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A Freedom beyond Conflict:
The Logic of Internal Conflict and the Free Will in Maximus the Confessor

1. Introduction

Any social conflicts, religious or not, have roots in the internal conflicts related to the human freedom, but—what is less obvious—the human freedom is in the conflict with logics: not with all possible logics but certainly with the logics where the law of non-contradiction is in force. The freedom requires tolerating some contradictions in reality.

This problem has two ends:

1. (in)compatibility between God and the evil (thus, the possibility for the rational beings to choose the evil),
2. (in)compatibility between the irreversibility of the deification (θέωσις) and the freedom of the human being.

These are two sides of the unique problem. The side (1) was mostly discussed in the West, whereas the side (2) in the East, especially in connexion with Christology, where the most important contributions were those of Maximus the Confessor. From both sides, the resolution of the problem could be approached only through a breach in the wall of the logic inherited from the Greek Antiquity, which continued to be, in Byzantium, the logic of common sense, if not simply *the* logic. The specific theological ideas were considered as belonging to the realm ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ ἔννοιαν—let us translate "above logic and reason" (Theotokion dogmatikon, tone 7). Nevertheless, their solutions were explained in a precise manner—theoretically, no less precise that the logical standards of the Greek Antiquity would have required.

Maximus the Confessor turned out to be the most successful in constructing the formal logical apparatus able to express what is beyond and above any form and any logic. For the modern, post-20th-century logical point of view, this could be considered, however, as a logical task, even though within a non-classical logical framework.

2. The *liberum arbitrium* in the East: God as a "Round Square"

To appreciate the tension between the Greek logic and the problems to be resolved concerning the free will problem, it would be useful to address some predecessors of Maximus, whose theological ideas were taken by him for granted.

This is the problem of the possibility—to those who dispose with the free will—to choose the evil. Does God tolerate the evil choice of the created free will? For the West, the problem was acute, because, if so, God would be not omnipotent. Therefore, two classical western answers to the problem of theodicy are either predestinarianism (God is omnipotent, but there is no free will in the proper sense) or atheism (God must be omnipotent but there is the evil, and, therefore, God does not exist). As a modern logician wrote about the Anselmian God and his recent avatars, "[a]n existent God is metaphysically impossible as the unresolved problem of evil indicates... To be at once omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly benevolent, and the author of an actual world in which there is moral and natural evil is tantamount to being a round square" (Dale Jacquette, *Meinongian Logic*, Berlin—N.Y.: de Gruyter, 1996, 237).

Those in the West who took the problem of preserving the free will very seriously were the early 17th-century Spanish Jesuits, followers of Luis de Molina, especially Diego Montoya and Diego Granado, and Leibniz. They preferred to consider inconsistent the human, whereas preserving God consistent and omnipotent. According to them, God limited himself to the "moral necessity" only, but he created each

individual human "vague" (Leibniz's term): the divine predestination establishes only "vague" concepts, which become crisp when the free choice is made by the free will; however, the "moral necessity" implies that God will turn the scale to the best at any outcome of the free choice.

In this way, the Jesuit Molinists and Leibniz escaped the danger which they called "semi-Pelagianism," that is, that God could be limited not by himself only but with a created will (in the case if the latter would choose the evil). However, this "semi-Pelagianist" attitude was the only one accepted by the Eastern Fathers. Their western disciple, John Cassian defended it against the Augustinians in the early fifth century.

