

## CHAPTER 7

# Love in Dionysius the Areopagite and St Maximus the Confessor

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**Abstract:** Love (*erōs*, *agapē*) is a fundamental category in the sixth-century Dionysius the Areopagite and the seventh-century Maximus the Confessor, the latter being confessedly dependant on the former, and both formative for the later Byzantine tradition. Both are indebted to earlier thinkers, both pagan thinkers such as Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus, and Christian thinkers such as Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers. Dionysius's teaching on love presents a fundamentally metaphysical account, with cosmic entailments. He assimilates the two Greek words for love, *erōs* and *agapē*, seeing them both as manifestations of beauty and responses to beauty, and using them more or less interchangeably for the ecstatic love of God for the cosmos and the love that underlies the creatures' return to union, to the One. Maximus shares Dionysius's sense of love as metaphysical and cosmic, but his teaching is much more practical, and presents love as something that can be attained by the Christian or monk, though it requires genuine ascetic struggle. He makes more of a distinction between *erōs* and *agapē* than Dionysius, seeing *erōs* as perfecting the soul's desire, while *agapē* perfects the soul's *thumos*, psychic energy. Maximus's understanding of the interrelated psychological makeup of the soul, influenced by Evagrius, though with its own characteristic emphases, also underlies his sense of what is meant by the restoration of the cosmos.

**Keywords:** love, beauty, soul, cosmos, Platonism

This paper is concerned with two thinkers who were to exercise an enormous influence on Byzantine theology: Dionysius the Areopagite (or, to be precise, the person who wrote under his name) and St Maximus the Confessor. What we find with them, something characteristic of the subsequent Byzantine tradition in general, is an understanding of love broader and deeper than something simply ethical; for both love

Citation of this chapter: Louth, A. (2021). Love in Dionysius the Areopagite and St Maximus the Confessor. In K. Grørdum, H. F. Hågg, J. Kaufman & T. T. Tollefsen (Eds.), *Love – ancient perspectives* (Ch. 7, pp. 123–137). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.133.cho7>  
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(*erōs* or *agapē*) have aspects or dimensions that are metaphysical and cosmic. Something of this conviction they inherit from their predecessors, both the pagan Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition and the Christian tradition of such theologians as Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers.

Although St Maximus the Confessor acknowledges his debt to the Areopagite on several occasions (and indeed cites him several times in his *Centuries on Love*), when we compare the way in which the two Fathers treat the concept of love, their approach seems very different. Dionysius's treatment is fundamentally metaphysical: his longest discussion of love occurs in chapter 4 of the *Divine Names*, the chapter dedicated to the first of the divine names, that is, the name of the Good. Maximus discusses love in virtually all of his works in one way or another; nevertheless there are two treatises dedicated to love, *agapē*, itself, namely, his second letter, addressed to John the Chamberlain, and his four *Centuries on Love*, dedicated to an otherwise unknown Father Elpidius (most likely a fellow monk), for whom Maximus composed his "Questions and answers" (*erōtapokriseis*), the *Liber Asceticus*. These works are, in one sense, complementary, in that the first was written for a layman, a high-ranking court official, while the latter was written for a fellow monk. What I propose to do in this paper is set out, first, an account of Dionysius's doctrine of love, derived from *Divine Names* 4, and then an account of Maximus's doctrine, based on the works I have mentioned, and then go on to explore what connexions I can see, which may, I hope, show some of the ways in which their very different approaches converge.<sup>1</sup>

*Divine Names* 4 is dedicated to the first of the divine names, the "Good", to be followed in later chapters by discussion of being, life, wisdom, and various other names, concluding with the "Perfect" or the "One". To start with the Good betrays Dionysius's fundamental Platonic affinities: he is well aware of the position the Form of the Good holds in Plato's thought, especially in the *Republic*; the analogy of the sun in *Republic* VI. 507–9 lies behind his initial reflections on the Good. Dionysius soon moves on

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<sup>1</sup> For Dionysius's *Divine Names*, I have used the critical edition by Suchla, 1990, though I have given references to the columns in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 3, which are to be found in most editions and translations. For Maximus, *Ep.* 2, see Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 91: 392D–408B; for the *Centuries of Love* (= *CL*), see Ceresa-Gastaldo's (1963) edition.

