

‘Naturally and by grace’: Maximus the Confessor on the operation of the will

Ian A. McFarland

Candler School of Theology, 109B, Bishops Hall, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322, USA

iamcfar@emory.edu

Abstract

Although Maximus’ and Augustine’s theologies of the will were shaped by very different polemical contexts, it is arguable that the two thinkers were interested in securing the same theological ground. In response to positions that treated the will as a reserve of human autonomy over against God, both thinkers sought to see the freedom of the will as a function of its integration into the natural order through grace. Maximus’ concept of the natural will in particular functions as a means of challenging both divine determinism and human libertarianism as adequate accounts of the relationship between divine and human activity.

In one of his early works, Maximus the Confessor offers a brief but impassioned account of the final destiny of human beings:

With the advent of Christ at the end of time, there will be a change and transformation of inclination and choice in human beings from faithlessness to faith, from wickedness to virtue, from ignorance to knowledge of God; because then, at the end of the ages, there will be through the same God, our Savior, a transformation and renewal of the whole human race that is all-encompassing, natural, and by grace, from death and corruption to immortal life and incorruption in the expected resurrection.¹

Though Maximus quickly moves on to other matters in this treatise, much of his subsequent literary output can be read as an attempt to flesh out the meaning of this seemingly bizarre conflation of intentional, natural and divine activity in human life. By dint of Maximus’ engagement in the Monothelite controversy, the later stages of this development centre on the will as the nexus where inclination (*gnome*), choice (*proairesis*), nature (*phusis*)

¹ *Expositio in Psalmum 59* (PG 91:857A). It should probably be pointed out that Maximus’ talk here of a ‘renewal of the whole human race’ need not be taken as evidence that he believed in an apokatastasis. See Brian E. Daley, SJ, ‘Apokatastasis and “Honorable Silence” in the Eschatology of Maximus the Confessor’, in Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn (eds.), *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1982), 322–3.

and grace (*charis*) intersect. Focusing on the figure of Christ as the touchstone for anthropological reflection, Maximus will come to see the agony in the garden as the prototype of genuinely human action: at once free, natural and founded in grace.

Vastly influential in Orthodox theology, this model also has much to contribute to more Augustinian reflections on the relationship between human freedom and divine grace. Though it is an open question whether or not Maximus was familiar with Augustine,² both struggled to define the relationship between freedom, nature and grace. More specifically, both opposed a model of free will as a reserve of autonomy cut off from God and the world in favour of an understanding in which it is 'always already' related to both.³ As a consequence of this basic anthropological orientation, both had to answer the objection that such a position amounted to a necessitarianism that ruled out genuine freedom of the will. A crucial issue for both men therefore became how divine grace becomes part of human willing without rendering mention of one or the other superfluous.

Needless to say, the theological contexts that brought these two thinkers to this common predicament were profoundly different. Augustine's arguments centre on the anthropological question of human beings' capacity to secure blessedness for themselves: over against Pelagian (and pagan philosophical) claims to the contrary, Augustine insisted that they could not; blessedness was a gift of grace. By contrast, Maximus' views assumed final form in the context of a christological debate in which his main concern was defending the presence and power of Christ's human will over against a position (Monothelitism) which effectively argued that salvation depended on the human will being overruled by God. So contextualized, it seems that the two theologians' perspectives could not possibly be more divergent⁴ – and yet one of the chief objections levelled against Maximus by his opponents was precisely that his position undermined the freedom of the will! To understand how such a charge could make sense, it is necessary to take a closer look at the details of Maximus' views.

² Maximus spent a long time in North Africa. Arriving no later than 630 (perhaps as early as 628), he stayed till his departure for Rome in 646 and was sympathetic enough to Western theology to have offered a sympathetic interpretation of the *filioque*; but he nowhere refers to Augustine in his writings. See G. Berthold, 'Did Maximus the Confessor Know Augustine?' in *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982), 14–17.

³ I owe this phrasing to Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 103.

⁴ For an argument seeking to make just this point, see Joseph P. Farrell, *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor* (South Canaan, PA: St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1989).

The category of the will in Maximus

Though Monothelitism provided the stimulus for Maximus' mature doctrine of the will, many key components of his final position were in place beforehand. For example, the issue of human freedom is introduced in one of Maximus' earliest extant works, 'Letter 2' (to John Cubicularius), in which he speaks of the need to make our capacity for self-determination (to *ep'hemin*) submit to reason and, more specifically, the way in which our inclination (*gnome*) must be persuaded 'to follow nature and not in any way to be at variance with the *logos* of nature' so that 'we are able to have one inclination (*gnome*) and one will (*thelema*) with God and with one another, not having any discord with God or one another'.⁵ This wholesale renewal of human intentional action is necessary because through the fall the devil has 'separated us, with respect to our inclination, from God and one another', having 'divided nature at the level of mode of existence, fragmenting it into a multitude of opinions and imaginations' by introducing into human being an 'irreconcilability with respect to inclination' that led us 'to turn from the natural movement [we] once had . . . to what is forbidden'.⁶

Already at this very early stage (around 626 and thus well before the emergence of Monothelitism) the basic architecture of Maximus' later thinking on the will is visible. Two points in particular are important here. First, Maximus defines fallen existence in terms of division with respect to inclination or *gnome*; second, he associates *gnome* with personal mode of existence (*tropos*) rather than created human nature (*physis*). In the fall human beings find themselves divided from God, each other, and even within their own selves by an 'irreconcilability of inclination' that marks a declension from the natural movement towards God characteristic of the will in its original state.⁷ Whereas humankind was created with a natural desire for God, the fall perverts desire.⁸ In redemption, however, this internal division

⁵ Maximus the Confessor, 'Letter 2' (PG 91:396C), in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 86–7.

⁶ Maximus, 'Letter 2' (PG 91:396D–397A), 87; the translation has been modified to indicate that Maximus speaks consistently of 'inclination' (*gnome*) in the singular here.

⁷ Thus Maximus can say that 'nature remains undamaged and undivided in those who have received . . . grace, not divided up into the differences introduced by *gnome*'. 'Letter 2' (PG 91:401A), 89.

⁸ As Maximus describes it elsewhere, 'every wicked power is at work . . . driving the *gnome* with the natural passions into the corruption of unnatural passions'. *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 21 (CCSG 7:128–9) in Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (eds.), *St. Maximus the Confessor, On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 110; translation slightly altered.

is healed:

nature remains undamaged and undivided in those who have received this grace, not divided by the differences in *gnome* characteristic of the many. For no longer are different things drawn to this and that, but they all continue with the same, none of them directed by their own *gnome* . . . but all directed to what is common and undivided in all things at the level of nature, thus drawing together what has been separated.⁹

Significantly, once gnostic division is overcome in the redeemed state, nature seems completely to displace the *gnome* in directing human behaviour. The *gnome* apparently plays a role in the personal development of the individual towards the redeemed state, but at the endpoint it disappears.¹⁰

This same basic pattern is visible in other early works of the Confessor. In the *Commentary on the Our Father*, for example, gnostic division within and between human beings is once again associated with postlapsarian existence, in contradistinction to the harmony with God and each other characteristic of human life in its natural state.¹¹ Correspondingly, redemption is described as a process in which we come to have a *gnome* no longer 'opposed to the principle of nature (*toi logoi tes phuseos*)', so that we may 'be as changeless in our *gnome* as we are in our nature'.¹² This transformation is more specifically described as one in which Christ 'will join to the will (*thelema*) of the one who supplies the grace the *gnome* of those who request it, by rendering the two identical in a unity of relation'.¹³ Likewise, in the sixth of the *Questiones ad Thalassium*, Maximus speaks of the gift of Spirit to the baptized as redirecting the *gnome*, so that it might be converted towards God and deification.¹⁴

⁹ 'Letter 2' (PG 91:401A), 89; translation slightly altered.

