Zizioulas claimed to derive from St. Basil the Great. These questions were further pursued by T. F. Torrance's nephew, Alan Torrance, in his book *Persons in Communion*, invoking a published response from Zizioulas himself.¹ While not necessarily agreeing with all the conclusions drawn by the Torrances regarding Trinitarian theology, person, and nature, Orthodox theologians have also raised similar questions regarding Zizioulas' personalism. While the initial discussions revolved, as with the Torrances, around Zizioulas' use and interpretation of the Cappadocian Fathers concerning person and nature, more recently the debate has moved to a new level, focusing on the role of the *will* in relation to person and to nature, and thus, to the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor on this important theme.

It has become, I think, evident today that some of the criteria of modern transcendental subjectivism, existentialism, and/or personalism seem to be the main criteria applied so far in the reading of Patristic doctrine on person and nature by most of the prolific Orthodox authors of the "generation of the 60's," as they have been called – although this sort of reading began before them, in Vladimir Lossky. The underlying question here is to what extent can we allow ourselves not only to use – because it is absolutely necessary to study and to understand them in a fertile way – but to become dominated by these criteria, turning the flow of Christian theology towards the mouth of the modern or post-modern river, instead of not only taking into account (as we must do), but also correcting some of the very presuppositions of post-modern thought. For the last six decades, or perhaps even more, this sort of subjugated interpretation has

1 See Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), and Zizioulas, "The Father as Cause: Personhood Generating Otherness," in *Communion and Otherness* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 113-154.

become almost self-evident in Orthodox theology, both in Greece and in the West, and the few but accurate objections have never really disturbed the certainty of the leading thinkers of the above current. Thus it is with a sense of relief that, after the publication of my article² and Jean-Claude Larchet's book³ that followed, we witnessed not only a serious debate beginning in a vivacious way, but even John Zizioulas, in his Belgrade paper,⁴ trying to somehow reconsider his theology, in light of the above suggestions. Christos Yannaras also responded to my criticism in his last book, *Six Philosophical Paintings*.⁵

The remarks that follow aspire to be a small contribution to this immensely important nascent discussion, already marked by the excellent contributions of distinguished scholars. Once again, I think that this debate is not about some philological points of Patristic literature, but it affects decisively our very way of understanding God, the world, and ourselves. If Zizioulas and his fellow-personalists had aspired just to express their personal views on personhood, nature, and so forth, a different sort of discussion would arise; but the fact that they attribute these views, for example, to Maximus the Confessor, makes also this discussion of the texts relevant – not simply for historical, but mainly, as I believe, for serious theological and philosophical reasons. I am going to deal with the Metropolitan's arguments in the order they appear in his paper, while also taking into account some of his other very recent publications.

1. The Metropolitan starts by affirming that for the Greek Patristic tradition there is no "juxtaposition between nature and the human subject which we encounter in Francis Bacon, Descartes, Kant, and a whole philosophical tradition leading into modern existentialism" (87). This disjunction between nature

2 Nicholas Loudovikos, "Person instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas' Final Theological Position," *Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 4 (July 2011): 684-699.

3 Jean-Claude Larchet, *Nature et Person* (Paris: Cerf, 2012).

4 John Zizioulas, "Person and Nature in the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor" in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection. Proceedings of the Symposium on Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Maxim Vasiljević (Alhambra: Sebastian Press, 2013), 85-113. [Page numbers for citations from this essay will be included in the body text of the present article]. Zizioulas accuses me of being academically biased and dishonest in my article because I "accuse him for six heresies" (106n54). I never accused the Metropolitan of any heresy; when I mentioned some possibly misleading tendencies in his theology, I only wanted to encourage him to publicly reconsider some aspects of his thought. Many of his theological positions have been uncritically accepted as the quintessence of Orthodox theology by at least the youngest generation of Orthodox theologians. We must remember that divine truth belongs to no one – it is only possibly, humbly and partially, participated in.

5 Christos Yannaras, *Exi Philosophikes Zografies* (Athens: Ikaros, 2011).

and person was made by medieval scholastic thought, “the first representing the ‘objective’ and ‘necessary’ reality and the second the ‘subjective’ and ‘free’ individual who can distance himself from nature” (87). This claim seems, at least at first sight, to be a real “turn” for someone who until very recently affirmed that “such an understanding of personhood as freedom *from* nature [author’s italics] may be applied to the human condition in which nature is a ‘given’ to the person: humans are born as a result of given natural laws” – while for God “it is the Trinity that makes God free from the necessity of his essence.”⁶ Thus what we have to reflect upon now is whether there exists any change into the deep structure of the author’s thought or not, and what is the form this thought seems now to take after all this reconsideration.

2. The main subject of our discussion is St. Maximus the Confessor’s theology on

6 See Zizioulas, “Trinitarian Freedom: Is God Free in Trinitarian Life?” in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, ed. R. J. Wozniak and Giulio Maspero (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 197. How can we reconcile Zizioulas’ claim in his Belgrade paper regarding fallen necessity in nature and personal/natural harmony (111-12, cf. n.70)? According to the Metropolitan, the fallen person is subjected to the necessity of nature, though “nature and person co-exist harmoniously” both protologically and eschatologically. Yet, he also asserts that “such an understanding of personhood as freedom *from* nature may be applied to the human condition in which nature is a ‘given’ to the person.” As we all likely agree, *nature was a ‘given’ not after, but before the Fall*. How, then, can the Metropolitan accuse his critics of not having understood that he always identified nature with necessity *only after the Fall*, when he, even in his most recent articles, clearly identifies nature with necessity *before the Fall*? It is clear that this argument for post-lapsarian necessity is, among other things, something new and clearly borrowed from Alexis Torrance’s article “Personhood and Patristics in Orthodox Theology,” *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 700-7. Furthermore, is it not a serious contradiction to assert in opposition to D. Farrow that the real threat to creation “was not sin but mortality due to createdness,” a view that Zizioulas attributes to Maximus, and to aver at the same time that creation became necessity, mortality, and corruption only after the Fall (106n56. Cf. D. Farrow “Person and Nature: The Necessity-Freedom Dialectic in John Zizioulas,” in *The Theology of John Zizioulas*, ed. D. H. Knight (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 122)? First, nature does not become necessity for Maximus, even after the Fall; second, Maximus never shared Zizioulas’ position concerning createdness as a source of mortality. Even in the very text used by the Metropolitan in n. 56 (*Amb. PG* 91:1308CD), Maximus argues that the cause of mortality is not createdness, but, rather, sinful human activity: “man did not move naturally, as he was created to do, towards his own unmovable principle (and I mean God), but submitted himself to those elements that had been given unto him in order for him to govern them. He moved willingly and foolishly by improperly using the natural power he had received when he was created in order to unite those things that were divided. Instead, [man used his power] to divide those things that were united, and thus risked a piteous return to non-being. For this reason ... God becomes man to save man from being lost.” The text speaks for itself. Nature would not have known corruption if man had not sinned.

nature and person. It is according to the Confessor's theology that Zizioulas now defines nature as an *abstract universal*, while person is the only real being, as the *possessor* of this – non-existing in itself – nature (89). By speaking of nature in this way, the Metropolitan seems to use an expression that was first used by Torstein Tollefsen,⁷ and he defends his claims using precisely the texts Tollefsen uses. Let us see those texts again.

These texts belong to the *Opuscula* (PG 91). By reading the passage 276A, Zizioulas correctly assumes that nature is defined by Maximus "not in itself but in relation with hypostasis." But then he goes on quoting the 264AB and asserting that this text implies that "there is nothing concrete about nature; the concrete and self-existing in being is the hypostasis, not nature" (89) – which nature "is an *abstract universal*."

However, Maximus deals in this passage with "enhypostation." In order to defend it, he claims first against the Nestorians that "there is no nature without hypostasis; and thus anyone who thinks that this non an-hypostatic nature constitutes a hypostasis is wrong." Then, against the Monophysites, Maximus argues that nature "is never without hypostasis, but this does not mean that nature is identical with hypostasis." The doctrine of the "enhypostation" does not teach us only that it is impossible to have nature without hypostasis, but also that it is impossible to have a hypostasis without essential qualities. Thus, it is also "impossible to think of hypostasis without nature" (264A) – a hypostasis without nature is, for Maximus, also an *abstract universal*. The Confessor affirms it explicitly, when he asserts that hypostasis has to be considered as "*enousios*," –with and in the essence – since otherwise it is only a ψιλὸν ἰδίωμα, an abstract property (205B). The Aristotelian/Neoplatonic "vicious circle" of the priority of the first substance over the second, and the dependence of the second on the first, is now broken, since a new, much more "holistic" and reciprocal relationship between them seems to be proposed.

