Abstract: The dyothelite Christology of Maximus the Confessor provides a basis for countering modern worry that an Augustinian doctrine of the bondage of the will undermines human integrity. Modern discomfort with Augustine presupposes an anthropology that equates genuine agency with freedom of choice. In defending the principle that Christ has a fully human will, Maximus challenges this presupposition by denying that a human agent’s willing is to be identified with choosing. Thus, while Maximus does not share Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, he offers a framework within which to explore possible convergence between Eastern and Western understandings of the will.

There are few topics in Christian theology that tend to elicit more visceral reactions from believers and non-believers alike than that of free will. This sensitivity is rooted in the way in which beliefs about the will intersect with prevailing views of what it means to be human in Western culture. Chief among these is the belief that genuine humanity entails what is termed ‘freedom of indifference’ in the philosophical literature, but which is probably more readily understood (especially in the context of post-industrial consumer capitalism) as ‘freedom of choice’: that is, possession of a will that is equally free to turn to either of two (or more) options lying before it. Christian anthropology, especially in its Augustinian form, cuts against this vision in claiming that in the present life human beings are not free to turn away from sin under their own power, and that when this state is overcome in glory human beings will be similarly unable to turn toward sin.1 By qualifying freedom of choice with...

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1 Augustine refers to these two states as non posse non peccare and non posse peccare, respectively. Of course, Augustine also teaches that human beings were originally characterized by something like the kind of freedom characteristic of modern sensibilities (viz., posse non peccare), but inasmuch as he views this state as inherently transitory (i.e., even had it not been forfeited in the fall it was destined to be displaced in glory by the confirmation in virtue), it hardly stands at the heart of his anthropology.
respect to sin, Augustinian teaching conflicts with anthropologies that equate human integrity with the capacity for radical moral self-determination.

I want to argue that the Christology developed by Maximus the Confessor in the first half of the seventh century and ultimately vindicated at the Third Council of Constantinople in 681 provides a useful framework for countering modern discomfort with Augustinian anthropology. Given that the occasion for the council was the debate between monothelites and dyothelites over whether Christ had one will or two, the connection may not be immediately obvious. Yet when it is remembered that the central issue in this debate was whether or not Christ possessed a genuinely human will, it becomes somewhat easier to imagine how the Council’s christological judgements might have important anthropological implications. Specifically, it turns out that the dyothelites’ insistence that the will is a -- if not the -- defining feature of human nature (phusis) challenges the idea that willing is the source or ground of individual identity (hypostasis). And if identity is not reducible to the will, then the will’s lack of freedom with respect to sin either now or in glory may not constitute the kind of threat to human integrity that modern Westerners are inclined to fear.

Dyothelite Christology in context

Among the ancient ecumenical councils that defined classical Christian orthodoxy, the Third Council of Constantinople seems at first blush to rank among the most obscure and, to modern sensibilities, irrelevant. All participants confessed the Trinity; all agreed that Mary was rightly called Theotokos; all accepted that Christ was consubstantial with God in his divinity and consubstantial with us in his humanity. Nor did the debates have the kind of clear implications for the daily life of the church that marked the iconoclastic controversy in the following century. Indeed, the central issue under debate emerged almost by accident in the course of an extended process of theological and political negotiation designed to secure unity among the churches of the Byzantine Empire. On these grounds Harnack claimed the whole episode ‘essentially belongs to political history’ and dismissed the deliberations of 680–681 as ‘the Council of antiquaries and paleographists’, whose definitions and anathemas were shaped more by a desire to please the emperor than by theological conviction.³

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3 Adolph Harnack, History of Dogma (Boston: Little, Brown, 1898), vol. IV, pp. 254, 259. Without denying the importance of politics in setting the stage for the debate, Harnack’s dismissal of the theological seriousness of the controversy is belied by the stiff resistance put up by monothelite bishops at Constantinople III. Nevertheless, the basic thrust of Harnack’s opinion continues to draw support from Catholic scholars in particular; see,
The monothelite theology condemned at the Council had its roots in imperial efforts to reconcile with those churches that had broken with Constantinople over the two-natures Christology of Chalcedon. Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople worked hard through the early decades of the seventh century to promote a compromise position, according to which Christ, though possessing two natures in line with the decrees of Chalcedon, had a just single composite operation or mode of activity (mone energeia). Though this ‘monenergist’ position did prove acceptable to at least some anti-Chalcedonians, it met with stiff opposition from the staunch Chalcedonian monk Sophronius, who in 634 became Patriarch of Jerusalem. In the face of this resistance, Sergius backed off, referring the matter to Pope Honorius I with the suggestion that all attempts to enumerate Christ’s energeiai be proscribed. In his response Honorius concurred, but also set the stage for further controversy by making fateful reference to ‘the one will of our Lord Jesus Christ’ in the context of affirming Sergius’ view that it was impossible for two wills to exist together in one and the same person.