¹⁰ Thus, while Maximus speaks of redemption as including a process by which 'through love for humankind *gnome* embraces nature', the final state in which division is eliminated 'is clearly not a matter of *gnome*, about which there is contention and division . . . but of nature itself'. 'Letter 2' (PG 91:401A, 400C), 89.

¹¹ See, e.g., *Commentary on the Our Father* (PG 90:893B), in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, ed. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist, 1985), 111.

¹² *Commentary on the Our Father* (PG 90:900A), 114; translation slightly altered. See also 103 (PG 90:877A), where Maximus speaks of the redeemed's 'supernatural birth from on high in grace, of which divine birth the guardian and preserver is the free will (*proairesis*) of those who are thus born'. That *proairesis* is synonymous with *gnome* is suggested by a parallel passage later in the same treatise (PG 90:901A), where *proairesis* and *gnome* are used interchangeably to characterize the will as the preserver of the grace God gives.

¹³ *Commentary on the Our Father* (PG 90:900A), 114; translation slightly altered.

¹⁴ Maximus, *Ad Thalassium* 6 (CCSG 7:69), in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 103–4. Cf. *Ad Thalassium* 61 (CCSG 7:99), in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 139: 'all those

In these texts salvation is clearly depicted as a process in which the will's acting in accord with humanity's natural state brings it through grace to the supernatural end of union with God.¹⁵ The process is described in similar terms in the second of the *Ambigua ad Ioannem*, where Maximus speaks of a future in which our free will (*autexousios*) will 'surrender voluntarily to God'.¹⁶ In clarifying this statement he insists that he is not denying freedom of the will, inasmuch as the state he has in mind is 'a firm and steadfast disposition according to nature (*kata phusin*), a willing surrender (*ekchoresis gnomike*), so that from the one from whom we received being we long to receive being moved as well'.¹⁷ Indeed, Maximus goes so far as to argue that in the state of glory, human union with the divine is so complete that 'God alone is active' and 'in all things there will be only one activity (*monen dia panton energeian*)'.¹⁸

In short, the early Maximus more or less equates *gnome* with the will, and understands the fall as the event through which the will is put out of step with nature. The process of redemption is one in which the will is enabled to enter into a renewed correspondence with nature that leads to a union with the divine will. Though supernatural (in so far as it is achievable only by grace), this union nevertheless can be said to constitute the 'natural' end of humanity (in so far as it is the mode of existence God intended for human beings in creating them). Yet if Maximus' basic intention seems fairly clear, his terminology leaves room for further development. The idea that the final stage of human existence can be characterized both as a 'firm and steadfast disposition' and as a 'surrender' of the *gnome* in which 'God alone is active' raises some troublesome anthropological questions regarding the relationship between human and divine activity. Does nature simply replace the will, so that the eschatological surrender of *gnome* leaves the human creature a creature of instinct ('according to nature')? Or does the fact that 'God alone is active' render any talk of autonomous human existence at this point simply superfluous?

Revisiting the language of his *Ambigua* later in life, Maximus explains that he at no point meant to suggest that human activity simply ceased at

who by keeping the commandments of their own will (*gnomikos*) enjoy only birth in the Spirit uphold the use of death . . . to condemn sin' (translation slightly altered).

¹⁵ For in Christ 'there is only a deiform principle created by divine knowledge and one single movement of free will which chooses only virtue'. *Commentary on the Our Father* (PG 90:889D-892A), 110.

¹⁶ *Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91:1076B), in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 52.

¹⁷ *Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91:1076B), 52; translation altered to include the phrase *kata phusin*, which the translators omit.

¹⁸ *Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91:1076C), 53.

the eschaton, but only to stress that such activity does not effect human blessedness, since 'only the power beyond being is able to cause deification, and this comes about by grace in the deified'.¹⁹ This explanation falls within the context of a crucial terminological modification that the later Maximus introduces as a means of clarifying the character of human activity and its relationship to the divine. Whereas, in the early works we have examined, Maximus is content to speak of nature on the one hand and will (*gnome*) on the other, in his later career he refines this distinction in terms of the contrast between two wills: the 'natural' and 'gnomic'. Maximus defines this distinction as follows: 'The natural will (*thelema phusikon*) is the essential desire of things according to nature; the gnostic will (*thelema gnomikon*) is the self-chosen impulse and movement of reason to one thing or another'.²⁰ In creation humankind is characterized by a movement towards God that is both natural (in so far as it is a function of the underlying ontological principle or *logos* that defines human being) and free (in so far as it is not reducible to instinct).²¹ This movement constitutes the 'natural will' (or simply 'will' (*thelesin*)).²² Through the fall this intrinsic orientation to God has become distracted, and is now characterized by those 'irreconcilable inclinations' that characterize the operation of the 'gnomic will' (or simply *gnome*).²³

The upshot of this development is a greater precision in Maximus' use of terms. Whereas in his earlier writing, 'nature' might look like a category

¹⁹ *Opuscula Theologica et Polemica* (hereafter OTP) 1 (PG 91:33D–36A).

²⁰ OTP 14 (PG 91:153A–B); cited in Polycarp Sherwood, OSB, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Herder, 1955), 201; translation slightly altered. Cf. OTP 16 (PG 91:192B) and OTP 26 (PG 91:280A).

²¹ Lest anyone should confuse the 'longing' of the natural will with instinct, Maximus explicitly correlates the natural will with the possession of a rational nature. See, e.g., OTP 16 (PG 91:192B): 'For everything among existents, especially if they are rational (*kai malista logikon*), naturally desires being according to nature (*phusikos kata phusin*)'. Cf. OTP 1, PG 91:24A: 'no one desires rationally (*logikos oregetai*) without being by nature rational. Thus the human, being by nature a rational animal, is characterized by desire (*orektikos*)'.

²² See OTP 1 (PG 91:12C). In OTP 16 (PG 91:185D; cf. 192B) Maximus attributes the distinction between the natural and gnostic wills to a 'pious monk', by whom he probably means Sophronius, his theological mentor and later patriarch of Jerusalem.