In Eastern Patristics, the human will is free, but the human reality is not "vague" in a Leibnizian sense. However, the God, while omnipotent, is not consistent—to the extent that he could be compared with a round square. This idea, which is even now unbearable to the absolute majority of the analytical theologians, was explicit in Dionysius the Areopagite and was taken as it is by Maximus and the Eastern Patristics. In the West, however, Nicholas of Cusa criticised Albert the Great's Commentary to Dionysius for distorting his thought in this respect (the Cusanus himself followed Dionysius). Dionysius does not hesitate to call God "nothing" (οὐδέν) and "inexistent" (μὴ ὄν)—in the sense in what the created things exist:

> "[God] is the cause of the every being, and he is himself inexistent (μὴ ὄν) as being above every essence" [αἴτιον μὲν τοῦ εἶναι πᾶσιν, αὐτὸ δὲ μὴ ὂν ὡς πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα (*DN* 1:1; 588 B)]; "It is the Cause of all things and yet Itself is nothing (οὐδέν), because It super-essentially transcends them all" (Rolt's tr.) [ὅτι πάντων μέν ἐστι τῶν ὄντων αἴτιον, αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδὲν ὡς πάντων ὑπερουσίως ἐξῃρημένον (*DN* 1:5; 593 C).

3.   The Problem for Maximus

All this is extremely important to avoid the most common, among the modern interpreters, errors in understanding of both Maximus's and Monothelete Christologies, as well as Maximus's teaching about the free will.

How the two natures of Christ are united if they are so incomparable, in the extent that they even do not exist in the same sense of the word? The answer "within the unique hypostasis" was simply a reformulation of the question, even though useful. The standard answers in the fifth and especially the sixth centuries were formulated through the notions of "energy" and "will" (θέλημα). Among the Chalcedonians, these discussions caused that the monothelete language became quite common, as it was among the non-Chalcedonians. We need to skip the whole spectrum of the sixth- and seventh-century answers for focusing ourselves on the problem dealt with by Maximus.

His main opponents were those Monotheletes who confessed *two* wills in Christ. There were a number of different kinds of Monotheletism (so far nobody knows them all), with either Monophysite or Dyophysite background. The minimal distant from Maximus was the kind of Monotheletism—with the Dyophysite background, of course—where the human will was acknowledged in all those acts of Christ that were normally referred to by Maximus himself as epiphenomena of the human energy = natural will (such as the anger, the thirst or the fear in the front of the death). The most known (to us) theologian of this kind is patriarch Pyrrhus as he exposed his views in the *Disputatio* with Maximus in 645.

According to Pyrrhus, the human will was appropriated by the Logos, indeed, but not after the resurrection. However, even Maximus was agree that, after the resurrection, no human passion has been shown by Christ. Maximus and Pyrrhus agreed that such passions were previously accepted by the Logos according to the "relative appropriation" (κατὰ... οἰκείωσιν... σχετικήν), in the same manner as we are participating in the conditions or acts of the others through our love (καθ ἥν φιλικῶς τά ἀλλήλων οἰκειούμεθα καί στέργομεν, μηδέν τούτων αὐτοί ἤ πάσχοντες, ἤ ἐνεργοῦντες). This relative appropriation is outside of what we call incarnation. Then, Pyrrhus insisted that the human will in Christ was appropriated in this way only. Maximus disagreed answering that this would mean that the Logos incarnated in a human nature without its natural will and, therefore, not in the really existing human nature. However, in the dispute with Pyrrhus, Maximus did not explain his positive understanding of the union between the two natural wills in the incarnation. The by contrary proof provided there was not enough.

His positive teaching is explained in his later *Opuscula theologica et polemica* (esp. nr 1). Here, he tried to explain what remains from the human natural will and energy if they do not express themselves as human. This problem is relevant for the human nature both in Christ and in the deified human persons. In both cases, the human will is no longer in a slightest disagreement with the divine one; even the prayer for "removing this cup" is no longer possible. Is there any liberty if there is no *liberum arbitrium* at all?

To my knowledge, there is no understanding of either liberty or free will in the modern western culture that is compatible with this condition. Not only there is no longer any choice, but also there is no possibility of acting differentially at all. According to Aristotle, the latter is the necessary condition of freedom of an agent: "... the principle (ἀρχή) that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such [= voluntary] actions is in him, and the things of which the (moving) principle is in a man himself are in his power to do or not to do" (NE, bk 3). The modern and mediaeval western thinkers have discussed the concept of "principle" in this definition but nobody put under suspicion the definition itself. It is obvious, however, that, according to this definition and regardless of any further understanding of the notion of "the moving principle," there is no human freedom in the Maximian concepts of both humanity incarnation of the Logos and deification of the humans. For Maximus, "the moving principle" of the deified humans and incarnated Logos is only God.