In speaking of one will in Christ, Honorius may have wished only to deny that Jesus experienced any conflict in willing. Whatever his intent, however, the strategy of forbidding debate on the number of Christ’s operations while affirming that he had a single will (mone thelesis) was the centerpiece of a renewed attempt at rapprochement with the anti-Chalcedonian churches promulgated in an imperial edict (the Ecthesis) of 638. This monothelite theology met with resistance from the same quarters as had its monenergist precursor, and though Honorius died before being able to respond to criticism of his reference to Christ’s one will, his successors condemned the phrase as heretical. This opposition led the next emperor, Constans II, to issue a further decree (the Typos) forbidding debate over the number of Christ’s operations or wills alike. Nevertheless, continued support for the monothelite
position by successive patriarchs in Constantinople, combined with Maximus’ refusal to allow the question of number to be passed over in silence, guaranteed that controversy over the interrelated categories of will and operation would continue.

Dyothelite Christology in outline

At first glance perhaps the most surprising thing about the monothelite controversy is that the claim that Christ had one will proved controversial at all. Like the modern, secular West, the early church also placed a premium on the importance of human free will as a means of opposing both pagan fatalism and the perceived determinism of various Christian Gnostic groups. Free will was understood as the basis of human ability to respond to God, and the language of growth in faith was readily described as a matter of the human will’s conforming to the divine, with their ultimate unification in glory as the fulfillment of human existence. Against this background, it is easy to appreciate how it is that Honorius might have failed to see anything innovative or controversial in his reference to the one will in Christ. Indeed, even Maximus himself, who would become the chief intellectual architect of the dyothelite response to monothelitism, could in the years before the outbreak of the controversy speak of the goal of human life as one of deification, in which human and divine wills are made ‘identical... in a union of relation’.

Of course, even in this early quotation the fact that Maximus speaks of a ‘union of relation’ suggests a continuing ontological distinction between the divine and the human. Indeed, there is little evidence that Maximus’ views on deification underwent any fundamental shift as a result of the monothelite controversy. There is no change in his position either with respect to the material claim that deification is a state in which human wills are shaped directly by God’s will, or with respect to the formal grounding of theological anthropology in Christology. Already in the *Ambigua ad

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7 A variety of Greek terms were used to refer to this capacity, including prohairesis, boulesis and autexousiotes, alongside Maximus’ own preferred terms, thelema and thelesis. Bathrellos (*Byzantine Christ*, pp. 118–19) argues that Maximus’ preference for thelema is a function of its prominence in key Gospel texts like Luke 22:42 and John 6:38. For further discussion of the history of the key terms, see John Madden, ‘The Authenticity of Early Definitions of Will (*Thelesis)*’, in Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn, eds., *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1982), pp. 61–79.
8 Polycarp Sherwood argues that in the seventh-century church ‘a spirituality which places the summit of holiness in the unity of [divine and human] wills... was in large measure common property’. Polycarp Sherwood, *An Annotated Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor, Studia Anselmiana*, fasc. XXX (Rome: Herder, 1952), p. 3.
Ioannem the reference point for Maximus’ account of the deified will is the story of Christ in Gethsemane – the same text that is the linchpin of his later, dyothelite theology. At the same time, in this early treatise his language lacks the precision of his later theology, so that at one point Maximus can speak of the glorified state in seemingly monenergist terms that he will later find it necessary to clarify. In this way, the monothelite controversy did not so much alter the Confessor’s basic theological convictions as it provided the occasion for him to clarify the terms in which human freedom and integrity were to be described and understood. Though cast in a highly technical christological idiom, the results are in their own way no less significant for the Christian understanding of the relationship between nature, grace, and human salvation than Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings.

Dyothelite theology is often explained in highly schematic terms that obscure its anthropological significance. The standard, textbook account takes syllogistic form: the Council of Chalcedon had established that Christ was to be confessed as one hypostasis in two natures; the will is a feature of nature rather than hypostasis; therefore commitment to Chalcedon demands that Christ be confessed as having two wills. This summary is accurate as far as it goes, but it begs the question of why will should be associated with nature rather than hypostasis. Here, too, it is possible to present the decisive arguments in fairly short order. The first is more soteriological in character, working from the well-established principle that what Christ cannot redeem what he has not assumed to argue that Christ must have assumed a human will to have effected its redemption, and thence to the conclusion that whatever Christ assumes pertains to the nature by definition. The second depends on an appeal to consistency in the use of theological terms. According to this argument, the logic of the monothelite claim that Christ has but one will corresponding to his one hypostasis implies that God has three wills corresponding to the three trinitarian hypostases; but this is inconsistent with the belief that

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12 In *Ambiguum 7* (PG 91: 1076C) Maximus describes the state of glory as one in which the human being has ‘attained the divine activity [theias . . . energeias], and indeed become God by deification’. In *OTP 1* (PG 91: 33D–36A) Maximus explains that in so writing he did not mean to ‘take away the natural activity [phusiken . . . energeian] of those who experience this’, but only to stress that deification was a product of divine rather than human capacity. In this context, it is worth pointing out that in *Ambiguum 7* (PG 91: 1076B) Maximus does explicitly deny that that deification amounts to a ‘dissolution of human agency [autexousiou]’.