That means further that between hypostasis/person and nature there is no relationship of possession of the latter by the former as Zizioulas claims above, or *vice versa*. The Metropolitan implies here that nature is just an abstract sameness, and thus, what makes it exist is precisely the fact that there exists in a person, who lies above, by definition, the sameness of nature, who 'possesses' it, and uses it, and thus he gives it existence – as if person was another being living by itself, and deciding, in a detached manner, who is to possess and who

⁷ See Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 128. Tollefsen has recently started to modify his views.

is to be possessed. However, Maximus claims precisely the opposite, as can be seen in his *Epistles*, 552B-553C. In this text, which is a goldmine for his ontology, Maximus shows, against our personalist nostalgia, that in *speaking of created human beings*, nature is only personal and hypostasis is abstract and non-existent without it, and thus that *the ground of personal otherness is the natural otherness*, as he explicitly asserts. Indeed, Maximus never needed to go beyond John Damascene's definition of hypostasis as "nature with properties," which also belongs to the Cappadocians.⁸ On the contrary, he articulates his admirably holistic definition of person/hypostasis in exactly the same way. Thus the "personal otherness" of beings is due to the "addition of the properties that make the logos of his hypostasis unique; according to which (addition of natural properties) he is not in communion with the beings who are consubstantial and of the same being" (552BC); consequently, a human being "by reason (logos) of the natural communality of the parts of his being, he saves his consubstantiality with the other human beings, while *by reason (logos) of the particularity of those parts he saves the particularity of his hypostasis*" (553B, my italics). Hypostatic particularity then is bound with natural particularity, and is inconceivable without it; there exists a reason, a divine logos of natural particularity – otherwise the former is a fantasy, a *general abstract*. Finally, "if the attributes that distinguish one's body and soul from others' bodies and souls come together, they characterize him and make him a hypostasis, separate from others' hypostases" (552CD), precisely because a human being, while he unites with other human beings through their common nature, "*saves the natural otherness of the difference of his personal parts unconfused*" (553BC, my italics). With this genial phrase the Confessor puts a full stop to any modern theological or philosophical attempt for a transcendental/detached construal of hypostasis/person. A supposedly transcendental personal otherness, according to Maximus, does not mean freedom from the supposedly abstract immanent natural sameness, and thus the Confessor seems to radically disagree with Zizioulas' position that "*it is not nature that gives being or existence to hypostasis, but it is hypostasis that makes nature abandon its abstract character, which is void of ontological content and acquire being*" (90, author's italics). On the contrary, it is also natural otherness that gives ontological content and being to hypostatic otherness, according to St. Maximus, as well as the Cappadocians and St. John Damascene.

That means that *man is "other" principally through "the personal dimension"*

⁸ Basil, *Letter* 236.401-402; Gregory of Nyssa, *To his brother Peter, on the difference between Ousia and Hypostasis*; Basil *Letter* 38.

of his nature. That further means that any "personal" otherness has to be built – through painstaking education, ascetism, prayer, etc. – *only upon this natural "otherness."* For Zizioulas, it seems that we have an almost naturally unconditioned person who, as a free being, possesses at will an abstract and dead sameness, which is nature, but giving it being, making it his own property, and "harmonizing" it to himself (111). There is no place in Maximus, however, for any transcendental "possession" of this supposedly general abstract/nature by a person above it, which claims its otherness against it, or without it. The Metropolitan seems to forget that, in Greek, if "anhypostation" means something that does not exist, the same is meant also by the word "anousion." Person is strictly conditioned by the particularity of its *nature*, which also gives it being; otherwise, it is "anousion," i.e. in-existent – and this is something that modern phenomenology, together with modern biology and psychology understand very well. Person, if it is not conceived as totally detached from nature, which happens in the tradition of transcendental Idealism, does not simply give particularity to its nature, but, first and foremost, is *given* particularity by its nature, from the very moment of its conception.

The difference between man and the animals on this point is *freedom*, the image of God upon man's hypostatic nature: not a *freedom from* but a *freedom for* nature,⁹ which gives man the possibility *to work with this nature, which is already a gift, in order to transform its mode of existence through participation in divinity.* But even during or after this *dialogical/ascetical* work, the natural characteristics of a human subject do not change; what changes is the way he uses them, i.e. not any more *against nature*, dividing it through *philautia*, but *according to nature*, uniting it consubstantially in Christ. Thus, natural otherness is not to be overcome, since it is already a gift, according to God's loving logos/will/providence, in order for man to build his personal otherness *through and upon it.* Against any existentialist/idealist devaluation of nature, where, according to Zizioulas, it either dictates its terrible laws, entangling the person, or it is possessed, "given being" by the person (and the person draws his being from what?), dominated and directed by him, personal otherness expresses natural otherness and *vice versa*, and each is simply ontologically abstract and inconceivable without the other. Any effort to ignore this leads to an identification of personal otherness with only the passive exteriority of a relation with another who can give me, or I can give him, otherness, as Zizioulas claims.¹⁰

But can we have otherness without selfhood? If a man is hated or ignored,

9 See footnote 42 below.

10 See Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 69-70.

or denying and denied any relationship, is he not unique and other? Nature, according to Maximus the Confessor, does not mean simply sameness, but personal otherness; between nature and person, neither is *ontologically* prior or above or possessor of the other, precisely because neither really exists even for a moment without the other. And any "personal" relationship presupposes and manifests a natural otherness, which forms its existential bedrock. A man is free, not because he is a person prior to his nature, since then all human beings would be forever free, but because he willingly follows, as we shall see below, the divine *logoi* of his nature as existential ways back to his Creator. *Man is thus free only through and by nature.* The problem for Maximus is not simply *who* chooses, but, at the very same time, *what* is to be chosen.

I would need another paper in order to show the wisdom of the Maximian suggestions above in the light of modern psychology. I have insisted in my article that the subject, as it is described by Zizioulas, is strangely and decisively pre-modern, since it does not have, for example, an unconscious. Where is it possible to find that sort of fully conscious self, who is able to be a "free" person, possessing and dominating an "abstract universal" of nature, without this "domination" being affected by unconscious conflicts and desires? For a psychoanalyst, all this can be described perfectly as a "defense mechanism," precisely against some unsolved unconscious conflicts – i.e. a slavery, and *not* the triumph of freedom. This is why the Maximian advice to listen carefully to nature is so much wiser than our personalists' advice to dominate or to possess it! But the ascetic tradition of Christianity also knows well that one needs a deep ascetic experience in order to truly liberate its personal will in the Spirit. This is why the question of *who* the active agent in man is, when it takes for granted the black-and-white detachment between person and nature made by the personalists, is totally misleading and pointless for St Maximus. If, then, we must use the term *priority* to describe the relation between the two, then we should rather speak of the *co-priority* of person and nature, on the ontological level. We shall return to this later.

The question thus is not just to assert that person and nature are connected, but mainly to deny any Aristotelian/Neo-Platonizing "spatial" ontological model, which uses the scheme "above-under" in order to describe their relationship: i.e., person as "above" *versus* nature as "under." This is the scheme that seems to have replaced the scheme of freedom versus necessity in Zizioulas' thought, although the core remains the same: the ontological degradation of nature. This can be theologically, spiritually, and even psychologically dangerous, as we shall try to show. The Maximian nature is an *open nature*, since the divine wills/

logoi lie behind it, making it an open field of divine-human dialogue leading to a perspective of an unending divinization. Thus it is, once again, totally different from the Aristotelian self-existing nature, which remains closed to itself, even when it is fulfilled through the virtues: “the philosophers’ nature,” according to Maximus, which can perhaps be taken as dead sameness. The Patristic conception of nature is of an active, living, personal gift that exists as an enhypostatic/enousios otherness.¹¹ Nature only personally (“dialogically”) constituted, and/or person only naturally manifested: this is the Maximian holistic “revolution” in ontology, which, as we shall see later on, opens new ways of discussion with philosophy and science today. The question of ontological priority either of person or of nature would seem to be totally non-existent to Maximus: this is precisely his great contribution to the modern anthropological quest. We shall see below that this deep interconnection between nature and personal otherness is valid even for the Trinity.