²³ Maximus does not explicitly equate gnostic will with *gnome* in his formal definitions, but he treats them as synonymous in, e.g., the *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:368C–D). For evidence that Maximus is not altogether consistent on this point, however, see 'Opusculum 7' (PG 91:80A), in *Maximus the Confessor*, 185; cf. also OTP 4 (PG 91:60A), where Maximus describes human opposition to God through divergent inclinations as taking place *kata ten thelesin*.

standing over against the will, the idea of the ‘natural will’ amounts to the affirmation of a willing that is a function of nature.²⁴ By contrast, in so far as *gnome* stands over against nature as the ‘self-chosen impulse’, it appears in the first instance less a characteristic feature of human life as such than a sign of its deformation.²⁵ Is the experience of internal division to be equated with the gnomonic will in such a way as to justify a straightforward identification of the gnomonic will with the fallen will? There are grounds for supposing so. It is clear that for Maximus the fall produces a sinful disposition that is not characteristic of the natural will.²⁶ In so far as this postlapsarian experience of competing inclinations and a divided self appears to be correlative with the *gnome*, it seems natural enough to view the presence of the gnomonic will as both consequence and symptom of the fall, to the extent that Maximus is able to contrast gnomonic decision with genuine volition.²⁷

On this reading of Maximus, the gnomonic will is best understood not as a distinct faculty alongside the natural will, but rather as a perverted form of willing. Yet there is a problem with this way of reading Maximus. While the natural will pertains, as the name suggests, to human nature (or, in Maximus’ own ontological terminology, its *logos*), the gnomonic will refers to a particular mode (or *tropos*) of the will’s operation that is defined by the way in which human nature is lived out by particular human beings.²⁸ Maximus

²⁴ Note that over against the ‘Pelagian’ tendency to divorce the operation of the will from motivation, Maximus characterizes the natural will as a ‘movement of yearning after desire’ (*kat’ephesin orektike kinesis*) and again as a ‘movement after desire’ (*kinesis kat’ephesin*) in OTP 3 (PG 91:49A, 56A), 194, 197.

²⁵ Berthold (*Commentary on the Our Father*, 124) notes that in Maximus’ early work ‘the term *gnome* is . . . employed to signify will, that is, intentionality. This was a common enough usage in contemporary Greek. With the outbreak of the Monothelite heresy, however, Maximus had to restrict the use of this term to the human condition of the will which lies subject to sin’.

²⁶ ‘What happens through the fall is that a perversion of man’s capacity for self-determination takes place – not an annihilation of it – a perversion which predisposes man for its constant misuse . . . That is to say, it forms in man a sinful disposition of will (*gnome*)’. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 227.

²⁷ See *Ad Thalassium* 21 (CCSG 7:129), where fallen human nature is described as being moved *ouchi kata thelesin gnoinei*. Blowers renders this passage ‘by deliberation rather than true volition’ (*On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 111).

²⁸ See the *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:308D), where *gnome* is explicitly defined as ‘a *tropos* of use, not a *logos* of nature’ (*tropos ousa chreseos, ou logos phuseos*). Cf. OTP 16 (PG 91:192B–C), where Maximus affirms that ‘the self-chosen impulse . . . to various alternatives’ that constitutes the gnomonic will ‘is not definitive of nature, but strictly of person and hypostasis’.

explains this distinction as follows:

As being some thing, not as being some one, each of us principally operates, that is as a man; but as some one, as Peter or Paul, he gives form to the mode of action – more or less intensively, this way or that, he determines it as he wills. Hence when considering activity the changeability of persons is known in the mode (*tropos*), and the inalterability of natural operation in the *logos*.²⁹

In short, whereas the (natural) will is a constitutive feature of human nature as such, the gnostic will is a function of its employment by the individual. Granted that through the fall the gnostic will has become thoroughly perverted, it would nevertheless seem to be the case that even apart from the fall human beings would continue to have gnostic wills to the extent that they remain distinct hypostases. Quite simply, it would seem that we need a *gnome* in order to be free.

Christ and the gnostic will

Considerations like this lead Lars Thunberg (drawing on the earlier work of Polycarp Sherwood) to judge that one-sided portraits of the *gnome* in uniformly negative terms cannot be sustained.³⁰ He does not deny that for Maximus the gnostic will has been corrupted by the fall, but he nevertheless maintains that the 'self-chosen impulse' characteristic of *gnome* is constitutive of humanity's created dignity and is not simply a deficient form of human existence. He substantiates this position by pointing out that Maximus attributes *gnome* to Christ himself in such works as the *Commentary on the Our Father*.

The obvious objection to Thunberg's thesis is that the *Commentary on the Our Father* is an early work, and that in the later *Opuscula theologica and polemica*, composed in the context of the terminological refinements characteristic of his anti-Monothelite writings, Maximus vigorously denies that Christ possesses a gnostic will:

And this . . . Gregory clearly teaches in his second sermon on the Son, when he says, 'For the willing of that one is not opposed [to God],

²⁹ OTP 10 (PG 91:137A); cited in Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, 166 (translation slightly altered). Cf. *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:292D–293A).

³⁰ See Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 216: 'a diametrical opposition between nature and *gnome* would . . . introduce, for the first time, an entirely negative evaluation of differentiation into Maximus' thinking'. Yet one has only to read the comments on human sexual difference (in, e.g., the *Commentary on the Our Father* (PG 90:889C–D), or *Ambigua* 31 and 41 (PG 91:1276B–C; 1305C, 1309D–1312A)) to see that Maximus is not always inclined to view differentiation in a positive light.

but completely deified'. Thus he possesses a human will . . . only it was not opposed to God. But this will was not at all gnomic (*gnomikon*), but properly natural (*phusikon*), eternally formed and moved by its essential Godhead to the fulfilment of the economy.³¹

Thunberg is, of course, aware of this apparent change in Maximus' position, but he interprets it as signifying no fundamental shift in the Confessor's views on the place of *gnome* in theological anthropology. Instead, he avers that it reflects an increasing focus on the generic character of Jesus' humanity in Maximus' anti-Monothelite writings.³² It is certainly true that Maximus (in common with the whole of the patristic tradition) viewed Jesus' role as representative. It is an open question, however, whether in Maximus' hands this tendency is properly viewed as indicating a diminished emphasis on Jesus' human particularity, especially given that one of the main objections Maximus raised against his opponents was precisely that they viewed Christ's humanity in generic terms.³³

In order to evaluate the significance of Maximus' denial that Christ had a gnomic will, it is necessary to recognize that the theological impetus behind his distinguishing between the natural and gnomic wills in the first place was above all else christological. Over against the Monothelite claim that Christ, as one person or hypostasis, had but one will, Maximus insisted that proper interpretation of the Council of Chalcedon demanded that Christ be confessed as having two wills, corresponding to his existence in two natures. Only so was it possible to honour the venerable principle, 'that which [Christ] has not assumed he has not healed'.³⁴ Since his human will is in this way seen as a corollary of his possessing a complete human nature, it is appropriately described as a *natural will*.³⁵

³¹ 'Opusculum 7' (PG 91:81C–D), 187; cf. OTP 1 (PG 91:29D), and *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:308D–309A).

³² Maximus' 'later denial of a *gnome* in Christ was probably . . . due to the fact that he regarded the incarnate Christ not only as one human being among many but as Man, representative of all humanity'. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 216.

³³ See, e.g., his judgement that the great error of Severus of Antioch was that he 'only confirms the difference of natural qualities after the union'. 'Opusculum 3' (PG 91:56D), in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 197; cf. 219, where Louth interprets this passage as meaning that while Severus admits the presence of generic human qualities ('thirst, speaking, the colour of the hair') in the incarnate Word, he refuses to allow the possibility of identifying a distinct, clearly defined human nature.

³⁴ Gregory of Nazianus, Epistle 101, 'To Cledonius Against Apollinaris', in Edward R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 218. Maximus refers explicitly to this passage in support of the Dyothelite position in the *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:325A).

³⁵ See, e.g., *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:289B).