to add to the notion of the Good, *to agathon*, the notion of the Beautiful, *to kalon*, or Beauty, *to kallos*. These are not to be distinguished, because beauty is the “cause of the harmony and splendour” in everything; it is a ray pouring forth from a hidden source, says Dionysius, echoing an important insight of Plotinus’s, shining on everything beautiful, bestowing on it a radiance from beyond. It is because it calls – *kaloun* – everything to itself that it is called *kallos*, beauty. Beauty is not just something pleasing; it lies at the heart of reality:

For beauty is the cause of harmony, of sympathy, of community. Beauty unites all things and is the source of all things. It is the great creating cause which bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing (*erōs*) inside them to have beauty ... The Beautiful is therefore the same as the Good, for everything looks to the Beautiful and the Good as the cause of being, and there is nothing in the world without a share of the Beautiful and the Good.  
(DN 4:704AB)

It is because of the Good and the Beautiful (I don’t think Dionysius actually uses *kalokagathia*) that everything exists and everything relates one to another. Both the harmony of all things and their mutual sympathy, as well as their individual reality, are due to the Good and the Beautiful: Dionysius speaks of the *koinōniai* of the opposed, the *assummixiai* of the united, the *pronoiai* of the higher, the *allēllouchiai* of like-constituted, the *epistrofai* of the more needy – all of these manifest the rest and repose, protecting and unchanging, that beings have among themselves (704B). Dionysius goes on to speak of the threefold movement – direct, circular, and spiral – that is to be found among both intellects and souls. From these movements, all inspired by the Good and the Beautiful, comes all the variety and harmony of the cosmos. Such movement originates from the desire, and the love, both *erōs* and *agapē*, that all things have for the Good and the Beautiful.

This leads into what appears at first sight to be a digression, but is more than that, about the use of *erōs* and *agapē*. He imagines objectors to his use of *erōs*, because it is not found in the Scriptures. One might wonder why someone writing, most likely, in the early sixth century would see this as a still-live issue, but, of course, Dionysius is pretending to be writing at

the turn of the first century, and is aware of objectors to the use of *erōs* in earlier times. Indeed, in his consciousness of his mask, he almost lets it slip, for it is clear (though only pointed out by István Perczel (1999) fairly recently) that Dionysius bases himself in this section on Origen's discussion of *eros* and *agape* in the preface to his commentary on the Song of Songs. He condenses and misses much of Origen's argumentation, but his argument that *eros* and *agape* have the same meaning – and what matters is the power of what is meant (*hē dynamis tou skopou*) and not simply the words – is Origen's, as well as most of the citations he uses in support of his argument: Proverbs 4:6, 8 (LXX: *erasthēti autēs* – “Love her”, spoken of Wisdom), and Wisdom 8:2 (“I became a lover [*erastēs egenomēn*] of her beauty”), and the citation from the “divine Ignatius” – “my love [*erōs*] has been crucified” (*Rom. 7:2*). Just before introducing that quotation from Ignatius, Dionysius remarks that “it appears to some of our writers on sacred matters [*hierologōn*] that the name *eros* is more divine than that of *agape*” (*DN 4.12:709B*). One would expect Dionysius to be referring to scriptural writers, though his usual word for them is *theologos*, not *hierologos*, and indeed he goes on to quote Ignatius, but there is a writer who seems to say that *eros* is more divine than *agape*: and that is St Gregory of Nyssa. In the first Homily on the Song of Songs (*PG 44:772*) he argues for *eros* in preference to *agape*, and in the thirteenth homily he says that *agape* stretched to intensity (*epitetamenē*) is *eros* (*Or. 13:048C*).<sup>2</sup> I am not suggesting that Dionysius would have expected his readers to have picked up the reference – that would have completely blown his pseudonym – but if they thought of Gregory of Nyssa in this context, it would have confirmed the sense that quickly gained ground that Dionysius was a thoroughly Orthodox theologian (and, in the eyes of his readers, a possible source for the notions of love one finds in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa). His teaching on love, *eros*, is summed up a paragraph or two later:

Divine *eros* is ecstatic [a paraphrase of Gregory's *epitetamenē gar agapē ho erōs legetai?*], so that lovers belong not to themselves but to those they love. This is manifest in the providence shown to the weaker by the higher, in the mutual regard for those of equal status, and in the more divine return of the lower

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<sup>2</sup> See Daniélou's discussion in Daniélou (1954), pp. 206–208.

towards the first. Therefore also the divine Paul, possessed by divine *eros* and swept up by its ecstatic power, says with divine voice, “I live, but no longer I, but Christ lives in me”. As a true lover, and beside himself, as he says, in God, he is living not his own life, but that life exceedingly longed for, the life of his beloved. (712A)

And Dionysius goes on to add that

We must dare to add this as being no less true; that the Source of all things Himself, in His wonderful and good love for all things, through the excess of His loving goodness, is carried outside Himself, in His providential care for all that is, so enchanted is He in goodness and love and longing. Removed from His position above all and beyond all, He descends to be in all according to an ecstatic and transcendent power, which is yet inseparable from Himself. (712AB)

And says, furthermore, that

the divine love shows especially its unending nature without beginning like some eternal circle travelling in unerring revolution through the Good, from the Good, in the Good and into the Good, always with the same centre and in accordance with itself eternally proceeding and remaining and being restored to itself. (712D-713A)

This goes well beyond Aristotle’s vision of the unmoved mover, which “moves through being loved” (*kinei de hōs erōmenon: Metaph.* 11:1072b): in ecstatic divine love, God moves through all his creation (note that in this section Dionysius is not thinking about God’s love in the Incarnation, but simply about his cosmic love) (Osborne, 1994, pp. 195 ff.), and all love, uniting and preserving, is a manifestation of God’s own love.

Once we see the cosmic nature of love, as a unifying and preserving power, we can see that Dionysius is talking about love, even when he does not mention the term. *Eros*, for instance, is not used at all in the *Mystical Theology*, still less *agape*, but it is all about ecstatic union, which is what Dionysius means by *eros*. Similarly the notion of hierarchy, defined in the *Celestial Hierarchy* as “a sacred order and knowledge and activity which is being assimilated as much as possible to likeness with God”, is also a manifestation of divine *eros*, as Dionysius expounds it in his *Divine Names*.

A final point, before we move on. Most scholars writing about Dionysius on love (or indeed almost anything) raise, at some point or another, the question: is this Christian or Neoplatonist? It has always seemed to me not a very helpful question, though in attempting to answer it, lots of interesting points have emerged: for example, the notion of *erōs pronoētikos*, God's outgoing love to those lower than him, can easily be found to have a precedent in Proclus, or even in Plato; nevertheless, the notion in Platonists like Proclus has far less scope than in Dionysius, for *eros*, to the Platonists, is just one of the gods, not especially exalted, whereas Dionysius's *eros* is God's love for the cosmos.<sup>3</sup> It seems to me, however, that Dionysius would not have understood the contrast being suggested. His pseudonym was adopted because he saw in Christianity a convergence between the classical tradition of Platonism and the biblical tradition; his teaching, especially on love, is soaked in Platonism or Neoplatonism, but he derives it, at critical points, from the Scriptures, interpreted through his Neoplatonic spectacles, as it were. Early on in his presentation of his doctrine of love in *Divine Names* 4, seeing the communication of light to beings that turn towards God as ever the more abundant, for they "loved much" (*hoti ēgapēsen poly*), he quotes exactly (save for changing the verb to the plural form) the Lord's commendation of the harlot who had anointed his feet with myrrh, washed them with her tears, and wiped them with her hair, at the table of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:47); and his example of one who loves ecstatically is none other than Paul the apostle. The ramifications of this have been explored recently at some length by Charles M. Stang (2012).

What about the doctrine of love in St Maximus the Confessor? If we open his *Four Centuries on Love*, we seem to be entering a different world. Although his very first words recall Dionysius – "Love is a good disposition of the soul, according to which one prefers no creature to the knowledge of God" (*CL* I.1) – for there is the same sense that love is a one-centred attention to God, the echo is not very close and the next two chapters begin to sound very different indeed.