We have similar things to say about homoousion in Maximus, another notion Zizioulas is allergic to, since he understands it, again, exclusively as sameness. Are three men waiting for the bus in a bus-station homoousioi for Maximus? No, he would reply, they are same in their ontological structure (i.e. their natural/hypostatic otherness), but not necessarily homoousioi among themselves. Unless each one of them holds human essence in its fullness, they cannot be truly consubstantial. Human essence is in fragmentation after the Fall, following the gnomic/personal fragmentation of humanity, as the Confessor claims.¹² In order for this anthropological homoousion to be achieved, we need to practice the ascetical *perichoresis* towards the other, following Christ who gathered the broken parts of humanity through his Cross. Consequently, homoousion is now a goal to be *achieved*, since after the Fall the primordial unity was broken, and hypostatic/natural otherness cannot safeguard the communion of beings without the ascetic struggle for love based upon grace.

Thus, once again Maximus would disagree, I am afraid, in a double way, with Zizioulas, who claims that “the function, therefore, of nature is this and nothing else: *to relate the hypostases to each other, to make them relational*” (90, author’s italics). First, because, as we have seen, nature participates in the very definition of personal otherness and *vice versa*. And, second, because this relationality, in order to be achieved, needs the ascetic struggle also – otherwise we speak of sameness, and not consubstantiality. Sameness cannot be called

11 See Nikolaos Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor’s Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), chaps. 5 and 6.

12 See, for example, *Ad Thalassium* 40 (PG 90:397BCD, 401CD).

relation, σχέσις, since it is only ομοιότητα (of the same genus). So, homoousion is an absolutely dynamic existential concept for Maximus, giving us the essential base for an ontology of personal communion: the oneness of humanity is not just given as essential sameness, but remains to be *achieved* as a *perichoresis* of the others in Christ, in the Spirit, in the Church. Thus homoousion is the *goal* of personal activity, the verification of its function “according to nature,” as we have already seen. But what happens with the Triune God?

As I have claimed elsewhere,¹³ homoousion is precisely the difference between, say, the Plotinian triad of primordial hypostases (One, Nous, Psyche), and the Christian Trinity. The Plotinian hypostases represent three non-consubstantial fragments and parts of Being; consequently, Being is ultimately the addition of all these parts. It is then impossible for the communion of those three parts to be free, precisely because *they have to be necessarily added in order to constitute the wholeness of Being*, i.e. in order to make sense as representing Being *per se*. Each consubstantial person of the Divine Trinity, on the contrary, represents divine essence in its wholeness. This is precisely the base of a personal dynamic communion of the divine hypostases that is absolutely free – since, as each hypostasis holds the whole of divine being in himself, he is in communion with the others exclusively out of love. The difference between the divine and the created or *Christological* consubstantiality above is that the former is pre-eternally and timelessly existing, while the latter represents Christ’s “proposal” to us, and remains to be achieved in time, in the Church.¹⁴

Since he construes homoousion merely as sameness, Zizioulas avers – referring to me – that “those, therefore, who refer to the ousia (or the homousion) as such and build an ontology on that basis have departed fundamentally from the spirit of the Greek Fathers,” because “it is otherness that constitutes sameness, not the reverse.” But I have never claimed that homoousion somehow pre-exists in God, so that it creates or causes the hypostatic communion. What I have argued since 1999 is, on the contrary, that for the Fathers in general, as well as Maximus particularly, it is impossible to speak of the Trinitarian hypostatic communion without taking into account the active role of nature in it, thus speaking of a supposed overcoming of nature, understood either as blind necessity, or, which

13 See my *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self: Mysticism of Power and the Meaning of Personhood and Nature* (Athens: Greek Letters, 1999), 258-300. Currently, this title is only available in Greek.

14 See my “Eikon and Mimesis: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and the Ecclesial Ontology of Dialogical Reciprocity,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, nos. 2-3 (2011): 125-6.

is the same, as deadly sameness, as Zizioulas, Yannaras, and others do. It is precisely in this incorrect way that Zizioulas, in his last published article on Trinitarian freedom, mentioned above, writes:

Trinitarian freedom is, negatively speaking, freedom from the given and, positively, the capacity to be other while existing in relationship and in unity of nature. In as much, therefore, as unity of nature provides sameness and wholeness, Trinitarian freedom, as the capacity to be other, can be spoken of as freedom from sameness. And in as much as otherness provides particularity, Trinitarian freedom can be spoken of as freedom from selfhood and individuality.¹⁵

Here once again nature (even divine nature) is just a passive given of necessity/sameness, which cannot *actively* be included in the hypostatic otherness, and which has to be escaped from, through the "personal" capacity to be other. It is paradoxical that while the Metropolitan argues that, concerning his nature, God is not presented with any "given," he considers sameness precisely as a given, i.e. as something God *has* to transcend through the "capacity to be other." Once again here otherness is not related with (and is even somehow against) nature: nature does not participate in the very definition of divine otherness. This is in opposition to what happens in Maximus and the Cappadocians, as we shall see below. All in all, this ontological scheme seems totally Levinasian, not Patristic: freedom from sameness/totality, and then freedom from selfhood for the sake of the infinity/other. If we apply Ricoeur's criticism in relation to this Levinasian/Zizioulian scheme, we shall be forced to admit that this entails an even more decisive subjectivism, as it shows an initial will of self-enclosure and separation from the other (the "moment" of *ekstasis* from sameness), in order for the other to be understood as radical exteriority (the "moment" of "freedom from selfhood and individuality").¹⁶ It is precisely this danger of an ecstatic and separated subjectivism that the Patristic notion of the Trinitarian homoousion saves us from, as this subjectivism shows a subject who never really meets the other, as he, first, avoids the others' existence (*ekstasis* above sameness), and then also avoids his own existence (denial of selfhood): in both cases, either the other is absent, or the self is missing. Let me substantiate this.

In my article referenced above, I described homoousion as "the principle of the eternal personal dialogue within the Trinity, as an eternal circulation of substance that is always one but in a state of absolute inter-giveness."¹⁷ This

¹⁵ Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 206.

¹⁶ See his *Soi-même comme un Autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 387.

¹⁷ See my "Person instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas' Final

caused Zizioulas' reaction, who in his article we are now discussing argues that to speak of "givenness" in the Trinity would be to imply time and pre-existing individuals.¹⁸ The first good thing in this article is that the author tends to explicitly refuse now to insert time in God, as he previously tended to do.¹⁹ The second good thing is that he tries to smooth a little his subordinationist tendencies so obvious in his *Communion and Otherness*, where the Father seems to be the only really active person in the Trinity.²⁰ What is paradoxical, however, is that he now arbitrarily connects time with intra-Trinitarian givenness, as it seems to him connected with movement.²¹ However, Maximus as well as the Cappadocians speak of a sort of "movement" of nature within the Trinity, which does *not* imply time. This movement is precisely the homoousion! It is also the way for divine nature to participate in the very definition of divine otherness.

Thus, concerning divine essence, the Confessor avers that "though it stays in immovable rest, the divine essence seems to move, moving towards each other" (εν τη εν αλληλοις χωρήσει, where χωρώ is a verb meaning both *move* and *contain*).²² This "movement" is called "convergence (σύννευσις) to the one, of those who originate from him" by Gregory Nazianzen.²³ So, this is what homoousion is: a timeless intra-Trinitarian movement, as the affirmation, by the Son, of His nature as the Father's nature, and an affirmation, by the Spirit, of the His nature as the Father's nature, and a reciprocal affirmation by the Son and the Spirit of their essence as that of the Father's, following timelessly the *causal* affirmation, made by the Father of his nature as the Son's and the Spirit's nature through *generation* and *ekporeusis*. This reciprocal affirmation of nature as immovable movement, i.e. as χώρησις (movement towards and mutual containment) and σύννευσις/convergence between the Three, is initiated by the Father. This is the principle of the Monarchy of the Father, on which we all agree, i.e. the Father's absolute *monocausality*²⁴ which, at the same "moment,"

Theological Position," 690.

18 Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 201-203.

19 See my "Person instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness," 692.

20 Ibid., 691-2.

21 Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 201.

22 *Comments on the Divine Names* (PG 4:212B).