God has only one will, which corresponds to the one divine nature and thus is common to all three hypostases.\(^{14}\)

While the logical force of these arguments is undeniable, neither is particularly effective in illuminating the anthropological implications of the dyothelite position. Indeed, it might seem at first glance that the correlation of will with nature rather than hypostasis purchases theological consistency at the price of psychological plausibility. Most basically, what sense does it make to speak of two wills in Christ if – as both monothelites and Maximus agreed – there is in Christ only one willing agent (namely, the divine Logos)?\(^{15}\) And the confusion seems only to be increased when it is recognized that Maximus’ dyothelite arguments includes a further distinction within human willing between the ‘natural will’ (*thelema phusikon* or *thelema*) and the ‘gnomic will’ (*thelema gnomikon* or *gnome*).\(^{16}\) According to Maximus, all human beings possess both a natural and a gnomic will; yet while he insists that Christ’s full humanity dictates that he, too, has a natural will, he repeatedly denies that Christ has a gnomic will.\(^{17}\) Given that Maximus explicitly associates the gnomic will with the powers of deliberation and decision – effectively with the ability to choose between options – it seems that his defence of Jesus’ consubstantiality with the human race is subverted from the outset, since the significance of Jesus’ solidarity with us in possessing a natural will is evidently undermined by denying that his willing is marked by those features connected with choice that we are inclined to view as most central to human freedom.\(^{18}\)

**Maximus’ analysis of the will**

In order to address these concerns, it is necessary to explore in greater detail why Maximus introduced the distinction between natural and gnomic wills. Prior to the monothelite controversy, Maximus treats *thelema* and *gnome* as synonyms and, correspondingly, has no difficulty in ascribing a *gnome* to Christ.\(^{19}\) Already in one of his earliest extant writings, however, there is a foreshadowing of the later distinction. Maximus describes humanity’s end as ‘to have one *gnome* and one *thelema* with God

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\(^{14}\) Maximus makes this point in *DP* (PG 91: 313C–316B); cf. *OTP* 3 (PG 91: 53C).

\(^{15}\) For Maximus’ insistence on the Logos as the unique subject of Christ’s willing in either nature, see, e.g., *DP* (PG 91: 289B); cf. *OTP* 7 (PG 91: 80B–C). As Bathrellos points out, Maximus’ position was not consistently maintained in subsequent dyothelite Christology, with both the Sixth Ecumenical Council and (at least on occasion) John of Damascus making the two natures rather the single hypostasis the subject of willing in Christ. See Byzantine Christ, pp. 184–5.

\(^{16}\) Maximus also uses the term *thelesis* for the natural will (see, e.g., *OTP* 1 [PG 91: 12C]); and he regards the phrase ‘prohairetic will’ (*thelema prohairetikon*) as equivalent to the gnomic will in *OTP* 1 (PG 91: 28D) and *DP* (PG 91: 329D).

\(^{17}\) See, e.g., *OTP* 7 (PG 91: 81C–D) and *DP* (PG 91: 308D–309A, 329D).

\(^{18}\) This criticism of Maximus is made in Raymund Schwager, *Der wunderbare Tausch: zur Geschichte und Deutung der Erlösungslehre* (München: Kösel, 1986), pp. 157–8.

\(^{19}\) See Commentary on the Our Father, in Maximus Confessor, p. 104 (PG 90: 877D).
and with one another’, while at the same time noting that the fall has blocked this process by introducing a division within the will that causes us ‘to turn from the natural movement . . . to what is forbidden’. This contrast between the will’s ‘natural movement’ on the one hand and its capacity to turn from nature on the other parallels the later distinction between the natural and gnomic wills. It was only in confronting the monothelite identification of Christ’s will with his divine hypostasis, however, that Maximus found it necessary to cast this distinction in technical terminology.