In this context, Maximus' denial of a gnomonic will to Christ is a function of two points. First, the conviction that Christ is without sin:

The Fathers . . . openly confessed the difference between two natural but not gnomonic wills in Christ . . . For they knew it was only this difference of gnomonic wills that introduced into our lives sin and separation from God. For evil consists of nothing else than the difference of our gnomonic will from the divine will, which occurs by the introduction of an opposing quantity (*viz.*, number) in the will, showing the opposition of our gnomonic will to God.³⁶

It is not simply a function of our fallen state that precludes the ascription of a gnomonic will to Christ, however, but also the fact that his hypostasis is divine and thus not subject to the constraints of finite existence in time and space:

Now those who say that there is a *gnome* in Christ . . . teach that he is a mere human being, subject to deliberation as we are, plagued by ignorance, doubt, and hesitation between opposites . . . For inasmuch as we simply and naturally have desire for what by nature is good, but have experience of the good only through investigation and deliberation, *gnome* is properly ascribed to us . . . But the Lord's human nature subsists divinely and not merely as ours. And, as God, the one who for us appeared in flesh taken from us is not able to be ascribed a *gnome*.³⁷

In short, here it appears that, even apart from the fall, the *gnome* is an inalienable part of human existence in time. Crucially, however, it does not follow that it is a part of human existence *outside of* time, for Maximus argues that in glory humanity will share the same deified state that Christ possessed during his earthly existence, so that 'there will be no evaluation or deciding between opposite [courses of action] . . . since all uncertainty has been removed from things'.³⁸ In this way, denying a *gnome* to Christ does not reflect a retreat from interest in Jesus as a particular human being among others, but rather reflects the conviction that Christ anticipates in his earthly existence what Maximus believed to be the destiny of all the saints.

³⁶ 'Opusculum 3' (PG 91:56B), 197; translation slightly altered.

³⁷ *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:308D–309A).

³⁸ OTP 1 (PG 91:24C); cited in Farrell, *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor*, 110; cf. 112, where Farrell goes on to note that in Maximus' vision of the eschaton freedom entails 'the ability to decide without involving any of the processes of discursive reason, for these are no longer needed; it becomes a decision made without the intervention of these intervening processes'.

The upshot of this perspective is that for Maximus the presence of *gnome* is evidently not necessary for the integrity of hypostatic existence. Indeed, one of the main arguments Maximus deploys against ascribing a gnostic will to Christ is that it would imply a division of will among the persons of the Trinity. Working from the perspective that the *gnome* is a function of hypostasis, and that Christ's hypostasis is divine, he points out that if Christ were ascribed a gnostic will, that would imply three gnostic wills in God corresponding to the three divine hypostases, thereby introducing an intolerable division within the Godhead:

If . . . you say that Christ has one will, how do you say this and what kind of thing are you saying? . . . If . . . this will is *gnomic*, then it will be characteristic of the single hypostasis. For the *gnomic* is defined by the person, and . . . [the Second Person] will [thereby] be shown to have another will from the Father and the Spirit, and to fight against them.³⁹

Clearly, if the divine hypostases have no gnostic will, then there is no need to view *gnome* as a condition of freedom. Instead, the gnostic will appears to be a mark of a division between hypostasis and nature (and, thereby, from other hypostases of the same nature) that renders its attribution to any of the trinitarian persons unthinkable and its possession by human persons a sign of existence that falls short of its ultimate destiny in communion with God. In short, one can be free without a *gnome*, in so far as in the eschaton freedom will be divorced from deliberation and 'will be a single, active, and intellectual desire for those things that are naturally to be desired'.⁴⁰

Freedom and the natural will

In Maximus' early work the human will is more or less identical with *gnome*, and there is no distinction between the natural and gnostic wills.⁴¹ In this

³⁹ 'Opusculum 3' (PG 91:53C), 196–7; cf. *Dispute with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:313C–316B).

⁴⁰ OTP 1 (PG 91:24C). While Farrell agrees that the gnostic will is not constitutive of hypostatic integrity, he argues that for Maximus *gnome* represents a more inclusive psychological category (of which the gnostic will is simply a particular species) that is a necessary condition of divine and human freedom alike; but he provides very little in the way of evidence. For example, the one passage he cites in support of the idea of a plurality of wills in God (*Quaestiones et Dubia*, PG 90:801B) speaks of 'three wills' not in relation to the three divine persons, but with respect to divine action in the economy. See *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor*, 124–6.

⁴¹ For example, in the *Commentary on the Our Father* the term *thelesin* appears only once, in an entirely neutral context: 'the only pleasure is the attainment of divine things whose . . . guardian by will (*phulax de kata thelesin*) is the free choice (*proairesis*) of the one who receives them'. *Commentary on the Our Father* (PG 90:901A), 115.

context, for Maximus to attribute a *gnome* to Christ is simply for him to acknowledge that Christ had a fully human will – exactly the same point he will want to stress in his polemics against the Monothelites. Over the course of this later controversy, however, Maximus evidently grew to believe that simply ascribing Christ a *gnome* was not an adequate means of securing this fundamental christological point. Monothelite talk of a single will in Christ convinced him that greater precision was needed as a means of securing the principle of Christ's full consubstantiality with divinity and humanity alike. In response to this perceived need, Maximus introduced the distinction between the natural and the *gnomic* wills, affirming that Christ had the former but not the latter. But why exactly was this move necessary? Why not continue to speak of the will (or *gnome*) in general terms and simply contrast Christ's good use of it with its subjugation to 'unnatural passions' in postlapsarian humanity?

The answer seems to be a rethinking of the relationship between the freedom and nature forced by careful consideration of the implications of Monothelite insistence that Christ had only one will. The Monothelite movement presented Maximus with the challenge of explaining how the will can remain genuinely human while being totally at one with God. This process of reflection led Maximus to an increasingly strong correlation between the will and nature, culminating in the definition of the natural will as 'the power that longs for what is natural'.⁴² This is not to say that the early Maximus conceived the will and nature as simply opposed. Already in 'Letter 2', for example, he opposes humanity's fallen state, in which 'will is . . . divided from nature into many parts' with the state of the redeemed, in which 'the will is joined to nature'.⁴³ Yet there remains a certain disjunction between the will and nature: though the will's job is to see to it that human life fulfils its natural course, it does so from a position seemingly at some

⁴² OTP 3 (PG 91:45D). In OTP 26 (PG 91:276C; cf. 317C), he attributes a slightly modified version of this definition to Clement of Alexandria, but Madden ('The Authenticity of Early Definitions of Will', 64–71) argues that this attribution is extremely doubtful and suggests that the definition is in fact Maximus' own. Cf. OTP 16 (PG 91:185D), where the natural will is defined as 'a power desiring being according to nature, and encompassing all the properties that inhere essentially in nature'.