23 *Theol. Or.* 3.2.

24 Here I have to make a couple of corrections to my article in the *Heythrop Journal*, which passed unnoticed by me and caused some misunderstandings. Both of these misprints are on 692 in the second paragraph. First, in the phrase "If they cannot be conceived in a 'successive' way, this means that 'cause' and 'causation' are ultimate and reciprocal presupposition of one another." Instead of "cause" and "causation," one should

timelessly, *actively* and not passively, is *reciprocally* affirmed by the two Others. This affirmation is not of course automatic, since it represents the intra-Trinitarian love, i.e. the *free natural dialogical reciprocity* between the Three Persons, which can be also perhaps called *reciprocal inter-giveness*, in the sense that it is a timeless reciprocal essential dialogue on the ontological level, constituting the very mode of being of God. All these are names for this dynamic and personal understanding of homoousion, which expresses the mystery of the personal and natural Trinitarian communion in a way that the latter is inconceivable without the former, and *vice versa* (and one may add even new names here in order to describe this ineffable mystery of the mode of the Triune being). In this sense, it is absolutely wrong to interpret the homoousion as any sort of Hegelian *kenosis*, since it represents precisely the opposite: a timeless *plerosis*, i.e. the mutual dialogical affirmation/fulfilment of otherness *on the level of nature*, without which any "personal" otherness is but a transcendental, or, better, narcissistic fantasy. Thus divine homoousion does not simply mean sameness, but a pre-eternally achieved and timeless reciprocal, inter-personal, essential *χώρησις*/movement, containing, *σύννευσις*/convergence, dialogical reciprocity, or, simply, inter-giveness. *Any discussion about Trinitarian personalism without the homoousion leads unavoidably to the absurdity of a Trinitarian transcendental subjectivism, speaking of God's nature as passive sameness.*²⁵ And it is of course senseless

read "to cause" and "to be caused." Second, and more importantly, an editorial error appears in the phrase "By being 'caused' willingly by the Father, the Son at the same 'moment' offers to be his 'cause' as well, and so with the Spirit." This should read, "By being 'caused' willingly by the Father, the Son at the same 'moment' offers to be his Father's 'caused' as well, and so with the Spirit." Thus, I accept the Patristic concept of the Monarchy of the Father and his *monocausality* in the Trinity, albeit without having this monocausality unilaterally imposed by the Father upon the Others; their reception of it forms part of its mystery.

25 I find Zizioulas' discussion of natural necessity in God's nature to be unfruitful (106-107, n56). In an attempt to answer his critics, he asserts that necessity is connected to divine persons only in a hypothetical sense. First of all, Zizioulas has never indicated in his past work that his discussion of the freedom of God's being is totally hypothetical. Second, what is the possible ontological meaning of declaring that by definition a non-personal *unmoving mover* constitutes necessity for itself, when, in order for this declaration to have possible legitimacy, the *unmoving mover* would have to possess a conscious self in relation to which he has a problem of freedom. A thunderbolt, or a river, or the hippopotamus inside the river, do they have problems of freedom? Third, and foremost, Maximus once again disagrees here, even if this discussion is, as Zizioulas wants it to be, 'hypothetical'. Arguing against Pyrrhus who claims that what is natural is always bound with necessity, Maximus insists (*PG* 91:293C): "if, according to this view, anything natural is bound with necessity, then God who is God by nature, and good by nature, and creator by nature, he is God, good, and creator by necessity; something that even if we think of it (i.e. as

to think that the homoousion/consubstantiality, understood as it was above, occurs “before” the communion of the persons, thus forming a sort of “cause” of their communion: for it is precisely this personal communion that occurs as consubstantiality.

3. Hypostasis/person and atomon. It is paradoxical that Zizioulas insists so much that his conviction that person and atomon are fundamentally different (91) can be derived from Patristic tradition, although it is impossible to find even *one* patristic text explaining this difference in the way Zizioulas does. The only reason the formula “three atoma” is rarely used in the Patristic tradition with reference to the Holy Trinity – although theologians of the status of St. John Damascene did not hesitate to use it (see his *Elementary Introduction to Dogma* 7) – is purely historical, and has only to do with the fact that the Italian authors (not the Greek Fathers!) identified the notion of hypostasis with that of person, as Boethius explains, “because of our lack of terminology.”²⁶ The same explanation is given by Gregory Nazianzen, who accepts the term person only because the Italians cannot make the distinction between hypostasis and substance/nature, unless they call the former *person*, “due to the poverty of their language.”²⁷ Thus the term person gradually became the most frequently and ecumenically used concerning the Trinity, but this has nothing to do with any shift of meaning, since this shift happened only in the modern times, after the great crisis of the Western subjectivism.

Maximus follows this line, absolutely identifying person both with atomon and with hypostasis throughout his work, although, for the historical reasons mentioned above, prefers the term hypostasis or person, when speaking of the Trinity or Christ. It is then pointless, anachronistic, and fruitless for Zizioulas or anyone else to search for texts juxtaposing atomon and hypostasis/person in Maximus’ *oeuvre*, simply because Maximus never wanted, and was of course unable, to think in such a (modern) way. Thus the only Maximian text that Zizioulas utilizes is totally misread. It is precisely in this text (*Opuscula*, PG 9:201C-204A) where Maximus, on the contrary, *completely identifies the concept of synthetic person with that of synthetic atomon*, just a few lines above

Zizioulas wants it, *hypothetically*), it is the ultimate blasphemy. Who is the one who brings necessity to God?” Can we thus say that God is God, or good, or creator *because* he is personal, even hypothetically? Do we not thus mean, more or less, that part of God’s being is not free, and that there is a special part of it, called person, that liberates Him from the rest of it? And what is the real aim of such discussion, which persistently projects some existentialistic/idealistic obsessions upon Trinitarian theology?

26 Boethius, *Liber de Persona et duabus naturis, contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3.

27 Gregory Nazianzen, *Serm.* 21.35.

(201C: Ἐν ἀτόμῳ δε και προσώπῳ πάντῃ τε και πάντως, εἶπερ σύνθετον) the text Zizioulas has chosen (201D). After this identification of person with atomon made by Maximus in 201C, let us read again the text 201D in the Metropolitan's translation, which is quite correct: "we cannot call atomon the synthetic person of Christ. *Because it has no relation with the division of the most general genus through subsequent inferior genoi into the most particular genus*" (translator's italics). Zizioulas concludes from this: "Atomon differs, therefore, fundamentally from hypostasis and prosopon (person), because it falls under the category of nature" (91). However, Maximus does not contradict himself; what he says here is in fact totally different: he says that the *synthetic atomon* or, what is, as he explicitly asserts, the same, the *synthetic person* of Christ, cannot be called an atomon of a certain genus, *in the sense that Christ as existence is absolutely unique, i.e. it is impossible to find other persons/atomata of the genus "Christ."* Maximus by no means says that the person of Christ cannot be called atomon, as if atomon has supposedly to do with nature, while person lies above it. Thus, the Metropolitan's conclusion is another misreading of Maximus.

Not only Maximus, but also Boethius, in the second and third chapters of his aforementioned treatise, puts an end to this tiresome discussion, which resulted from a confusion of ancient terms with modern concepts. Boethius clearly asserts that the Greek *hypostasis* means the same thing as the Latin *substantia*, i.e. "essence/nature with properties" – as is also the case in Maximus, John Damascene, and the Cappadocians. The Latins had difficulty in making a distinction between *substantia* and *subsistentia*, i.e. *hypostasis* and *ousiosis* (which means the clear essence without properties, since hypostasis also comprises properties). But, Boethius continues, the Greeks "keep the term *hypostasis* only for higher forms of existence" such as God, the angels and the humans. For this use of *hypostasis*, the Latins, "due to their lack of terms," as Boethius admits, which renders the meaning of hypostasis difficult to be clearly understood, use the term *person*, which precisely means "an atomic [i.e., individual] essence of a logical nature." Thus, as has been made clear, both for the Latins and the Greeks hypostasis also means *atomon* – and, of course, person, as soon as the Greeks understood that it was impossible for the Italians not to use this dangerous (since it had been used by Sabellius) term.