As already noted, Maximus’ immediate theological concern in confronting monothelitism was to affirm the theological principle that Christ could only redeem the will if the will were part of the nature that he assumed in the incarnation. This correlation of the will with nature is the basis for the category of the natural will. And though the claim that the will was a constitutive feature of human nature had the effect of reducing the will to one among many such faculties, no diminishment of the will’s significance was thereby intended. On the contrary, Maximus is quite clear that the natural will is the most significant of humanity’s faculties, since it ‘holds everything together’, and ‘we exist in and through it’ in a way that is not true of other aspects of our nature. Indeed, the supreme importance of the natural will in Maximus’ anthropology is illustrated by its persistent identification with human agency (autexousia). Nevertheless, Maximus’ analysis of the natural will suggests that such agency is distinct from freedom of choice. For Maximus the primary manifestation of the natural will is in our natural appetites:

For by this power [of the will] alone we naturally desire being, life, movement, understanding, speech, perception, nourishment, sleep, refreshment, as well as not to suffer pain or to die – quite simply to possess fully everything that sustains the nature and to lack whatever harms it.

Clearly, we do not desire sleep or food because we choose to do so; on the contrary, Maximus’ whole point is that such desires are natural. They do not need the presence of a will to manifest themselves, as is clear from the fact that animals, too, naturally seek life and avoid death. What is distinctive about human beings is what it means for them to desire something naturally. For whereas other sentient beings desire rest or

21 See, e.g., DP (PG 91: 304C): ‘agency, according to the Fathers, is will’. Cf. 301B–C (where Maximus cites the authority of Diadochus of Photike) and OTP 15 (PG 91: 147C).
22 ‘Agency’ is preferable to ‘self-determination’ or ‘freedom of choice’ as translations for autexousiotes precisely because Maximus contrasts autexousiotes as the defining feature of the natural will with the gnomic qualities of prohairesis (OTP 1 [PG 91: 13A]) and authairesis (OTP 16 [PG 91: 192B–C]), both of which much more clearly have the sense of autonomous freedom of choice.
23 OTP 16 (PG 91: 196A).
flee pain by instinct (and thus by compulsion), human beings do so ‘in and through’ the will (and therefore freely):

For that which is rational by nature has a natural power that is a rational appetite [logiken orexin], which is also called the will [thelesis] of the intellective soul. And by this power we reason willingly [thelontes logizometha]; and when we have reasoned, we desire willingly [thelontes boulometha].

In short, for Maximus the natural will is that property whereby we do whatever we do as responsible agents rather than mechanically or by instinct. It follows that if Christ is confessed as fully human (that is, a genuinely human agent rather than a divine ghost in a biochemical machine), he must have a human natural will.

What then of the gnomic will? In line with the description of the fall in his early letter to John the Cubicularius, Maximus understands sin as the product of a gnome that has turned from what is natural; yet it would be a mistake to conclude that he simply identifies the gnomic will with fallenness, given that he has no difficulty acknowledging that it can conform to God’s will. Yet if the gnomic will is not inherently sinful, it is intimately connected with the possibility of sin, for it is understood in terms of the capacity to choose between options – including especially good and evil. Maximus associates this capacity with a will that does not enjoy the eschatological state of immediate conformity to God’s will, arguing that short of this state willing is a complex process that moves from desire (boulesis) through deliberation (boule or bouleusis) to the actualization of the results of deliberation in choice (prohairesis).

Deliberation is crucial to Maximus’ understanding of the gnomic will. It is correlated with the ignorance and doubt that are characteristic of the will that has not yet been deified: we deliberate about those things which are within the scope of our will, but the implications of which are unclear to us (and under the conditions of history, that includes everything that we will). Because our deliberation can go either well or badly, we have the capacity to deviate from our natural end, and our willing is, correspondingly, mutable. Though inseparable from our nature as responsible agents, the gnomic character of our willing under conditions of historical existence leaves open the possibility of deviating from that nature. In the fall this

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24 DP (PG 91: 293B); cf. OTP 7 (PG 91: 77B).
25 See, e.g., OTP 16 (PG 91: 193B). This distinction between the exercise of the gnomic will and sin also shows that Maximus does not subscribe to an Augustinian version of fallen humanity as non posse non peccare.
26 OTP 1 (PG 91: 13A–16C). Though Maximus gives a more detailed elaboration of the stages of volition in the subsequent sections of this Opusculum, this basic sequence is not affected. For a comprehensive analysis, see Lars Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor, second edn (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), pp. 218–26.
27 OTP 1 (PG 91: 16D–17B); cf. DP (PG 91: 308D, 329D).
possibility was actualized in a way that continues to render human beings disposed to sin.\(^{28}\) Whether or not we sin in any particular instance, however, our status as pilgrims dictates that our earthly actions are invariably characterized by the process of gnomic deliberation and choice.