If there any difference between this situation of the deified human person and the situation of a man who sold himself into the servitude? Even if the origin of his action of solving himself was in himself, his further actions performed in the condition of servitude will be no longer free. Everybody including Maximus would agree with this reasoning. After all, this is nothing than the normal reasoning applied, in the Byzantine anthropology, to the human condition in the sinful state. Then, should we consider the humanity in deification, in both Christ and deified humans, still preserving its free will? Why the sin denies our freedom, whereas the deification does not? Why the sin suppresses our natural will and put us into a condition damaging our nature, whereas the deification not?

In the west, a similar problem was and still is discussed in relation to God: whether God is free or not, that is, whether he was/is able to act otherwise than he acted/acts? His freedom seems to be inconsistent with his goodness if he allows the evil. Leibniz resolved this problem in the way of redefinition of freedom, in submitting God's actions to the "laws of wisdom" (*Theodicy,* 359), in the framework of his understanding of "moral necessity" imposed to God. The modern philosophers do not agree with Leibniz at this point and, therefore, prefer to limit explicitly either freedom or omnipotence of God. In Byzantium, as we recall, there was no need for God to be consistent. Therefore, the acute theological problem was related to the human freedom only.

4. Maximus's Definition of Freedom

To begin with, Maximus does not separates the freedom from the free will. Already in the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* he defined: τό γάρ αὐτεξούσιον, κατά τούς Πατέρας, θέλησίς ἐστιν "the freedom, according to the Fathers, is the (natural) will". One often translates the word αὐτεξούσιον (or simply ἐξούσιον) "free will" or, even worse, *liberum arbitrium*, but this not correct, even though fitting with many contexts.

In the *Opuscula theologica et polemica*, 1, Maximus provided a detailed definition—in the context of the need to discern between the γνώμη "choice" (the exact Maximian correspondent to the western *liberum arbitrium*) and προαίρεσις "acting for performing a choice", on the one hand, and ἐξουσία as his basic notion for "freedom," on the other:

Ἀλλ᾽ οὔτε ἐξουσία ἐστίν ἡ προαίρεσις. Ἡ μέν γάρ προαίρεσις, ὡς πολλάκις ἔφην, ὄρεξις ἐστι βουλευτική τῶν ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν πρακτῶν· ἡ δέ ἐξουσία, [1] κυριότης ἔννομος τῶν ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν πρακτῶν [2] ἤ κυριότης ἀκώλυτος τῆς τῶν ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν χρήσεως· ἤ [3]ὄρεξις τῶν ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν ἀδούλωτος. Οὐκ ἔστιν οὖν ταυτόν ἐξουσία καί προαίρεσις· εἴπερ κατ᾽ ἐξουσίαν μέν προαιρούμεθα· οὐκ ἐξουσιάζομεν δέ κατά προαίρεσιν· καί ἡ μέν ἐπιλέγεται μόνον· ἡ δέ χρᾶται τοῖς ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν, καί τοῖς	And neither the freedom is the choosing. The choosing, as I have said many times, is a wishful aspiration of what is ours to perform, whereas the freedom is [1] the innate authority to perform what is ours or [2] the unobstructed authority of using what is ours or [3] the non-slavish aspiration of what is ours. Therefore, the freedom and the choosing is not the same: if we, indeed, we aspire according to the freedom, we do not acquire the freedom according to what we aspire, and the aspiration is only choosing, whereas the freedom makes use of what is ours

ἐπί τοῖς ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν, ἤγουν, προαιρέσει καί κρίσει καί βουλῇ. Κατ' ἐξουσίαν γάρ βουλευόμεθα, καί κρίνομεν, καί προαιρούμεθα, καί ὁρμῶμεν, καί χρώμεθα τοῖς ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν.	and what is [depending] on what is ours, that is, the aspiration, the decision, and the wish. Because it is according to the freedom that we are wishing, deciding, choosing, aspiring, and using what is ours.