Thus the – according to the modern Greek personalists – glorious and historic identification of hypostasis with person *took place in the West and not in the East*. And, what is more important, no one, either in the East or in the West, ever understood this identification as meaning any ontological differentiation between hypostasis, person, and atomon, or any ontological exaltation of

person over nature, or person/hypostasis over atomon/individual, implying either identification of the former with freedom and the latter with necessity, or possession of the former by the latter, or freedom of the former from the sameness of the latter, or any other degradation of the one and priority of the other, etc. To cling so passionately to such assertions, which are totally unsustainable by the texts, is not only a waste of time; what is more painful is that, in this way, we lose sight of the real meaning of the Patristic holism that is genial for the contemporary anthropological quest.

4. On the other hand, Metropolitan John Zizioulas is right in connecting divinisation in Maximus with adoption as sons in Christ (*huiothesia*). Where it is impossible, however, to agree with him is when he, following his enterprise of exalting person over nature, claims that God the Logos “contains the *logoi* of beings in His person (not in his nature, for it is only He, and no other Person of the Trinity that contains them)” (95). Were this to be the case, then the *logoi* would be *hypostatic properties* of Logos, since the only thing that the Three persons do not have in common are their personal/hypostatic attributes: non-generation, generation and spiration/*ekporeusis*. The divine will and energies, and consequently the *logoi* (which are God’s loving will) derive from divine essence, and they are *hypostatically* expressed by the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. The Son manifests the *logoi* in communion with the three other Persons, but He is not their exclusive hypostatic “possessor”. There exists an underlying problem in Zizioulas regarding the function of the divine will here, as we shall see below.

5. But let us now switch to Zizioulas’ analysis of Maximian Christology. Unfortunately, underplaying nature and prioritizing person is once again his main concern here. Thus we read that “it is a Person that brings together into an unbreakable unity the natures, not the other way around. The person leads, the natures follow. A certain priority of the person over nature is an undeniable fact in Maximus’ Christology” (11). This assertion would be true only *if the reception of human nature by Christ’s divine hypostasis was prior to the communication of the natural properties, human and divine (communicatio idiomatum), through which (and only through which) this reception is realized*. That is: it would be true if there were two successive “moments” in divine Incarnation: that of the “personal” activity of the Logos and that of the two natures being put in communion by this “prior” and superior being called person. This, however, is unthinkable for Maximus.²⁸ Anyone who reads texts such as those included in his

28 Tollefsen seems to be close to Zizioulas here, although with some nuances. See his

Epistles, 553C-576D, sees clearly that it is simply impossible to speak of Christ's identity without referring simultaneously to both the communion (*perichoresis*) of his natures according to their hypostatic union, and to his acting through both natural parts of his existence, expressed through the mutual communication of natural will and energy between them. In his *Epistle to John Cubicularium, on Love*, the Confessor directly connects the Incarnation with the communication of properties between the natures, a communication "which makes man God and makes God appear as a man, because of the one and identical agreement of will and movement of the two."²⁹

The deeper meaning of this connection is, as explained by Maximus in his *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*,³⁰ that through his hypostatic union with man, God really inserts His divine reality into human reality. This is why Maximus uses for the divine Logos the bold expression ἀνθρωπικῶς οὐσιωθεῖς (becoming human nature), concerning the ontological reality of the Incarnation – signifying that this is not a divine work external to Him, but it is His very *nature* that is involved in it. In other words, the very agent of hypostatic union is not the Person of the Logos prior to the "natures," but the very *hypostatic nature* of the Logos, *hypostatically assuming human nature through the communication of properties*. There can be no prior movement, or initiative, or enhypostasis of person before or without nature, since the divine Person does whatever he does only in communion with the other two divine Persons, and only through divine nature. Otherwise, I am afraid that we are not far from that "Christology of escape" of which I spoke in my *Heythrop* article, in the sense that there seems to exist a "superior" part of the saving agent, which remains above the salvation event and realises it without *at the very same moment* being fully and naturally involved – thus refusing to jeopardize, like the Plotinian *higher soul*, a part of His uncreated transcendence in this dangerous *real* mingling with the fallen immanence. It is not merely a "Person," but the Logos as an *enousion* divine Person, who unites, not two natures as if they were outside Himself and He gives them an order to unite, but rather two natures hypostatically in Himself, acting through His divine nature, *perichorizing* the fallen human nature. Thus, while in the Metropolitan's Christology we see one, ontologized, active divine person ordering two passive natures to unite, in Maximus we have, on the contrary, the active divine nature of the Logos uniting an active human nature to him, within His unique hypostasis.

The Christocentric Cosmology St. Maximus the Confessor, 129-132.

29 PG 91:401B.

30 PG 91:297BC.

And now time has come for a word concerning the natural will in Christ. Zizioulas accuses Larchet and others (including me), of using the expression “will belongs to nature, not to the person” (98), thus supposedly ignoring the reality of the “willing one,” who is the person. However, this expression belongs to Maximus,³¹ meaning that the ontological source of the will is nature, not person. (Maximus is speaking here against Pyrrhus, who claimed the opposite, implying the existence of only one will in Christ.) Neither Maximus, nor I by extension, by this mean that natural will acts automatically, by itself, without its hypostatic expression. But there also exist some nuances here. This does not mean, for example, as Zizioulas asserts, that, consequently, in Christ, the human will was deified because “it was expressed and realized by a divine Person,” which “moved and inclined towards the fulfilment of the will of the Father’ (100) – as if Christ’s divine will was not totally and forever identical with the Triune God’s unique natural will. Does Christ have a personal/hypostatic will? The answer of the Patristic tradition very clearly seems to be: no. Let me make some points here.

(a) As Zizioulas rightly claims (102), following Polycarp Sherwood, there is no *gnomic will* in Christ, since, obviously, according to Maximus, that would mean that Christ is merely a man, “deliberating in a way proper to ourselves, having ignorance, doubt, and opposition, since one only deliberates about something which is doubtful, not concerning what is free of doubt.”³² Subsequently, the Metropolitan claims that while Christ does not possess a *gnomic will*, he nonetheless possesses a personal/hypostatic will, as we saw above. However, according to Maximus, there does not exist either a hypostatic will in Christ, since “if his will is hypostatic, then he shall be of different will, in relationship with his Father. Because, what is called hypostatic characterises only a certain hypostasis.... I would also ask them [the Monothelites] with pleasure, whether the God of all and Father wills as a Father, or as God. However, if He wills as a Father, then His will shall be different from that of the Son, because the Son is not a Father; if He wills as a God, then the Son also is God, as well as the Holy Spirit; and then they shall admit that the will belongs to nature, i.e. it is natural.”³³ So, if we claim that in Christ it is the Logos Who wills, we thereby introduce three personal/hypostatic wills in God, and consequently, three Gods.³⁴

31 Cf., for example, PG 91:292B, 293A, 304BCD.

32 *Disp. cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:308D).

33 PG 91:313CD.

34 Zizioulas also clearly attributes hypostatic will to the Son when he argues that it is His hypostasis only that possesses the divine *logoi/wills*, as opposed to the other persons of the Trinity (see paragraph 4 above). He, furthermore, attributes hypostatic wills to the Trinity (112n72) when, in responding to my initial objection to his substitution of

(b) But who then wills in Christ? The Maximian answer is obvious: it is God Himself in His entirety, i.e. the Son, who expresses the good will (ευδοκία) of His Father, and realises it (αυτουπγία, i.e. He is the one who brings it forth), in the Holy Spirit, who co-operates (συνεργία)³⁵ – all the above constituting the expression of the one divine natural will, which exists dialogically through the homoousion. But *God here wills as a man*. Thus Christ, as the one who brings forth this tri-hypostatic divine will, assumes human nature, and, consequently, he also assumes human natural will, not “in his Person” but in His *enousios* hypostasis. *And this assumption is only realised as a binding of the two natural wills together, in dialogical openness, without separation and without confusion, in a manner that Maximus does not hesitate to call natural, in the sense that it is real and concrete.* Thus we see the Triune God, naturally willing in Christ, both as God, and as man.