⁴³ 'Letter 2' (PG 91:400D–401A), 89; translation slightly altered. Cf. *Commentary on the Our Father* (PG 90:880A), 104, where the effect of Christ's reconciling work is described as 'that we no longer have a will opposed to the principle of nature (*toi logoi tes phuseos*) and that thus we be as changeless in our will as we are in our nature (*hosper ten phusin, houto kai ten gnomen*)' (translation slightly altered).

remove, as though itself fundamentally disjoined from the nature which, by its operations, it either subverts or perfects.⁴⁴

In his later work Maximus resolves this problem by bifurcating his concept of the will. The gnostic will is now clearly disjoined from nature as a hypostatic turning characterized by ignorance and hesitation with respect to its proper object.⁴⁵ As such, it is denied of Christ by virtue of his status as one of the divine hypostases.⁴⁶ Over against this defective turning stands the natural will, which both may and must be ascribed to Christ in so far as it is defined as a ‘movement of desire (*kat’ephesin*)’ that is ‘the proper and primary property of every rational nature’.⁴⁷ The Monothelites found this distinction bewildering. To affirm two wills in Christ seemed to them to attribute to him a kind of schizophrenia.⁴⁸ Maximus countered this objection by pointing out that in so far as Christ’s human will is natural, it cannot rightly be conceived as opposed to the God who founds nature.⁴⁹ But this defence led to a second and potentially more devastating line of attack: ‘Given that what is natural

⁴⁴ Maximus himself suggests the problem with this perspective when he argues that the Monothelite hypothesis of a single gnostic will in Christ would actually make him less than fully human, since ‘when He decides . . . in accordance with deliberation upon one course of action, with his free choice (*proairesis*) giving as it were the casting vote (*hoione psephos*), then either He brings about through the right use a logos in accordance with [human] nature, or, through its wrong use, a mode (*tropos*) contrary to [that] nature’. *OTP* 1 (PG 91:29A); cited in Farrell, *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor*, 117. Farrell points out that this would mean, in effect, that the logos ‘proper to human nature would subsist in Christ only by the correct employment of his will; He would therefore in a sense not be fully human’, since his human nature would depend on the proper exercise of his will.

⁴⁵ The twin themes of disjunction from nature and corresponding hesitation between alternatives is clear from the definition of *gnome* found in the *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:308C), as ‘a form of willing, qualified by habit (*schetikos*), that adheres to something that either is or is believed to be good’. Thunberg (*Microcosm and Mediator*, 214) notes that though there is some precedent for using *gnome* to refer specifically to the ambiguous dimension of the human capacity for self-determination, it is Maximus who gives the term a fixed anthropological sense.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:308D) and ‘Opusculum 3’ (PG 91:53C–D), 197.

⁴⁷ ‘Opusculum 3’ (PG 91:56B), 197.

⁴⁸ ‘It is impossible for two wills to coexist with each other in one person without conflict’. *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:292A). See the excellent analysis of this dimension of Maximus’ theology in François-Marie Léthel, ‘La Prière de Jésus à Gethsémani dans la controverse monothélite’, in *Maximus Confessor*, 207–14.

⁴⁹ See *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:292A–B), where Maximus notes that such an objection would make God ‘the creator of strife’. Cf. ‘Opusculum 7’ (PG 91:80A–B), 185: ‘That nothing natural is opposed to God is clear from the fact that these things were originally fashioned by him, and there can be no complaint on our side about their natural constitution’.

is constrained, does it not follow that those who say that the wills in Christ are natural take away voluntary motion from him?’⁵⁰ In other words, isn’t the idea of a ‘natural will’ a contradiction in terms, in so far as nature refers to that which happens independently of the will, and the will exemplifies precisely our independence from nature?

The Monothelite objection hinges on an oppositional understanding of the relationship between what is natural and what is free, in which the more free something is, the less it is determined by nature.⁵¹ Maximus responds by denying the fundamental presuppositions of the Monothelite argument:

For if (according to your premise) ‘what is natural is constrained’, then God – who is by nature God, by nature good, by nature Creator – will be constrained to be God and good and Creator . . . And if (as you claim) saying that the wills in Christ are natural takes from him all voluntary motion, it follows that beings who naturally will have an involuntary motion, and [only] those who do not naturally will have a voluntary one. And thus not only God (who is above all beings), but also all intellective and rational creatures – beings who possess a will by nature – will have an involuntary motion, and inanimate beings – lacking a will – will have a voluntary motion! But the blessed Cyril . . . released us from such superfluous concerns by clearly stating, ‘In an intellective nature nothing natural is involuntary’.⁵²

As its name implies, the natural will functions in accord with nature by turning human beings to that which is genuinely good for their natures. It is by definition never opposed to God, but rather functions in accord with the creature’s divinely established *logos*.⁵³ And yet this correspondence does not imply that the natural will operates automatically, as Maximus’ opponents

⁵⁰ *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:293B).

⁵¹ This is not to say that freedom for the Monothelites was properly manifest as opposition to nature. Presumably Pyrrhus (like the Maximus of the *Commentary on the Our Father*) would have seen the job of the will as bringing the individual to a life in conformity to her nature. The point is that this operation, to the extent that it is free, is seen as necessarily standing over against nature. It is this claim that genuine freedom entails a disjunction between the will and nature that the later Maximus denies.

⁵² *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:293C–296A). Cf. Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 46.54, in *Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, vol. 5 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1887), 139.

⁵³ ‘For nothing that is natural can be opposed to God in any way, not even with respect to *gnome* (*hopotan oute gnomikon*), for then a personal division would appear, if it were natural, and the Creator would be to blame, for having made something at odds with itself by nature’. ‘Opusculum 3’ (PG 91:48D–49A), 194.

thought. Here again, Christ is the test case. For though the gnostic will is often described as ‘deliberative’, it would be quite misleading to suppose that for Maximus Christ’s lack of a gnostic will meant that his human nature was reduced to the role of an automaton.⁵⁴ Indeed, it is Maximus’ contention that it is precisely the Monothelites who undermine Christ’s freedom by affirming that his humanity is moved directly by the logos.⁵⁵

It is here that Maximus’ reflections on Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane are decisive for appreciating his position. The theological problem presented by this passage is the relationship between Jesus’ two petitions. That the first of these – Christ’s plea for the passing of the cup – should be attributed to his humanity, which fears (and thus seeks to avoid) death, is something the Monothelites were ready to concede.⁵⁶ For them, however, this petition is a sign of human weakness that must be overcome by the divine logos, to whom they ascribe the second petition, ‘Not what I will, but what you will’ (Matt 26:39). Maximus denies that Christ’s willing can be divided up in this way:

But if . . . you proceed to say that ‘Not what I will’ is to be referred in a negative manner to the eternal divinity of the Only-Begotten . . . then you are compelled to refer what is willed (that is, the declining of the cup) to the same eternal divinity. For even if you say that the negation is the exclusion of his willing something for himself separately from his Father, it is nevertheless not a dismissal of what is willed. For it is impossible for the negation to apply to both things: the Only-Begotten’s willing something for himself separately from the Father and that which is willed But if it is impossible for the negation to be applied to both things . . . it is obvious that if you opt to apply it to the Son willing something for himself . . . you are not repudiating what is willed, namely, the declining of the cup, but you are in fact ascribing that declining to

⁵⁴ Given that in the detailed analysis of the act of willing in OTP 1, Maximus specifically includes deliberation (*boule* or *bouleusis*) as a function of the natural will, it would probably be a good idea to abstain from characterizing the gnostic will as ‘deliberative’. But see notes 82–4 below.

⁵⁵ See especially *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:297A–C); cf. 349B–C, where Pyrrhus insists, ‘The claim of one operation (*energeian*) is not a denial of a human operation; but since [the human] is defined over against the divine operation, it is said to be passive (*pathos legetai*)’. Though the language here is technically Monenergist rather than Monothelite, the logic is the same (as Maximus himself points out in his response).