Let us recall as well the definition of the (natural) will as the freedom. Now we can see that the freedom (and the natural will) is possible where no choice is possible, whereas the contrary is not true (the choice is impossible where there is no freedom). The bijection relation between choosing and freedom (free will), which is normal for the western thinkers to begin with Aristotle, is broken. The free will without the free choice is proclaimed possible (cf. more on this in McFarland 2010). Let us consider this in details.

This definition of the freedom contains three parts. The part [2] coincides with what is now, after Isaiah Berlin (1958), is called the negative understanding of freedom; this is the common denominator of almost all definitions of freedom. The part [3] is the Aristotelian claim of having the origin of the truly free actions in the agent himself. This condition is needed to explain, among others, why the free will of a human is necessary for God to save him. This is also an explanation why, in the incarnation, God assumed the will that would have been, at least, theoretically, slavish or non-slavish. These two aspects of the freedom were called by Nikolai Berdyaev "the freedom from" and "the freedom for." However, Maximus introduced something third and put this on the first place.

The part [1] is at odds with the antique tradition. What means this "innate authority to perform," κυριότης ἔννομος τῶν… πρακτῶν? The mutual relations between [1] and [3] are not obvious.
To be able to perform something you need to have a "non-slavish aspiration" to perform this, whereas not *vice versa*. [3] is a precondition for [1] but [3] is senseless without [1]. In this way, the two are mutually connected. Nevertheless, the first part of the tripartite definition is crucial. We can paraphrase it saying that the (true) freedom, that is, the natural free will (θέλημα) is power—some kind of.

However, in the same *opusculum* (col. 33) and elsewhere, Maximus insists that there is no human capacity for deification: Ἄρα τῆς ἡμῶν οὐκ ἔστι δυνάμεως πρᾶξις ἡ θέωσις, ἧς οὐκ ἔχομεν κατά φύσιν τήν δύναμιν· ἀλλά μόνης τῆς θείας δυνάμεως "Therefore it is not in our power to perform the deification, for which we have no power according to the nature, but only in the divine power." Maximus felt that this made problematic the participation of the free will in salvation. Already in *Amb. 7* (the text commented by himself in the present passage) he had written: Μή ταραττέτω δέ ὑμᾶς τό λεγόμενον. Οὐ γάρ ἀναίρεσιν τοῦ αὐτεξουσίου γένεσθαί φημι, ἀλλά θέσιν μᾶλλον τήν κατά φύσιν παγίαν τε καί ἀμετάθετον, ἤγουν ἐκχώρησιν γνωμικήν "Let not what I have said disturb you, for I did not say that there will be a withdrawal/deprivation of the freedom but rather (affirming) our fixed and unchangeable natural disposition, that is, a surrender of choosing." In the present text, Maximus explains further:

Οὐκ ἀνεῖλον οὖν τήν φυσικήν τῶν τοῦτο πεισομένων ἐνεργείαν, ὧν ἀποτελεῖν πέφυκε πεπαυμένην, καί μόνην ἐμφήνας τῶν ἀγαθῶν τήν ἀπόλαυσιν πάσχουσαν· ἀλλά μόνην ὑπέδειξα θεώσεως ἀπεργαστικήν τήν ὑπερούσιον δύναμιν, κατά χάριν τῶν θεωθέντων γεγενημένην.	Therefore, I did not refuse those who will experience it [deification] (to have) the natural energy,—which I have represented (however) standing still from achieving its usual (goals) and subjected only to tasting the goods,—but I have pointed out as performing the deification uniquely the above-all-being power which became by grace that of those who are deified.