(c) What is most important here: we cannot accept any sort of passivity of human natural will, as is implied by Zizioulas’ above claim that the deification of the human will is due to its expression and realisation by a “divine Person.” We cannot accept this, first, because through the Theotokos, *the human natural will is also active* in the Christ-event, in the exclusive sense that human nature is not only assumed by the Logos, but also *offered to him by humanity through and by the Mother of God*. Is this not the main cause for the veneration of the Virgin Mary as Theotokos throughout Greek Patristic theology, along with the Orthodox (as well as Roman Catholic) Liturgy, piety, and prayer? And second, as F.-M. Léthel has pertinently shown, behind any opposition between human and divine will in Christ (supposedly solved by the “person of Christ” who exercises His “personal” will) *lies precisely the Monothelite temptation*.³⁶

Zizioulas seems to attribute to the person of Christ a sort of transcendental will which “brings the two natural wills in harmony in Gethsemane” – the one

grace with person, he claims that grace belongs not to divine nature, but to “the Person of Christ” *par excellence*. As he argues, this “would amount, once more, to a disjunction between nature and person and would contradict the principle that it is the person that moves and hypostasizes and moves the nature.” Additionally, he uses 2 Cor. 13:13, where Paul speaks of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.” However, for the totality of the Christian tradition in East and West, *divine grace is one and derives from the divine nature*, being manifested as love of the Father and communion of the Holy Spirit *through the Son/Christ*. Otherwise, we would have to conclude there are three sorts of hypostatic manifestations of God *ad extra* (love, grace, communion), and, according to Maximus, three Gods.

35 *Ad Mar.* (PG 91:237D, 240B).

36 See his “La prière de Jésus a Gethsémani dans la controverse Monothélite” in *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur* (Sarrebruck: Editions Universitaires, 1980), 207-214.

desiring natural life, the other submission to the Father's will (13 – because it could not be otherwise possible for Christ to bring these two wills 'in harmony', unless he uses a third, more powerful 'personal' will!). But (according to Léthel, who brings four Maximian texts in witness³⁷) Maximus saw in Gethsemane's condescension, on the contrary, precisely "the expression of Christ's *human* will." If we see Christ's human will as somehow necessarily denying divine will, then this precisely results in the Monothelite position, which subsequently needs a hypostatic will in Christ to solve the problem. The union of the two wills is thus revealed in the relationship of the Son with His Father, as it is *humanly realised*, through a free human will, open – since it is Christ's will – to the natural Tri-hypostatic will of God manifested in the hypostasis of Christ, who wills naturally and freely both as man and as God. Christ's human hesitation, natural fear, and repugnance of death, etc., as described by the Patristic tradition, were not, according to the Confessor, "against" his divine will, since they represent human "blameless and natural passions," which, as the *sinful inclination is not present in Christ, are not in natural opposition, but in a certain convergence* (συμβαίνοντα) *with Him*.³⁸ Thus, these blameless passions do not represent any human volitional antithesis to the divine will, being also finally deified "through the absolute union with divinity" (237A). Maximus' anti-Monothelite "revolution" is precisely that Christ *wills only through and by and according to the nature(s), which cannot be conceived as naturally opposing each other*. Thus, the only possible reason for disharmony between human and divine will in Christ, for Maximus, would be *sin*. And, since Christ is free of sin, it is impossible for Him to have his two natural wills in disharmony,³⁹ as if needing, according to Zizioulas, some "personal" harmonization – an assertion which would be practically identical with Monothelism.

To conclude this consideration of natural will, Maximus' points on Christ's will are summarized in his *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* as follows:

There is no *gnomic will* in Christ, because of the "divine hypostatization" – Christ does not need to choose between good and bad through thought and choice, because he possessed good by nature through his divine nature (308D-309). This hypostatic divine nature of the Logos along with his assumed human nature, and not simply his detached divine person, is the active agent of the Incarnation.⁴⁰

37 Ibid., 212.

38 *Ad Mar.* (PG 91:236ABCD).

39 *Disp. c. Pyrr* (PG 91:292AB).

40 Both J. P. Manoussakis (in his "The Dialectic of Communion and Otherness in St

Christ's human nature does not move passively, following an order given by a divine person (νεῦματι, in Maximus' words); rather, it is the Logos himself who wills, but precisely *as man*: "as man and not as God Christ willed to accomplish his Father's will . . . because the Father's will also belongs to him, as he is God himself by nature" (297AB, 324C). Thus, it is not only that the "divine will moved and inclined towards the fulfillment of the will of the Father," as Zizioulas asserts

Maximus' understanding of the Will" in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection* (Alhambra, Calif.: Sebastian Press, 2013), 174), and D. Bradshaw (in his "St Maximus the Confessor on the Will" in *Knowing the Purpose of the Resurrection*, 155; drawing on D. Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 150-51), claim that Maximus initially attributed a gnostic will to Christ, and that he retracted this position during the Monothelitic quarrels. It is true that some other Patristic scholars also agree on this point. However, the passage *Or. Dom.* (PG 90:880A), which is used as the main source for this position is, as I think, misread, since it does not refer to Christ, but to us. Thus the text reads "He (i.e. Christ) made peace and reconciled us with the Father and each other through Himself, (up to this point I agree with the translation as it is referred by Manoussakis above), we not having (in Greek, οὐκ ἔχοντες, where the subject is **us**, while the Manoussakis arbitrarily reads here οὐκ ἔχοντα, where the subject necessarily is, according to him, Christ) any longer the gnome resisting the logos of nature, but as we have the nature, so we have the unvarying gnome." Instead of *we have*, as Maximus wants it to be, Manoussakis here reads *He (i.e. Christ) had*. On the other hand, it is true that the passage 877D that precedes the aforementioned passage seems to attribute a gnostic will to Christ; this is the only text of those mentioned by Bathrellos that can, at first sight, sustain such an interpretation. However, it is not easy to discern who is the one who "keeps his gnome passionless and is not risen in rebellion against nature." It could be either the Logos or the man Jesus. If it is the former, then this is Monophysitism; if it is the latter, then this is Nestorianism. I would suggest that Maximus probably refers here, perhaps in a somewhat clumsy way, to the divine natural will, which keeps human natural will in conformity to it, and, in this way, not against human nature. However, even if one can find a couple of such ambiguous texts in the Maximian corpus, there are so many other texts in his *oeuvre* pointing in the opposite direction. Given the plethora of assertions contradicting such a notion, it is absolutely clear that the author's ultimate position considers it impossible for Christ to have a gnostic will. Bradshaw, based on Bathrellos, would contradict this, and claims that Maximus would not deny a gnostic will or *prohairesis* in Christ, if his choice were based on the exclusive discrimination between things "which are good." However, Maximus seems not only to deny such a position, but to even characterize it as blasphemous (*Disp. Cum Pyrrho* 288CD) : "What is more impious than to claim that the same subject with the same will, on the one hand, before the Incarnation He created all beings out of nothing, and binds them together, and takes care of them, and saves them, and, on the other hand, after the Incarnation, He wants food and drink, and He goes from place to place, and does all the rest, which are beyond any blame or accusation, all those things through which He proved that his economy was not imaginary." According to Maximus, even if all that He chooses is good, if this choice is made through a divine gnostic will, this implies weakness and imperfection. It is, consequently, "impious" to attribute such a gnostic will to Christ. Christ wills all the above as man, in *antidosis* with his divine will (see below).

(100) (as if there were two separate divine wills struggling to unite). Rather, according to the Confessor, no such passivity of human natural will can be also be accepted here – otherwise we conclude with a sort of Monothelism. The problem of the Monothelites was precisely that they needed a “personal,” more or less “synthetic” hypostatic will (296ABC), in order to overcome the supposedly inherent antithesis between the two natural wills of Christ – the divine willing, the human unwilling or less willing to fulfill the Father’s will. Maximus’ proposal was that unless the two natural wills are actively and dialogically connected, in *antidosis/mutual exchange* between them (296C-297A), without violation and confusion, we do not have Christ really willing as God-man. Thus it is not the (ontologized *per se*) Person of the Logos that wills in Christ, as if simply carrying along the two natures, as Zizioulas avers (and I do not know how can one prevent this will from being a *synthetic* will). On the contrary, it is the human natural will that wills in *perichoresis* with the divine natural will, and *vice versa*: in Christ, God wills as man and man wills as God, in *antidosis, within the one hypostasis/person of the Logos, who now manifests the one and common natural will of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit accomplishing it actively as a man*. It is a pity that some modern theologians have lost sight of the unbridgeable gap between those two positions. If we prioritize by definition person over nature (as Zizioulas does in his statement on 97, “the person leads, the natures follow,” concluding with the anti-Maximian assertion that “In Christology, *it is the Person that has the first and last word – not the natures*” [100, author’s italics]), it is impossible to realize the perfect Maximian balance between the two, which is described above, and abolishes Monothelism.