At this point it is possible to speak more precisely about the relationship between the gnomic and natural wills. For Maximus the gnomic will is a mode (or \textit{tropos}) in which individual human beings will, rather than an inherent property (or \textit{logos}) of the will as a constitutive feature of human nature.\(^{29}\) In other words, the gnomic will is not a separate power alongside the natural will; it is simply a name for how willing takes place. In the same way that hypostasis is defined as the \textit{tropos} (that is, mode of being) of a particular \textit{logos} (that is, type of entity), so the gnomic will refers to the mode in which the natural will is instantiated by human hypostases prior to its eschatological transformation into a condition of immediate conformity to God’s will.\(^{30}\)

In this context, Maximus’ denial that Christ has a gnomic will derives from his conviction that Christ does not suffer from the kind of ignorance and uncertainty that we do and, for this reason, wills without deliberation and decision. Crucially, however, Christ’s willing lacks these characteristics not because his humanity is essentially (that is, with respect to its \textit{logos}) other than ours, but only because his human nature is already deified and thus wills in a mode (or \textit{tropos}) different than ours:

But as for the Savior’s willing according to his human nature, even though it was natural, it was not bare [\textit{psilon}] like ours, any more than his humanity as such is, since it has been perfectly deified above us in union, because of which it is actually sinless.\(^{31}\)

Because \textit{gnome} is a \textit{tropos} of the will, it is not analytic either to the act of willing or to the nature of the will. Instead, \textit{gnome} is a feature of the will only when willing hypostasized under conditions of ignorance and doubt. Since Christ’s human will is, by virtue of its enhypostatization by the Second Person of the Trinity, fully

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\(^{28}\) ‘What happens through the fall is that a perversion of man’s capacity for self-determination takes place...which predisposes man for its constant misuse...That is to say, it forms in man a sinful disposition of will (\textit{gnome}).’ Thunberg, \textit{Microcosm and Mediator}, p. 227; cf. \textit{OTP} 20 (PG 91: 236D): ‘for the nature did not change [because of the fall], but its motion was perverted, or rather (to speak more accurately) it exchanged one motion for another’.

\(^{29}\) See, e.g., \textit{OTP} 3 (PG 91: 48A), where Maximus draws a parallel between the natural and gnomic wills on the one hand, and the capacity to speak and the act of speaking on the other.

\(^{30}\) See \textit{DP} (PG 91: 308D), where \textit{gnome} is explicitly defined as ‘a \textit{tropos} of use, not a \textit{logos} of nature’ (\textit{tropos ousa chreseos, ou logos phuseos}); cf. \textit{OTP} 3 (PG 91: 53C), \textit{OTP} 10 (PG 91: 137A), and \textit{OTP} 16 (PG 91: 192B–C), where ‘the self-determining impulse’ of the gnomic will is defined as ‘not of nature but...of person [\textit{prosopou}] and hypostasis’.

\(^{31}\) \textit{OTP} 20 (PG 91: 236D).
deified, it is permanently oriented to God in a way that precludes any need for deliberation.\textsuperscript{32} Christ’s individual experience of willing is therefore different from that of all other human beings; but it does not compromise Christ’s consubstantiality with us, because the latter is a function of the will’s \textit{logos} rather than its \textit{tropos}.\textsuperscript{33} In short, in the same way that Christ’s having a genuinely human body is not compromised by the fact that the agent who is the subject of his bodily movements is God, neither is the claim that his incarnate acts are humanly willed compromised by the fact that God is the subject of the willing. As a property of human nature, the humanity of the will – like that of the mind or body – is logically distinct from (and thus ontologically unaffected by) the divinity of the hypostasis.

**Maximus’ interpretation of Christ’s willing**

Because the gnomic will names merely a mode of willing and not the essence (or \textit{logos}) of the will itself, the lack of a \textit{gnome} does not mean a dissolution of human agency. Again, the driving purpose behind Maximus’ introduction of the distinction between natural and gnomic wills was precisely to defend the principle that Christ’s fully deified humanity included a human will – and thus genuinely human willing – notwithstanding the fact that this will did not operate by means of the processes of deliberation and choice. The way Maximus uses scripture to defend the doctrine of Christ’s human will makes this clear. For though the soteriological issue of Christ’s consubstantiality with human beings serves as the dogmatic foundation of Maximus’ dyothelitism, it is only by attending to the biblical texts Maximus uses to substantiate and illustrate his position that his understanding of the will’s place in theological anthropology becomes clear.