⁵⁶ See the discussion of the Monothelite thesis that Christ might be ascribed a human will ‘by appropriation’ (*kat’oikeiosin*) rather than by nature in *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:304A–305D).

their common and eternal divinity, to which you have also referred the exercise of the will in this negative manner.⁵⁷

In short, if both petitions must be ascribed to the same will, and if they cannot be applied to the divine will without suggesting that God was afraid of death, then the only other option is to ascribe both petitions to Christ's human will – which is precisely Maximus' position.

But can both petitions be ascribed to Christ's (human) natural will any more coherently? Maximus argues that they can. First, he refuses to view Christ's evident fear of death in the first petition as a sign of a mark of creaturely defect or resistance to God. On the contrary, it is good, since creatures 'having come from non-being have an intrinsic drive towards being rather than non-being, and a natural urge for what sustains them'.⁵⁸ Maximus then explains the second petition by way of a short excursus on the character of Christ's human willing:

Now these natural acts of the will are not attached to the Lord in the same way as they are in us. For though he truly hungered and thirsted, he did not hunger and thirst in the mode that we do, but in a mode transcending us, because it was voluntary. So also though he was truly afraid, he did not fear as we do, but in a mode transcending us. To speak in general terms, every natural attribute in Christ had union with him according to the logos appropriate to it and a mode transcending nature, so that the nature was preserved through the logos, and the economy through the mode of possession.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Opusculum 6 (PG 91:68A–C), in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 175; translation slightly altered. Maximus' point in this dense passage seems to be the following: the Monothelites wish to interpret Christ's 'Not what I will' negatively (*arnetikos*), as a denial of a distinct willing on the part of the Son over against the Father. Maximus argues that there remains the problem of the *object* of this act of willing ('what is willed') in the particular context of Gethsemane, namely, the declining of the cup. Since this object is a function of the act of willing, it must also be applied to God, leading to the unacceptable conclusion that the declining of the cup was also divinely willed.

⁵⁸ *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:297B); cf. 'Opusculum 7' (PG 91:80C–D), 186.

⁵⁹ *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:297D–300A). Note that Augustine describes the willing of glorified human beings in similar terms: 'The bodies of the righteous . . . shall need neither any fruit to preserve them from dying of disease or the wasting decay of old age, nor any other physical nourishment to allay the cravings of hunger or of thirst; for they shall be invested with so sure and every way inviolable an immortality, that they shall not eat save when they choose, nor be under the necessity of eating, while they enjoy the power of doing so'. Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.22, in *St. Augustine: The*

Christ possesses all the desires characteristic of a natural will, but, as the Logos, he possesses them voluntarily – and therefore ‘in a mode transcending us’ – inasmuch as his will ‘is wholly deified, in its agreement with the divine will, since it is always moved and shaped by it and in accordance with it’.⁶⁰ Crucially, this movement of the human by the divine will is not for Maximus (in contrast to the Monothelites) a matter of overruling, but simply what it means to will naturally for a will that has been ‘wholly deified’. Indeed, to the extent that something analogous can be said to occur even prior to the final state of glory, Maximus can compare the movement of Christ’s human will in Gethsemane to that of ‘Moses, David, and whoever else has received the divine operation’.⁶¹ In all these cases obedience to God’s command is not a sign that the natural will has been bypassed, but the proper mode of human willing under God, which the rest of us will experience fully only with the eschaton.⁶²

In the meantime, as beings faced with a plurality of possible objects about whose goodness we may be mistaken, our willing remains a matter of *gnome*. Seen from this perspective, the *gnomic* will is not necessarily perverse. One imagines that it would have characterized human existence in time and space even apart from the fall. While *gnome* continues to define human willing prior to the eschaton, however, there will be a point at which human beings will cease to face merely apparent goods in glory: at that point the *gnome* withdraws.⁶³ It follows that *gnome* is not constitutive of freedom for human hypostases any more than it is for divine ones. But this does not signal the obliteration of the human will, as that would amount to the destruction of human nature rather than its salvation. Even in the eschaton a human being’s will is and remains genuinely her own; but this will is a power which comes out of nature, not one that somehow operates independently of it.⁶⁴ As such, the will achieves the end intended for it by God not as it stands over against our nature, but precisely in so far as it is enmeshed in it in the same way Jesus showed in Gethsemane.

City of God, Christian Doctrine, vol. 2 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1887).

⁶⁰ ‘Opusculum 7’ (PG 91:80D), 186. See also *Opusculum 6* (PG 91:68C), 176; cf. *OTP 4* (PG 91:60B).

⁶¹ *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:297B).

⁶² Cf. Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua*, 194: ‘For Maximus then *trope* as a moral term has a restricted and pejorative sense. The use of our freewill in turning to God is for him rather a fulfillment of nature than an instance of its mutability’.

⁶³ See note 16 above.

⁶⁴ In ‘Opusculum 3’ (PG 91:49B), 194, Maximus characterizes the natural will as ‘a power of life out of its nature’ (*zotiken ek phuseos dunamin*).

The logic of the natural will: from Christology to anthropology

It is one thing to put forth the idea of the natural will as a means of elucidating the problem of the relationship between freedom, nature and grace, and quite another to make sense of it concretely. How exactly does the operation of the will remain human if it is 'moved and shaped' by God? One might be forgiven for suspecting that Maximus is guilty of trying to have his cake and eat it too, as his opponents thought. In order to clarify Maximus' position, it is necessary to examine Maximus' position in terms of its relation to the doctrine of God and Christology, before moving back to anthropology.

The basis of what became the Orthodox interpretation of Chalcedon was an insistence on a consistent application of the key terms 'person' and 'nature' across theology.⁶⁵ Thus, as we have already seen, one of Maximus' chief arguments against the Monothelites was that their association of will with hypostasis led to the unacceptable conclusion that there were three wills in God. As one nature, God has one will. It follows that what God wills, God wills naturally.⁶⁶ Maximus takes it as self-evident that such a conception of willing does not amount to a form of necessitarianism;⁶⁷ moreover, it remains internally differentiated by virtue of its enactment in and through the three divine hypostases,⁶⁸ but it is emphatically not gnostic. The reason why is clear: Maximus regards the operation of *gnome* as a feature of temporally circumscribed existence. The upshot of this conclusion, however, is that Maximus does not see gnostic willing as constitutive of hypostatic integrity. The divine persons do not need to be ascribed *gnome* in order to be coherently confessed as distinct and free hypostases.

Chalcedon defined Jesus as one hypostasis, and Maximus follows the by then established orthodox view that this hypostasis is none other than the divine Word. In his mature thought Maximus therefore emphatically denies that Jesus has a *gnome*, affirming instead two natural wills, corresponding to the two natures of the Chalcedonian definition. But what does this mean concretely about our conception of Jesus' willing? Clearly it cannot mean that there are two subjects whose wills happen to come into accord, as that would amount to a Nestorian 'union of gnostic qualities' only.⁶⁹ Instead,

⁶⁵ Note, in this context, that Maximus held the Nicene *ousia* and the Chalcedonian *physis* to be synonymous. See OTP 14 (PG 91:149B).