There is no hypostatic will in Christ, but God’s one and common natural will (313CD) manifested through Christ, who expresses the common natural will of the three Persons. Here not only Zizioulas, but also some others too, seem to have serious hesitations towards accepting Maximus’ thought; perhaps they think that Maximus needs some theological correction. If we have not only nature but also divine hypostases in God, how is then possible not to have hypostatic will(s) in God, and, consequently, in Christ? However, the hypostatic will seems to be connected with *created* freedom in Maximus, where the hypostatic will cannot be practically detached from the gnostic will (which, as we shall see, is also connected with the unfortunate possibility of tearing created nature into fragments through sin), and not with uncreated nature. It is nonetheless inaccurate, on the one hand, to connect human gnostic will only with the Fall, as some scholars tend to do (since it is precisely the existence of this sort of will that makes Fall to be a Fall indeed). On the other hand, it is also unacceptable

for Maximus to attach either hypostatic or gnostic will to the uncreated Trinity or to Christ, *precisely because divine natural will cannot change*. Unless we properly understand consubstantiality, the above Maximian position will be totally unfathomable to us, whose minds have been so informed by idealism, personalism, and existentialism, and we will look for “corrections” of Maximus on this point. The divine tri-hypostatic affirmation of the one divine nature in dialogical inter-giveness is sufficient in order for us to see that the one natural divine will does not need any hypostatic “alteration” in order to be personal. It is personal since it is tri-personally affirmed as one and unique. This personal affirmation does not constitute a “hypostatic will,” but a triune manifestation through Christ, whose will is totally and consubstantially one and identical with the will of the Father and the Spirit.

6. And let me now come to the anthropological consequences of the above positions. The thorny problem for Zizioulas, even after the recent phenomenal shift in his thought, is still the relation between nature and freedom. For the first time in this paper, he no longer explicitly identifies nature with necessity *both before and after the fall*. As before, he still holds that nature represents something *given* to man; but now he insists that this happens, according to his reading of Maximus, only *after the Fall*. Let us search again for the witness of the texts, reading closely precisely the text that he uses, namely *Questiones ad Thalassium* 61 (PG 90:628A-645C).

Speaking of this text, Zizioulas claims that “speaking of necessity of nature in its present state in which nature exists under the yoke of death (636ABC) is commonplace in Maximus” (104). However, what seems commonplace in this text is to speak, on the contrary, of the submission under the necessity of death of, first, the person and, second, nature (γνώμη τε καὶ φύσει, 637C). That is: Maximus considers nature here as a victim of the person, who, by *blamefully* choosing pleasure instead of God, carries along the *blameless* nature with him under the yoke of pain, corruption, and death (641C). Thus, the “necessity” here in Maximus refers to *person*, not to nature.⁴¹ Zizioulas, always practically

41 Regarding this, it is precisely the *blameful* (διαβεβλημένη) fall of man’s personal gnome/prohairesis that caused the *blameless* (αδιόβλητον) fall of nature into death and corruption. See also *Ad Thal.* 42 (PG 90:405BC). Thus, it is nature that fell under the necessity of death and corruption created by the person, not the opposite. Note also that, for Maximus, the blameless fall of nature does not abolish the freedom of natural will to determine its own integrity, which is expressed for humans in a personal will/prohairesis through which nature’s restoration is possible. Nature’s restoration was precisely the work of Christ, through the dialectic of His two natural wills, who we are invited to imitate (405C-409A).

identifying person with grace, does not thus see that what is commonplace in Maximus is, on the contrary, to consider person (through the false use of *gnome* and *prohairesis*) as precisely the real cause of the fall into the inescapable necessity of death. This is why, in the end of the text that we read with Zizioulas, Maximus suggests as the only way of salvation, not the harmonization of nature with person, as Zizioulas asks (18), but quite the opposite, i.e. *the harmonization of the person* (as the one who sins, falls, and creates the necessity) *with nature*, since the latter is not an *abstract universal*, as the Metropolitan wants it to be, but a personal, dialogical divine proposal, asking for a personal/gnomic response of holiness. The following text (*Ad Thal.* 61, PG 90:645AB) seems to be incomprehensible if we admit that there exists in Maximus a “priority of the person over nature” (17):

Those who keep their *gnome* (personal choice and deliberation) by any means in agreement with nature, and they make it receptive of the energy of the logoi of nature, regarding the logos of ever well-being, they shall completely participate in the goodness, according to the divine life, which shines over humans or angels, because of the sensitivity of their *gnome* to divine will. But those who kept their *gnome* in complete disagreement with nature and they damaged the logoi of nature through their *gnome*’s activity, regarding the logos of ever well-being, they shall lose all goodness, because of the antipathy of their *gnome* for divine will, due to the obvious kinship of their *gnome* with the ever ill being.

Against our existentialist projections, which can destroy the very core of his thought, it seems that for Maximus *nature does not totally ontologically fall, precisely because nature is not just an abstract universal, but, on the contrary, it is the totally concrete incarnation of divine will, and remains such, even after its blameless fall into necessity caused by the person, and it is precisely by listening to this divine call through the logoi of nature that the person can be restored.*

It is thus impossible to fathom Maximus’ theocentric concept of nature, by using any current philosophical metaphysics, whether drawn from Plato and Aristotle or Kant or Heidegger. Nature here is an open essential presence, *as it consists in a divine personal dialogical suggestion*; it is an existential, personal way to God, *as it consists in an essential divine gift*. Nature is not a *thing* needing to be possessed and controlled by another *transcendental thing* called person, or even offered back to God either as a burden of necessity or abstract sameness, as happens in idealist/personalist thought (regardless of whether it separates or unites the two), but a *concrete natural divine-human reciprocal personal openness*. Thus, only the person, i.e. the gnomic understanding of nature, falls.

And this blameful fall causes, precisely because of the interruption of divine-human dialogical reciprocity that generates it, also nature's blameless fall as παράχρησις (bad use), which tends to destroy not the divine *logoi* that always sustain it, but rather its mode of existence as κατὰ φύσιν (according to nature/*logoi*) in our *gnome*, subsequently falsifying and distorting natural beings of God, since we no longer see them as such.

This is why, for Maximus, nature implies *freedom*. Separating once again person from nature, Zizioulas asserts that Maximus' above claim concerns nature only in an abstract universal way (101), and finally that it refers to person. For the Confessor, however, nature is, as we have seen, only personally constituted, just as person is only naturally constituted, with no need of relations of possession or "harmonization" between them, precisely because they do not even really exist if we separate them. Now, freedom lies both behind nature, concerning the way of its very constitution, as uncreated call and suggestion and loving will and not as a "given," as well as after its constitution, as reception and response and dialogue, something that even the Fall cannot stop. Nature's very constitution is thus a matter of an exchange of freedom, as it is dialogically constituted, developed, changed, and deified as an *open nature*. Finally fully united with its divine source in Christ, it is eternally and always – according to Maximus' suggestion concerning *ever moving rest* – transformed. The personalists' mistake is that they see nature as a static thing (even if Zizioulas, after the criticism he received, calls it now "dynamic"). They do not see that nature, in its very being, is *full of intentions* of personal divine suggestion, which call for dialogue and *point* towards its personal source. But if nature is such, person then cannot be, even "hypothetically," detached from nature, precisely because its very realization unavoidably passes through the *logoi* of nature, which form its very mode of existence in God, since they can and must finally become *existential powers of the soul*, making it *divinely logical*, as I have argued elsewhere.⁴² How then one can claim, in the way the personalists do,

42 See my *Eucharistic Ontology*, 101-105. Responding to my *Heythrop* article regarding his tendency to suggest an "escape from nature," Zizioulas offers Maximus' *Epistle 9* (PG 91:445C) as a paradigm "which shows how wrong is to conceive of grace as an addition to or fulfilment of nature. What we have clearly in this letter of Maximus' is rather a *rupture* with nature, and an *ek-stasis* from both world and nature, the latter occupying a middle position between God and the world" (104n52, author's italics, I omit the Greek terms). It is difficult to determine how the eschatological, harmonious, and gracious co-existence between nature and person-hypostasis (111) can be achieved if we believe that, for Maximus, we must be estranged from, or in *ekstasis* from nature in order to obtain grace. It is perhaps noteworthy that Zizioulas also uses the expression "freedom not *from* but *for* nature" (105), which constitutes another unfortunate contradiction: in what sense are we

that the person “saves nature” through his gnomic choice, when he has precisely to dialogically choose and follow his nature, in its divine existential intentionality, in order for him to realize his freedom from necessity, sin, and death? It is obvious that any idea of “possession” or “domination,” or “controlling,” or even, more smoothly, “harmonization” as a model of relationship between person and nature collapses here. The one conditions the other. No gnomic will can be freely exercised when the natural will is absolutely entangled, or even damaged, due to a psychosis or even a neurosis (or perhaps even an unsolved unconscious conflict), or addiction to alcohol or drugs – and if it is partially, or occasionally expressed, it will immediately ask for a therapy.