This is the resolution of the problem. Indeed, if the power performing the deification does not belong to the deified persons, this would mean that their freedom is destroyed. And, indeed, this power does not belong to the deified persons. However, their freedom—that must be destroyed—is not destroyed nevertheless. The power performing their deification, although without belonging to them according to the nature, becomes truly belonging to them according to the grace.

This situation is inconsistent: the same subjects do not have but have the deifying power *in the same respect*, namely, in the respect relevant to their freedom. "By nature" and "by grace" are certainly different as causal respects but not as respects featuring the achieved state. This is but a particular case of the inconsistency the very notion of the Maximian concept of deification according to the formula *tantum—quantum* (the

deified persons become God exactly in the same extent as the Logos became human). Both concepts of God and of deification contain internal contradictions. In the passage of the *Opuscula* just quoted the preceding sentence mentioned one of such fundamental contradictions: "…in the way that (God) will be both perfectly cognised and remaining completely incomprehensible" (ἵνα καί τελείως γνωσθῇ, καί μείνῃ παντελῶς ἀκατάληπτος).

Maximus's idea that, for achieving deification, the human person needs only God himself and, therefore, must denounce any predilection, "to choose not to choose," is a basic idea of Eastern asceticism. It was condemned, however, in the west, in the 1329 Papal bull directed against Meister Eckhart (*In agro dominico* by John XXII), where it was formulated as following:

Octavus articulus. Qui non intendunt res nec honores nec utilitarem nec devotionem internam nec sanctitatem nec premium nec regnum celorum, sed omnibus hiis renuntiaverunt, etiam quod suum est, in illis hominibus honoratur Deus.	The eighth article. Those who seek nothing, neither honour nor profit nor inwardness nor holiness nor reward nor heaven, but who have renounced all, including what is their own—in such persons is God honoured.

Meister Eckhart's doctrine aimed at was perfectly "Eastern" and Maximian: that the love for God "has no *why*" (*diu minne enhât kein warumbe*; Pr. 28).

5. Toward a Logical Formalisation

The human freedom is preserved in the way that the human acquires the divine freedom. The natural human freedom implying the capacity for choosing is suppressed. However, without the natural human free will it would be impossible to acquire the divine deifying power and the divine freedom.

God is hardly less free than the human being but he does not choose. The deified human being does not choose either but he/she is hardly less free than he/she was in the natural condition, not to say in the condition of servitude to the sin. The latter condition is simply a condition with no choice. The deified condition could not be described so simply.

In Maximus's terms, a choice of not choosing took place: ἐχώρησις γνωμικής (*Amb.* 7). I would prefer to say that this "choice of not choosing" could be described as a choice from a unique possibility.

According to the most of the modern deontic logicians, if there is only a unique variant to choose, there is no choice at all; this is the point of view put forward by Aristotle. However, it is counter-intuitive: the situation of no choice provokes panic resulting from the feeling of helplessness, whereas the situation of the choice from a unique variant, whatever hard it could be, is much more bearable, because it implies some line of behaviour.

Another example. Let us suppose that I am planning to choose one apple from the vase that I see from a distance. After having approaching it, I see that there is only one apple in it. I take this apple but without feeling that I have found nothing. Were the vase void, my feelings would be different. Now, however, I feel my task of choosing accomplished, even though I had only one variant to choose. My understanding of this situation is depending, of course, on my previous decision to perform a choice. Otherwise, I would say that there is only one apple5 and, therefore, no choice.

The same difference—crucial in some situations—is between the glass half-full and the glass half-empty. In a similar manner (from a logical point of view), we can discern between the two kinds of limitation of the human freedom, in the deification and in the sinful state, as well as, by consequence, by the asceticism and by the sinful passions. They are truly two different kinds of limitations, even though looking similarly,—as well as the half-full and half-empty glasses are two different glasses.