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<sup>3</sup> This is the point of several articles by J. M. Rist. See, e.g., Rist, 1964.

*Apatheia* gives birth to love; hope in God to *apatheia*; patience and long-suffering to hope; these are the children of all-embracing self-mastery; self-mastery the child of fear of God; and fear comes from faith in the Lord. He who believes in the Lord fears punishment; the one who fears punishment masters his passions; the one who masters his passions endures hardship; the one who endures hardship will have hope in God; hope in God separates one from every earthly inclination; the mind separated from these will have love towards God. (CL I. 2–3)

These two chapters constitute a chiasmus. The first has a sequence: love – *apatheia* – hope – patience and long-suffering – self-mastery (*enkrateia*) – fear of God – faith in God; the second: faith – punishment – mastery of the passions – hardship (or tribulation: *thlipsis*) – hope – separation from earthly inclinations – love. It has not been generally noticed that what we have here in Maximus is based on a few verses in Paul’s epistle to the Romans. Neither Ceresa-Gastaldo nor the translations I have consulted – in the English *Philokalia* (Palmer et al., 1981, p. 53) and Polycarp Sherwood’s (Sherwood, 1955, p. 137, note 248) – make any reference to it. In Romans 5:1–4, we read,

Justified then through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and boast on the basis of hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we take pride in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience testing, and testing hope, and hope is not ashamed, for the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.

Paul’s sequence is faith – tribulations – patience – testing (*dokimē*) – hope – love. What was for Paul a sequence envisaging the experience of Christians under persecution – faith, leading to persecution experienced as tribulation, borne by patience, in a process of testing, the fruit of which is hope, which is rewarded by love poured out in the Holy Spirit – is transposed by Maximus into the progress in ascetic struggle experienced by the monk. This recalls the way in which, with the peace of the Church in the fourth century, the role of the martyr was assumed by the ascetic or monk. A key term, *thlipsis*, changes its meaning from tribulation under persecution to tribulation under temptation, just as *peirasmos*

alters its meaning from persecution that may be beyond our powers (as in the *Our Father*) to temptation in the sense of challenges to a faithful following of Christ: both, of course, understood as the result of the assaults of demons. The ascetic context envisaged by Maximus is underlined by the introduction of a step between hope and love, that of *apatheia*, calm detachment, enabling one to direct one's whole attention to God, and *enkrateia*, self-mastery, preparing the soul to endure temptation/tribulation. It is these two technical terms from the ascetic vocabulary that are going to be expanded upon in the rest of the *Centuries*: the acquisition of *enkrateia* provides the weapon for fighting against the passions, and the final transcendence of the assault of the passions is manifest in *apatheia*.

There is another striking difference between the Apostle and the Confessor: the Confessor's sequence leads to love, which is the daughter of *apatheia*, as Evagrius had affirmed;<sup>4</sup> the Apostle's sequence leads to openness to, receptivity towards, love, which is the gift of the Spirit. It is not that Maximus is unaware of the gratuitousness of love; rather, I think, that at the beginning of his *Centuries on Love*, he is concerned to present love as something attainable: the ascetic struggle of the monastic life has love as its goal; there is something we can do about reaching it.

That is the first point I want to make about Maximus's teaching on love: that it is practical; it is concerned with what we can do (at all times, of course, in response to God's grace). The suggested contrast between the Apostle and the Confessor is, however, more apparent than real: the Apostle is equally insistent on the practicality of love, while the Confessor, as we shall see, is aware of a dimension to love that is more than just the next step of our ascetic struggle.

It is, however, very difficult, at least on the basis of the *Centuries on Love*, to be at all systematic about the Confessor's teaching. The very genre of the century – a hundred brief chapters, each no more than paragraphs or even sentences – has a practical, rather than a systematic, purpose. A century is to be read slowly and meditatively: each chapter is intended to provide food for thought and reflection; only rarely do we find a sequence of chapters developing a point, though quite often we find a sequence of

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4 Prologue to *Praktikos*; cf. *On Prayer*, 84.

chapters iterating in different ways the same point. The century is also intended to meet the needs of people of very different temperaments: if one finds oneself passing over some chapters rather quickly, while other chapters detain one and lead to prolonged self-scrutiny and resolution, then that is deliberate: that is the purpose of a century. It seems to me, then, easiest to draw attention to threads that run throughout the centuries, rather than look for any sustained argument.