Maximus’ exegetical arguments for a distinct human will in Christ rests on the contention that the Bible depicts Christ willing things that cannot coherently be ascribed to the divine nature: ‘How . . . if the incarnate Word did not himself will naturally as a human being . . . did he voluntarily \textit{[hekousios]} and willingly \textit{[thelon]} submit to hunger and thirst, labour and weariness, sleep and all the rest?’\textsuperscript{34} This line

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} ‘The human will of God [incarnate] . . . having received being in unity together with God the Word, had a motion that was without hesitation but had instead fixed \textit{[stasimon]} motion in accordance with the natural appetite or will; or, to speak more precisely, there was in him an unmoving condition \textit{[stasin]} in accord with his absolutely pure, completely deified subsistence \textit{[ousiosin . . . pantelos theotheisan]} in God the Word’. \textit{OTP} 1 (PG 91: 32A); cf. \textit{OTP} 7 (PG 91: 80D) and \textit{OTP} 20 (PG 91: 236A).
\item \textsuperscript{33} Some monothelites rejected the ascription of a human will to Christ on the grounds that it would imply ignorance (see \textit{OTP} 19 [PG 91: 216B–C]). The terms of Maximus’ dyothelitism imply not so much a flat-out rejection of this charge as its deflection by conceding that ignorance is a feature of gnomic will but denying that Christ willed gnomically. To put it another way, from Maximus’ perspective the monothelite charge rests on a failure to recognize that \textit{gnome} refers to a \textit{tropos} rather than the \textit{logos} of the will.
\item \textsuperscript{34} \textit{OTP} 7 (PG 91: 77A).
\end{itemize}
of argument is developed at some length in the *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, where Maximus cites a range of texts from the Gospels as support for the existence of a distinctly human will in Christ, arguing in each case that Christ is depicted as willing something that cannot be referred to divinity and so must be ascribed to Christ’s human nature. For example, he argues Christ’s wandering around Palestine must be viewed as a function of his human will, since the omnipresence of the divine nature makes it absurd to speak of Christ willing his own physical movement from one place to another according to his divinity.\(^{35}\) The force of Maximus’ exegetical logic in these passages comes across with particular clarity in his interpretation of Philippians 2:8:

> The divine Apostle says of him in the Epistle to the Hebrews [*sic*]: ‘He became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.’ Was he obedient willingly or unwillingly? If unwillingly, then it should be described as compulsion [*turannis*] and not obedience. But if willingly, obedience is not a property of God but of human beings, as the divine Gregory [of Nazianzus] says (in accord with the Fathers): ‘God is neither obedient nor disobedient, for such matters pertain to subordinates and those under authority.’\(^{36}\)

Obedience cannot be ascribed to the divine nature. Therefore, in so far as Christ willed to be obedient, he must have done so according to his human nature. And for Maximus it is essential to say that Christ’s obedience was a matter of will; otherwise Christ would not be fully human, since human beings, as rational creatures, do what they do willingly rather than by instinct or compulsion.

As important as such passages are to building his case, the exegetical center of Maximus’ dyothelite Christology is (as already noted) the agony in the garden.\(^{37}\) The *crux interpretandum* in this story is the relationship between Christ’s initial petition that the cup pass from him and his subsequent acquiescence to the Father’s will.\(^{38}\) In response to the monothelite reading of this prayer as depicting a displacement of the human will by the divine, Maximus argued that both aspects of Christ’s prayer are to be ascribed to his human will: as a human being, Christ recoiled from death (in line with the inherent disposition of the natural will); but it was also as a human being that


\(^{36}\) *DP* (PG 91: 324A–B; the citation from Gregory comes from his *Fourth Theological Oration*); cf. PG 91: 293B, where Maximus also rejects the idea that Christ’s human nature is moved by necessity (*enagkasmenon*).

\(^{37}\) Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46 and pars.) is the focus of *OTP* 3 (PG 91: 45B–56D), 6 (PG 91: 65A–68D) and 7 (PG 91: 69B–89B) and is referred to at various other points in Maximus’ dyothelite corpus (though, oddly, it does not come in for explicit discussion in the *Disputation with Pyrrhus*).

\(^{38}\) For a helpful review of earlier patristic exegesis of the Gethsemane episode, see Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, pp. 140–6.
he overcame this fear in obedience to the divine will (since obedience pertains to the human rather than the divine nature):

. . . he was in truth and properly a human being: to this his natural will bears witness in his plea to be spared from death . . . And again that the human will is wholly deified [diolou tetheoto], in its agreement with the divine will itself, since it is eternally moved and shaped by it and in accordance with it, is clear when he shows that all that matters is a perfect verification of the will of the Father, in his saying as a human being, ‘Not mine, but your will be done,’ by this giving himself as a type and example of setting aside our own will by the perfect fulfilment of the divine, even if because of this we find ourselves face to face with death.39