This is also why Maximus does not hesitate to insert the reality of the two natures in his very definition of Christ’s hypostasis. Christ is not only *of* two natures, and *in* two natures, but He *is* also *these* two natures, as the Confessor claims, in a whole series of texts.⁴³ That means that, as P. Pirret puts it, “the

free *for* nature, if we need to create a “rupture” with it in order to acquire grace? Does our physical existence participate in this struggle to obtain and keep the grace, or not? Let us now attempt to see what Maximus says indeed. Nature in this text is truly in the middle between God and the world, the latter of which represents the fall of nature if man turns towards it. What happens in relation to God? According to Maximus, if the natural man turns towards Him, “*He keeps man a man as he is* (τουθ’ ὅπερ ἐστὶ διαφυλάττει τὸν ἄνθρωπον), *and he makes him in condition of God* (θέσει Θεόν), *by offering him the divinization above nature, out of His goodness.*” If man’s nature is kept “as [it] is”, no rupture with it seems necessary when man is divinized. This is because divinization has to do with the change of nature’s *mode of existence*, and not with an alteration of nature itself. Man becomes a divinized man θέσει but not φύσει, i.e. full of grace *as man*, and not a god or an angel! Any rupture or ekstasis from nature would have made divinization an empty word, as it is precisely nature that is divinized *through the hyper physin mode of existence given to it through the Incarnation*. There seems to exist, for the Confessor, a continuity of nature with grace, since the divine logoi of beings also form existential ways toward God, i.e. ways toward the “accomplishment” of “eternal well-being” in rational creatures (See the text *Ad Thal.* 61, 645AB above, and my *Eucharistic Ontology*, 84-88). It is obvious that the “fulfilment of nature” in a divine mode of existence constitutes the only reason for the Incarnation.

43 The texts are given by Pirret, below. In his n.72 (112), Zizioulas tries to place his ideas of a rupture between nature and grace in a Christological perspective. This is precisely what I refer to in my *Heythrop* article as a *Christology of escape*. Theosis (divinization) is now *above nature* precisely because, according to the author, grace is identified with “the Person of Logos,” Who helps beings to *ecstatically* escape their nature, as “the concepts of *ὑπὲρ φύσιν* and of *χάρις* coincide.” However, this unfortunately is also based on the misreading of a Maximian text (*Ad Thal.* PG 90:324AB): the Confessor simply says that the “human being does not possess either the power of hyper-being or that of non-being,” *precisely because a human being is not by nature God*, and, second, *since man did not create himself ex nihilo, he is unable to return to nothingness*. Consequently, a human being “does not have either the power to acquire theosis by nature” (i.e. without

ousia is the hypostases, the hypostases is the ousia,"⁴⁴ in the sense that the two natures *are* Christ's unique hypostatic identity, or, better, according to Maximus, the two natures are "the complements of one person,"⁴⁵ and not "possessed" by it, since person alone is just an *abstract property*, as we have seen above, non-existent without them.

The problem is after all that, as I have already claimed, when we use this *spatial, vertical model* of understanding a human being, or Christ, in terms of "above" and "below" (person above, nature below), a model that R. A. Markus calls Neoplatonic (spiritual above, carnal below), we tend to forget that "the biblical opposition, on the other hand, depends on Christ's redemptive work: ... The opposition is not between something cosmologically 'higher' and something 'lower.'"⁴⁶ The biblical opposition, rather, is one best expressed in temporal rather than spatial terms, precisely as "new" and "old." The spatial model entails possession, which means controlling and domination of the above over the below, as happened not only in Neoplatonism, introduced in Western theology through Augustine and in the Eastern theology through Origen, but also in the course of the modern idealism of the *Detached Self*, to use Charles Taylor's terms, of which not only Kant, but also Heidegger, Sartre, and Levinas are some of the final upshots. If the "above" being also possesses will, then we have the core of Western metaphysics, as Heidegger described it, as the metaphysics of the Will to Power.

the assistance of grace), or prevent suffering "the wickedness as a result of our choices against nature, since we do not either have the natural power to invent wickedness. In this life we practice virtues, since we have by nature the power for virtuous practice, while we experience theosis in the future, by accepting it as a gift of the grace for our suffering." This text does not suggest any allusion to a rupture between nature and grace, and Maximus does not exclusively identify grace with theosis in the eschatological future. It could not be so unless we also assert that the practice of "natural" virtues in this life can be accomplished without grace! After all, through the virtues we have the 'natural' power to accomplish something that is "in the here and now" by grace, i.e. by divine logoi/wills (see n.38 above). It is impossible to disconnect the concept of nature from that of grace in Maximus, and, if we were to do so, we would strip from Maximus what is precisely his most valuable contribution to the modern theological quest.

44 P. Pirret, "Christologie et theologie trinitaire chez Maxime le Confesseur, d'après sa formule des natures 'desquelles, en lesquelles et lesquelles est le Christ'", in Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn eds, *Maximus Confessor, Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, Fribourg, 2-5 Sept. 1980 (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982), 215-222.

45 PG 91:552A.

46 R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 79.

Thus it is not accidental that nature for Kant is *phenomenological*, as Collingwood claims,⁴⁷ or that being in Heidegger is ecstatically identified with its *mode of existence*,⁴⁸ while, for Levinas, real being exists as it existentially emerges out of the (*abstract universal?*) Totality. In all cases, what is repressed, according to the Lacanian reading of Freudian tradition, is nature, since the I of this sort of philosophical theory is already what Lacan terms *the social I*, emerging after the end of the *mirror stage*, i.e. after the end of *primary narcissism*. Lacan continues: "It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into being mediated by the other's desire, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence due to competition from other people, and turns the I into an apparatus to which *any instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation process.*"⁴⁹ (my italics). It is this *alienation*, articulated as a repression of the natural selfhood in favour of the imaginary development of the *social, detached I* that Maximian theology saves us from, along with the following neurotic aggressiveness that characterizes it, and the will to power, where it is metaphysically embedded. By indissolubly connecting will with nature, Maximus puts a full stop to any possessive, dominating, and controlling detachment of person from nature, which would make the growth of the person unreal, imaginative, or even neurotic – Lacan does not hesitate to use here even the term *paranoiac*.

Personal growth now means, on the contrary, a loving response to the divine call that lies within our nature, which thus becomes not an abstract sameness, but a personal ascetic way of following God, in Christ, in whose Incarnation the ultimate meaning of those loving *logoi/calls* leads. Maximus' answer to the question concerning human essence is different, as I tried to show elsewhere.⁵⁰ For him man is not his "person," nor his "nature," nor even a sort of an "addition" of them, but "*his wholeness*," as he explicitly asserts: "something beyond them, and around them, giving them coherence, but itself not bound with them." With these mysterious claims Maximus overcomes all the philosophical idealism and existentialism inherent in modern theology, by inserting freedom and

47 See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), 119.

48 See Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, vol. 3 (Yale: Yale University Press, 2000), 4:2.

49 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2006), 79.

50 In my *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self: Mysticism of Power and the Truth of Nature and Personhood* (in Greek), (*Athens: Ellinika Letters, 1999*), ch.2,

dialogical reciprocity in the very constitution of human being that is absolutely psychosomatic, but nonetheless in a state of a free dialogical becoming. This is *human wholeness*, and thus we have Maximus' *apophatic anthropology*, which is, as I strove to show in my *Eucharistic Ontology*, decisively eschatological and historical at the same time. Unless this anthropology is properly understood, modern Orthodox theology will never be able to go beyond modern Western philosophical subjectivism, which seems to mark, totally or partially, at least two generations of Orthodox theologians.