⁶⁶ See especially OTP 6 (PG 91:68B), where God is said to will our salvation by nature (*touto gar autoi phusei kathesteke theleton*).

⁶⁷ See note 52 above.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., 'Opusculum 7' (PG 91:77C), 185: 'For [Christ]... came... with the good pleasure of the Father and the co-operation of the Spirit'. Cf. OTP 16 (PG 91:192A).

⁶⁹ 'Opusculum 3' (PG 91:56C), 197; cf. OTP 16 (PG 91, 192C).

the one Word wills simultaneously in two natures.⁷⁰ Yet this way of putting things may appear to suggest that talk of human willing is just a sham, with the human will as a neutral capacity that is only set in motion by the willing of the logos. On such a reading the hypostatic *gnome* would stand over against the natural will (which is at best reduced to a kind of natural inclination or instinct) as the actual locus of human freedom.⁷¹ Yet it is precisely this idea of a ‘passive’ human will or operation that is the focus of Maximus’ objection to Monothelitism and Monenergism.⁷²

The only alternative here is to recognize that for Maximus there is no willing ‘behind’ or ‘above’ the natures. Nature simply is the locus of willing, inasmuch as willing is ‘a power of life out of its nature’.⁷³ The one to whom the willing is ascribed is the hypostasis (i.e. it is Christ – or you or me – who is said to will); but the willing (like hunger or reason) is a property of nature and not some ontological reserve over and above nature. After all, no one feels the need to say in order to be ‘really’ curious, one’s curiosity needs to be ‘more’ than just a property of one’s nature. Why should the will be any different? Here again the trinitarian framework of Maximus’ reasoning is crucial, since he repeatedly charges that the Monothelite urge to associate

⁷⁰ So the Gethsemane episode ‘made clear that as man, being by nature God, he acts humanly . . . And . . . as God, who is human by nature, he acts divinely and naturally exhibits the evidence of his divinity’. ‘Opusculum 7’ (PG 91:84C), 188.

⁷¹ This is effectively the final position of Farrell, who allows that the natural will ‘moves only toward things which are good’, but goes on to argue that in order to escape from the determinism associated with the Origenist idea of apokatastasis ‘there must be a unique hypostasization of the will in the person, each free to do with the natural will and its objects what he sees fit’. See his *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor*, 189. While Maximus’ views on eschatology in general and the apokatastasis in particular are beyond the scope of this essay, it is hard to attribute them the kind of central role that Farrell’s thesis demands. Even Daley, who argues convincingly that the evidence does not support the view that Maximus was a universalist, notes that ‘one would be hard pressed to find in Maximus’s writings any direct attack on the Origenist doctrine of apokatastasis’ (‘Apokatastasis and “Honorable Silence”’, 323). Perhaps still more to the point, Farrell’s characterization seems to attribute to Maximus precisely the division between will and nature for which the Confessor attacks the Monothelites in *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:297A–C).

⁷² ‘For if on account of the operation (*energeian*) of the divine motion the human nature is said to be passive, then it must also be true that human wickedness exists because of the goodness of the divine nature’. *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:349D; cf. PG 91:297A–B).

⁷³ ‘Opusculum 3’ (PG 91:49B), 194. This phrase emerges as a development of a lengthier definition of the will (in PG 91:49A) as ‘the movement of longing that follows desire’. Cf. *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:292B), where Maximus states that ‘willing as such (to *haplos thelein*) pertains to nature’.

will with hypostasis, far from preserving a coherent notion of freedom, only succeeds in undermining the Christian confession of one God. Freedom is not some passive or neutral capacity that the divine persons have to activate through some special form of hypostatic operation; it is of their essence as divine. And in so far as one of these persons takes flesh, it is no less of his essence as human.

Of course, for Maximus there is a form of willing that can be spoken of in distinction from nature. That is gnostic willing, and with this category we move from Christology to anthropology proper. The gnostic will is for Maximus a function of hypostasis, and it is for him characteristic not only of sinful, fallen humanity, but, seemingly, of all human existence on this side of the eschaton. It is a corollary of the uncertainty with respect to goods that afflicts creatures unable to glimpse the eternal order of goods outside of the perspective of time.⁷⁴ That final proviso is crucial, however, because it reinforces the point that *gnome's* relationship to human being is provisional and not constitutive. This is not to deny that the *gnome* has a role to play in human progression towards communion with God; but it is to say that, in so far as the final stage of this progression is a 'gnomic withdrawal' in which it is grace that deifies human existence as a whole and the human will in particular, what remains in glorified humanity is a will that is ever drawn into God naturally and by grace, but not gnomically.⁷⁵ As we move from life in time to communion with God, the natural will, deified by grace, is the only will that remains.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ In this context, Farrell rightly notes that while human beings' wills are fixated on goods that may be real or apparent, '[t]o God, a good cannot be merely apparent'. Farrell, *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor*, 124.

⁷⁵ Perhaps the most succinct account of this role is found in *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:309C), where Maximus, attempting to explain why there is so great a variation in the human practice of virtue, even though virtues are natural, notes that 'asceticism . . . was intended for the virtuous for the sole purpose of separating out the deception introduced to the soul through sense perception'. While *gnome* is not mentioned explicitly here, the pattern of gnostic withdrawal as a function of spiritual progression seems implicit in Maximus' claim that when 'deception is finally rooted out [and, thus, presumably there is no more need for gnomically governed asceticism], the soul shows the brightness of its natural virtue'.

⁷⁶ Maximus elsewhere maintains (in language that undercuts any zero-sum account of the relation between divine and human action) that this eschatological elimination of 'gnomic difference' (*diaphora gnomike*) among people is the culmination of a process whereby God unites creatures' own self-chosen impulses (*authaireton hormen*) towards well-being in order to make them 'harmonious and self-moving in relation to one another and the whole universe'. See *Ad Thalassium* 2 (CCSG 7:51), in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 100. In this passage it is worth noting that the Greek phrase *authairetos horme* is

Conclusion: a contribution to the Augustinian tradition?

This reading of Maximus brings him into closer proximity to Augustine than first appearances might suggest. Augustine's chief theological concern in his battle with the Pelagians was to deny that human beings are capable of securing their own beatitude. It would be a mistake, however, to view the essence of this debate as a disagreement over the capacities of the human will in which both sides worked with a common vision of the will as an anthropological datum and differed only in their views on its range of operation, with Augustine minimizing its capacities and the Pelagians maximizing them. Rather, Augustine's debate with the Pelagians centres on a more fundamental disagreement over the nature of the will itself. While the Pelagians saw the will as a reservoir of autonomy over against all external sources of motivation, Augustine argued that such a perspective rendered human action unintelligible. By insisting that the will represented a source of action over and above the motives that prompted them, the Pelagians were left with a vision of humanity in which our own selfhood becomes opaque and, indeed, alien.⁷⁷

Thus, though Augustine has little patience with the idea that we fallen human beings can do whatever we want, the essence of his disagreement with the Pelagians lies in his refusal to accept that we can want whatever we want.⁷⁸ Where the Pelagians sought to defend an anthropology that effectively elevated human beings above the desires that tie them to the world, Augustine insisted that the human will operates from a position squarely within the world.⁷⁹ By viewing our created nature, centred in the

precisely the same phrase used to characterize the operation of the gnomonic will in *OTP* 14 (PG 91:153A), further substantiating the idea that even human movement toward well-being that takes place *kata gnomen* is ultimately dependent on grace.