Given that Christ’s two petitions clearly differ in content, one cannot help asking how they can both be ascribed to the same human will, if – as Maximus insists – Christ’s lack of a gnomic will precludes the possibility that doubt and deliberation be used to account for the shift from resistance to acceptance.40 As the quoted passage suggests, Maximus’ answer rests on making a distinction between what is natural to human will (in this case, avoidance of death) and the movement of the same will inasmuch as it is ‘wholly deified’ and thus fixed immovably on God. Working within this framework, Maximus insists that though Christ’s two petitions are clearly different from one another, the fact that God, as the common author of created nature and deifying grace, is the source of both movements of the will means that this difference cannot be interpreted in terms of the process of choosing between sin and righteousness characteristic of gnomic deliberation.41 Nor is it permissible to see Christ’s eventual acceptance of the cup as indicating the overshadowing or bracketing of his humanity, since Maximus insists that deification produces no change with respect to nature.42 Instead, the movement from rejection of the cup to its acceptance illustrates a progression from human nature as it operates according to its own powers and human nature enabled to transcend those powers through grace so as to fulfil the particular calling of the individual within God’s wider plan for a deified humanity.43

This distinction between the natural power (logos) of Christ’s human will and the particular way (tropos) it moves in Gethsemane parallels the distinction

39 OTP 7 (PG 91: 80C–D). The translation is by Andrew Louth (Maximus the Confessor, p. 186).
40 See, e.g., DP (PG 91: 308D).
41 OTP 3 (PG 91: 48D).
42 OTP 7 (PG 91: 31D); see also OTP 4 (PG 91: 60C): ‘His willing is with respect to natural being [on phusikon] entirely like ours, but it is above ours in that it is divinely shaped [tupoumenon . . . theikos]’.
43 OTP 3 (PG 91: 48C); see also OTP 7 (PG 91: 84A–B). Cf. Adam G. Cooper, The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 152, who writes that ‘Christ’s human nature is affirmed, since its logos . . . remains completely intact and natural. At the same time, it is transcended, since the tropos . . . in which that nature . . . is freely lived out and encountered at the level of the contingent and particular is supernatural’.

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between the natural and gnomic wills. There are, however, three crucial and interrelated differences, two of which we have already had occasion to note. First, the deified will is permanently fixed on God’s will, in contrast to the inherent mutability of gnomic willing, which is a function of the ignorance and uncertainty of a will that is not so fixed. Second, this difference in the will’s basic orientation means that the processes of deliberation and decision which are an intrinsic feature of gnomic willing are not found in the deified will. Finally, while the distance from God that is definitive of gnomic willing means that in itself its freedom of choice consists in the possibility of willing that which is against nature (and which is therefore opposed to God), the freedom of the deified will consists in the God-given capacity to will that which is beyond but – crucially for Maximus – not against nature. In other words, the gnomic will has the capacity either to follow nature or to sin. By contrast, the deified will’s deviation from its ‘natural’ object is not sin, because it is not a rejection of nature; on the contrary, it wills whatever it wills (in this case, the cup of suffering) precisely out of obedience to the God who is recognized as the author of human nature and thus as the one whose calling must be understood as a fulfillment of that nature even as it exceeds that nature’s intrinsic inclinations and capacities.

Thus, although the tropos of Christ’s will in Gethsemane is certainly a function of his hypostatic particularity (that is, of his particularity as the incarnate Word), it is not a product of a gnomic will: instead of being the product of gnomic deliberation and decision, it has its origin directly in the will of God. The divine will ‘moves and shapes’ Christ’s human will; but this will, in turn, accepts this moving and shaping in an act of obedience that both reflects and constitutes its deification. Moreover, this unswerving orientation to God, far from undermining the willer’s particularity,
actually secures it: Christ is never more Christ than in his acceptance of the cup; and, indeed, he would not be Christ apart from it. The deified will remains both free and distinctively human, because God draws the individual to Godself not by cancelling or overriding human willing, but rather by giving the will the grace to desire an object that exceeds its natural capacities. In this way, the will is presented with an object that it could not desire on its own, but which by God’s grace it is able to accept as its most proper desire.48

Anthropological implications

Inasmuch as Maximus conceives of deification as the proper end of human nature as such, it should come as no surprise that he does not view the characteristics of Christ’s deified humanity as unique to him. On the contrary, because Christ is fully human it follows that the willing of all deified human beings (namely, the saints in glory) will have the same structural features that mark his willing during his earthly ministry.49 The parallels are clear in Maximus’ characterization of the saints’ experience of deification:

At that time there will be no prohairesis (as in the law of nature that now prevails), since every uncertainty regarding things will fall away, and there will be an active desire [orexis energes] that is single and cognitive for whatever

48 Does this process by which the object of willing transcends the merely natural not entail choice? It depends on how the term is understood. If ‘choice’ means the psychological processes by which we in this life (i.e., gnomically) choose between alternatives, then the deified will does not choose. If, however, ‘choice’ is simply used to refer to an objective change in the object of willing, without any speculation regarding the psychological processes by which this takes place, then there can be no objection to speaking of ‘choice’ – though the choosing in question is one of which we have no experience prior to the consummation. See, in this context, Bathrellos, Byzantine Christ, p. 151, n. 302: ‘prohairesis is a particular kind of choice or decision that . . . depends on deliberation and goes hand in hand with mutability, sinfulness, etc. To exclude . . . prohairesis from Christ as man means to exclude this particular kind of choosing and deciding, not choosing and deciding as such.’ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), pp. 254–5 and Joseph. P. Farrell, Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor (South Canaan, PA: St Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1989), p. 161, n. 15.