First of all, however, it is easy to see how the chiasmus presented in the first century, quoted above, underlies the whole of the set of centuries. The movement from faith to love, via the learning of patience, the acquisition of self-mastery over the passions, leading to freedom from distraction and a kind of detachment – the two sides of *apatheia* – issuing finally in the capacity to love: this movement forms a kind of ground bass. Nonetheless, Maximus is soon reflecting on the final stages of this process. The tenth chapter tells us:

When the intellect, by the *eros of agape*, goes out of itself towards God, then it is conscious neither of itself nor of any of the beings whatsoever. For irradiated by the divine and unbounded light, it is unconscious of any of those things that have been brought into being by him, just as the physical eye has no awareness of the stars, when the sun has risen. (CL I. 10)

There are a few points I want to comment on in this passage. First of all, the expression “the *eros of agape*”: it is clear that Maximus has inherited the sense of the distinction between *eros* and *agape* that we have discussed earlier. *Eros* is not opposed to *agape*, rather it is a mode of *agape*: an intensified mode, *epitetamenē*, perhaps! Sherwood translates the phrase, “the burning love of its charity for God”. I don’t think “charity” can any longer be used to translate *agape*, as was the case in the older translations; it is too cold a word (“as cold as charity” is a proverbial expression in English). It is a pity as it reduces still further the possibilities of translating the Greek, with its host of words for love. But “burning” seems to me to be about right, and is supported by some other examples in Maximus we shall look at later; only *about* right, however, for the notion of *eros* always, I think, has the sense of something inspired in us, even a kind of madness that takes us beyond ourselves (think of the way in which *eros* is

introduced in the *Phaedrus* as a further type of divine madness, *enthousiasmos*, following on from poetic inspiration).<sup>5</sup> This is made explicit in the second point I want to mention: the notion of going out of oneself in love, for the word used, *ekdēmē*, has the sense of going into exile, in this case from oneself.<sup>6</sup> It is another way of speaking about ecstasy. My third point relates to this: the way in which Maximus speaks of the intellect becoming unconscious of everything “brought into being by him” (*panta ta hyp’ avtou gegonota*). Even as the intellect becomes unconscious of the created order, it is aware that it is created by God; the reality of creatures is not diminished or ignored.

This is the point I want to pursue now: the importance of the natural for Maximus. It is, of course, related to his doctrine of the *logoi*, but that notion is not particularly prominent in the *Centuries*, though it is not absent, either. Here it is important for understanding Maximus’s doctrine of the passions. Normally the term passion, *pathos*, is a negative term for, so for instance he says that “a pure soul is one that is freed from the passions and is gladdened continually by divine love” (*CL I.34*). The following chapter, however, defines *pathos*, and defines it precisely: “a blameworthy (*psektion*) passion is a movement of the soul against nature [*para fysin*]” (*CL I.35*). The passions that are blameworthy are unnatural, contrary to nature, but that suggests that there are other passions that are not blameworthy, even natural, and indeed there are. Maximus himself does not develop (not at least in his *Centuries*; I am not sure that he does anywhere) the notion of “natural and unblameworthy passions” [*fysika kai adiablēta pathē*] that we find in his close follower, John of Damascus, when he seeks to understand the passible nature of Christ – his experiencing passions that are not “up to us” (*ef’ hēmin*), such as hunger, thirst, tears, rejection of death, and so on (Kotter, 1973, pp. 162–163) – but he does find occasions to use *pathos* in a positive sense. On one occasion, Maximus discusses the inadequacy of passionless knowledge of divine things (*hē anev pathous tōn theiōn gnōsis*): this is of no use for turning the mind towards God (*CL III. 66*). He goes on to argue that