⁷⁷ 'If agents are so voluntaristically spontaneous, then their actions are not determined even by their own deliberations. The explanation of our actions then ends invariably in the raw existentialist claim 'so I willed it'. But that ends up rendering one's identity a riddle; for why should I, a reflective, deliberative agent, identify myself with this willing 'I'?' Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 54. Cf. Alistair I. McFadyen's judgment (*Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 170, n. 6) that Pelagius 'saves the freedom of the will at the cost of being able to say that the will is in any sense personal'.

⁷⁸ '...from an Augustinian perspective, the problem [of sin and evil] does not most basically concern our freedom [viz., our capacity to act rightly], but rather our loves [viz., our capacity to desire rightly]'. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 15.

⁷⁹ 'The Pelagian man was essentially a separate individual: the man of Augustine is always about to be engulfed in vast, mysterious solidarities'. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*:

will, as ultimately detached from its environment (and correspondingly able to stand at a distance both from the effects of the fall and from the intrusion of grace), the Pelagians ended up with a position in which free will is part of human nature that somehow also stands apart from that nature. Augustine rejected this picture of things, arguing instead that free will names precisely the process whereby we are drawn by God into the wider order of created nature: through grace the will of the believer is healed in such a way that its desires correspond to the nature of things.

In his defence of Christ's human will, Maximus had to secure much the same ground, albeit in response to a different line of attack. In response to the Monothelite vision of Christ's will as a kind of hypostatic reserve that overcomes the weakness and recalcitrance of human nature, Maximus develops the idea of a natural will as a means of affirming that Christ's obedience is fully a function of his humanity. By emphasizing the humanity of Christ's willing, such a move might at first glance appear Pelagian; but in fact its underlying rationale is every bit as opposed to the 'Pelagian' notion of the autonomous will as anything in Augustine. Maximus' definition of Christ's human will as natural makes willing a function of human nature, and not a process detached from it. Indeed, the whole point of categorizing Christ's human will as 'natural' was to preclude the idea of its being opposed to God by defining its activity in terms of correspondence to the created logos of human being. Through the operation of grace, the will's natural tendency towards the good is freed from the habits of unnatural desire. Here, too, grace heals the will in such a way that its desires correspond to the nature of things.

In this way, both Augustine and Maximus view postlapsarian humanity's struggles with sin as a battle between a will that has, in turning from nature, been cut off from nature and nature's God alike, and a will that, healed by grace, has been reintegrated into nature's order. Both face the charge that such a vision of the will effectively robs humanity of any meaningful idea of freedom, and both respond by refusing to be locked into the alternatives of irrational instinct (i.e. mindless subjection to desire) or autonomous decision (i.e. independence from desire) as the framework for interpreting the will's operation.⁸⁰ Instead, both see the will's freedom lying in the turning of a rational being towards the natural objects of its desire.

A Biography (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 365; cf. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 9.

⁸⁰ Albrecht Dihle goes so far as to say that 'a notion of will, as distinct from both irrational impulse or decision on the basis of knowledge, was indispensable in the theory of St Augustine, but hardly in that of Pelagius. Pelagius' position can be understood and evaluated without the notion of will and within the limits of the traditional

But if deliberation and struggle are signs of the will's captivity to sin, one wonders if an unintended consequence of an emphasis on the redeeming power of grace is a situation in which the drama – and thus the particularity – of a person's life becomes a function of their sin. At least one contemporary scholar worries that Augustine, despite his best intentions, may end up with a picture in which sin does become in this way the ultimate principle of individuation, with grace effectively eclipsing the will in a way that risks making the life of the blessed appear a featureless gray.⁸¹ By contrast, Maximus' articulation of the category of the natural will in the context of Christ's prayer in Gethsemane provides a model of grace that mitigates this risk, because it depicts a moral movement that does not turn on overcoming sin and therefore sketches a narrative in which the advent of grace does not render the will invisible.

As a human being, Christ had a natural (and therefore proper) fear of death that caused him to will the passing of the cup. Such aversion to death is a feature of human nature as such; it is in no way unique to Christ. What defines the particularity of Christ's existence as a human being is his being called and given the grace to accept the cup. The process whereby grace is victorious in this life involves real fear and real pain – but without sin. In this way the movement of grace in and by which a person becomes most himself has genuine drama, but at its heart is not the problem of sin and the question of whether to follow God's will (in which grace and the will are conceived as operating over against each other), but of how to follow it (in which God transforms a generic humanity into a particular human destiny). Such reading of the agony of the garden checks concerns about grace undermining the freedom of the will by providing a narrative in which human life, freed from sin and moved by grace, retains all the ingredients of a true adventure.

Or perhaps not quite all the ingredients. Maximus explicitly denies that Christ has genuinely to deliberate (and thus struggle) with the prospect of

intellectualism of Greek and early Patristic philosophy' (Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of the Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 132). The same point might be made of Maximus and the Monothelites. Interestingly, Dihle's understanding of Augustine's theological appropriation of the Latin *voluntas* parallels in many ways Madden's views on Maximus' appropriation of the Greek *thelesis*, except for the fact that Dihle views Augustine's breakthrough as aided in some respects by the existing Latin usage of *voluntas* in a way that finds no real parallel in Maximus' case.

⁸¹ Augustine 'meant grace to individuate the soul and restore to it the identity it was losing in sin. We can still wonder, however, whether human entrance into the cosmic plot of redemption, whose ending has all the saints bear the image of God, does not in retrospect lend the life of sin an identity and interest all their own'. James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 211.

refusing the cup.⁸² While this insistence doubtless derives from Maximus' desire to clear the omniscient Word of any 'gnomic' uncertainty regarding his proper good,⁸³ one wonders if it is strictly necessary, given that Maximus elsewhere is careful to identify deliberation as an inherent part of the operation of the natural will.⁸⁴ Moreover, the fact that the rest of us remain human beings who, unlike Christ, still await deification means that our lives continue to be characterized by the gnomic struggle against sin that is far removed from the experience of Jesus.

Nevertheless, in drawing the parallels he does between Christ in the garden and heroes of faith like Moses and David, Maximus reminds us that the movement of grace is operative even now, such that when we get beyond the gnomic will's struggle with sin, we are not left with a self whose being grasped by God brings its story to an end. Instead, we find a self whose liberation by grace shapes personal distinctiveness in and through the ongoing operation of the natural will. Exactly how this 'works' psychologically remains a mystery. But this should neither surprise nor disappoint us, because the purpose of the technical distinctions Maximus deploys is less to explain how we are free in God than to resist any reading of the Bible that would view human life in God as anything less than free, or our freedom as anything less than graced. This suggests that the category of the natural will is perhaps best conceived not so much as a piece of psychological theory but as a conceptual guide for the following narrative proposal: given what Christians believe about Jesus, there is no way for them to read his story – or their own – consistently except as one in which the freedom of the will is vindicated in its living under God 'naturally and by grace'.

⁸² *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:369A).

⁸³ See, e.g., *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, PG 91:308C–D.

⁸⁴ See especially OTP 1, PG 91:13B–14B. Farrell does an excellent job of raising penetrating questions on this point in *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor*, 161, n. 15.