5 Cf. *Phaedrus*, 243E–245C.

6 See Sherwood’s comment, ACW 21, p. 248, note 7.

as the simple (*psilos*) thought of human things does not force the mind to scorn the divine, so the simple knowledge of matters divine does not persuade to scorning of matters human; for the truth now exists in shadows and figures. Therefore there is needed the blessed passion of holy love [*tou makariou pathous tēs hagiās agapēs*], to bind the intellect to spiritual contemplation and persuade it to prefer the immaterial to the material and the intellectual and divine to what is perceived by the senses. (CL III. 67)

This is the obverse of the notion that he returns to throughout the *Centuries* that it is impassioned attachment to what we perceive through the senses that we need to be freed from; simple awareness is no problem at all, nor, however, is it enough: it could be simply indifference. In the case of knowledge of God and spiritual things mere “objective” knowledge is no good: it is necessary for one to be moved with a blessed passion towards the knowledge of God. In another place, Maximus suggests that in the knowledge of God all three parts of the soul – the intellect and the two irrational parts, the incensive and desiring – are engaged. It is not, as Evagrius sometimes seems to suggest, that the irrational parts are laid to sleep so as not to disturb the intellect in its divine contemplation, rather the irrational parts have a positive role in such contemplation:

For the one whose intellect is continually with God, his desire is increased beyond measure to divine *eros* and his whole incensive part transformed into divine *agape*. For by continual participation in the divine radiance, [the intellect] becomes wholly full of light and the passible part [of the soul], become one with it, turns back, as has been said, to divine *eros* without end and unceasing *agape*, wholly passing over from earthly things to the divine. (CL II.48)

Perhaps we should mention one other aspect of Maximus’s teaching on love in the *Centuries*. The aim of the ascetic life is the passionate love of God: at the opposite pole to this is self-love, *filavtia*. Self-love is the “mother of the passions” (II.8), or the “mother of the vices, which is the love of the body” (II.59); more precisely, “Self-love is an impassioned and irrational love of the body, to which are opposed *agape* and *enkrateia*. To have it is to have all the passions” (III.8). Another set of genealogies is suggested in III.56:

Self-love, as we have said many times, is established as the cause of all the impassioned thoughts. For from this are born the three generic thoughts of the desire: greed, avarice, and vainglory. From greed is born fornication; from avarice, wanting more; from vainglory, pride. All the rest follow on from each of these: anger, grief, bearing grudges, listlessness, envy, backbiting, and the rest. These passions bind the intellect to material things and drag it down to the earth, weighing upon it like a very heavy stone, while by nature it is lighter and sharper than fire.

The place of self-love in Maximus's thought was set out very elegantly by Irénée Hausherr (1952). Not the least of the excellencies of that book is its inclusion of a translation of Maximus's *Ambiguuum* 41 towards the end. For *Amb.* 41 is one of the more metaphysical discussions in Maximus; it is the principal source of Maximus's notion of the divisions of nature, to use Eriugena's designation. However, at the heart of *Amb.* 41 Maximus makes it clear that the failure of the human to hold together the divisions of nature is fundamentally a failure to love: the human was meant to move naturally around the unmoved, from whom it owes its being, namely God, but contrary to nature has chosen to move in ignorance around those things that are beneath it, and thus frustrated God's plan for the cosmos by relinquishing its role as a natural bond (*syndesmos*) of the cosmos. God's remedy is one of love: "in a paradoxical way that which is completely unmoved by nature is moved immovably around that which by nature is moved, and God becomes a human being, in order to save lost humanity" (*Amb.* 41:1308D). Christ, God-made-man, is then able to fulfil the human role in the cosmos and, more than that, restore the human to his natural role in the cosmos: the ascetic programme we are familiar with from the *Centuries* is seen to be fundamental to the coherence of the cosmos.

This makes clear – and this is something we can glean from other parts of Maximus's works – that the ascetical has a cosmic role: in this we can see the way in which, behind Maximus's fundamentally ascetic approach to the concept of love, there can be discerned the cosmic approach of that mysterious thinker to whom he owed so much, Dionysius the Areopagite.

There is another place in Maximus where the integrity of the natural can be seen to lie at the heart of his understanding of ascetic struggle, and

therefore at the heart of his doctrine of love. It occurs in one of his last works, his *Dispute with Pyrrhus*, the deposed Patriarch of Constantinople, an articulate supporter of the Christological heresy of monotheletism. At one point in the *Dispute*, Pyrrhus remarks with amazement: “What then? Are the virtues natural?” (Aristotle had denied that the moral virtues are natural: *Eth. Nic.* II.1103a.18–20; natural virtues for Aristotle include qualities like health, wealth, and so on). Maximus replies that they are. Pyrrhus comes back with the objection that if the virtues are natural, why do they not exist equally in those of the same nature? But they do, Maximus replies to the baffled patriarch (at least according to most MSS). How do you account for such inequality amongst ourselves? Pyrrhus retorts. Maximus responds: “Because we do not equally act out what is natural. If everyone acted out what was natural in accordance with their origin, then just as there is one nature manifest in all, so it would be with virtue, and there would be no better or worse.” Pyrrhus objects that “if what is natural to us proceeds not from disciplined training [the Greek is *askēsis*], but from creation, and virtue is natural, why do we acquire the virtues, which are natural, through toil and disciplined struggle?” Maximus responds thus:

Disciplined training and the toils that go with it were devised simply for the purpose of separating from the soul in those who love virtue the deceit that infects it through the senses. It is not as if the virtues have been lately introduced from outside. For they were inserted in us from creation, as has been already said. Once therefore deceit has been completely expelled from us, at that moment, too, the soul manifests the radiance of its natural virtue. He therefore who is not foolish is sensible; and he who is not cowardly or foolhardy is courageous; and he who is not undisciplined is chaste; and he who is not unjust is just. By nature reason is wisdom, discernment is justice, the incensive faculty is courage, and the desiring faculty chastity. Therefore with the removal of what is contrary to nature [*para fysin*] only what is natural [*kata fysin*] is accustomed to be manifest. Just as, if rust is removed, there is manifest the natural gleam and lustre of iron. (Pospelov, 2004, pp. 174–176)

Virtue is natural; the cardinal virtues describe the lineaments of that nature. It is only because of a deceit lodged in the soul that disciplined

training and toil are necessary. I have avoided translating *askēsis* as asceticism, for that seems to me to prejudge immediately issues that need consideration. The word *askēsis* generally means training or exercise, so I have translated it “disciplined training”, but the verb from which it is derived, *askeō*, originally meant to work with raw materials, and I am attracted by the idea that the root meaning of *askēsis*, too, is to work with raw materials, the raw materials of our humanity, and out of it to make something fine. It seems to me to accord with what Maximus meant by *askēsis*, for he saw human kind as created in the image of God with the purpose of attaining the divine likeness. That working with the raw materials of our humanity – even in paradise – would entail uniting our being (*einai*) and our eternal being (*aei einai*), both gifts of God, by means of well-being (*eu einai*), and so bringing into being an eternal well-being (*aei eu einai*) in which the divine image attains the divine likeness. This triad – being – well-being – eternal being – is a fundamental aspect of Maximus’s ontology of the created rational being, and expresses Maximus’s idea that virtue, well-being, unites God’s gifts of being and eternal being, leading to eternal well-being, the eternal life with God for which created rational beings are intended.

Maximus and Dionysius are at one in seeing love as something rooted in nature; it is something that brings out what our human nature fundamentally is – indeed there is the clear suggestion in Dionysius (and in Maximus, if we look deeply enough) that it is love that underlies the structures of being. This means that, whatever differences we may detect between Dionysius and Maximus, what they share is more fundamental. How do they differ, and why? Partly because of their different concerns. Both were probably monks (though this is no more than a plausible guess in the case of Dionysius), but Maximus is always conscious that he is addressing the ascetic struggle to which the monk is committed by his vocation (even when he is writing to a layman, as in his second letter, he is concerned both to extol love and to underline what it entails in practical terms). Dionysius is more concerned to celebrate love as the principle of the coming-into-being and indeed the purpose of the cosmos. There may be another difference between Maximus and Dionysius, though I am not so sure about this: Maximus seems to know the Aristotelian tradition

and makes use of it in a way that we hardly find in Dionysius. This could be the result of some kind of trickle-down effect from the vast work of commentary on Aristotle that reached its climax in the decades before Maximus's lifetime. So, raising a few questions that might find an answer in this gathering, I bring this paper to a close.

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