49 Of course, though Jesus shares our humanity’s logos, he is unique with respect to the way his humanity is lived out as the humanity of the incarnate Word (i.e., his tropos). Thus, Maximus writes that the ‘natural aspects of the will are not attached to the Lord in the same way as they are to us. For though he truly hungered and thirsted, he did not hunger and thirst in the mode [tropoi] that we do, but in a mode above us, because it was voluntary [hekousios]’ (DP [PG 91: 297D]). The point seems to be that while we no less than Christ hunger willingly (i.e., our experience of hunger is part of our existence as agents), our hungering is a necessary feature of our non-deified existence in a way that it is not for Christ. Interestingly, Augustine suggests in glory the saints shall enjoy a similar relation to food in City of God, XIII.22.
nature renders desirable [tois houto kata phusin orektikois]. And this desire, having marvelously attained the pure, mystical enjoyment of that which is naturally to be desired... finds its satisfaction in the infinite extension of its appetite for enjoyable things.  

Gnomic choice (prohairesis) will disappear from human experience, but while this means that among the saints there will be revealed ‘one common will with respect to the logos of nature, difference will remain with respect to the tropos of motion’. In other words, the eschaton preserves the individual integrity of each person: in no case is will at odds with nature (as is the case at least potentially where the gnomic will is active), but, as with Christ, deification means that the various objects of human willing will transcend – without opposing – nature as God draws each individual to her or his own particular calling.

As with Christ, so with all other human beings the distinction between nature and hypostasis is crucial here as a framework for interpreting the distinction between the natural and gnomic wills. In so far as it pertains to the hypostasis, gnomic will is not a distinct property (logos) of human being. With respect to logos, human beings have but one – natural – will both now and in glory; and it is this natural will that constitutes them as free and responsible agents. Gnome is a tropos of willing that marks individual hypostases of the human nature so long as that nature remains undeified. Deification establishes a new mode of willing in which gnomic deliberation is replaced by a direct and undeviating orientation to God. This model of deification makes it easier to see how the glorified state of non posse peccare is consistent with the integrity of human beings as free and responsible subjects. As that feature of human nature by which human beings can and must own their actions as precisely theirs (that is, as that which is rightly predicated of their individual ‘I’s), willing is properly conceived as the natural form but not the source of human action. This basic principle is true whether or not the will is deified. Just as the fallen person claims rightly their actions (whether eating, fornicating or praying) as their own, so the glorified person will rightly claim their actions (for example, loving God) as their own: in both cases, ‘I willingly did x’, will be the correct form by which an individual describes their actions. The mode by which this willing action is accomplished, however, differs radically before and after deification. The undeified will operates by means of deliberation and decision,

50 OTP 1 (PG 91: 24C).
51 OTP 1 (PG 91: 25A).
52 ‘Thus the world above will reach its fullness; the members will be united with their head, each according to his merit [kat’axiosan]. Through the constructive skill of the Holy Spirit, every member will have a place appropriate to it... So each of us will bring to completion the Body that itself brings all things to completion in each of us, filling everything and itself brought to fullness by all things.’ Ambiguum 31 (PG 91: 1280D–1281A), cited in von Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy, p. 358 (translation altered). The idea, again, is not that will is the means by which a particular place is earned, but that each place is a function of the particularity of the individual agent.
culminating in choice (prohairesis); in the deified will, by contrast, these processes are rendered redundant as the will is moved and shaped directly by God.

In this way, the power of self-determination characteristic of gnomic willing turns out to be an index of the willer’s distance from God.\footnote{Maximus defines the gnomic will as self-determining impulse (authairetos horme) in OTP 14 (PG 91: 153A–B); cf. OTP 16 (PG 91: 192B–C) and Quaestiones ad Thalassium [hereafter QT] 2 (CCSG 7.51).} The deified will is not self-determining in this way, but it is free, since Maximus’ construction of the will is one in which the abolition of gnomic distance from God by grace takes away nothing from the integrity of willing. For the will to be moved and shaped by God is not for it to be compelled, any more than in the present life the fact that the will is shaped by, say, the impulse to pursue what is life-preserving and flee what is life-threatening is a matter of compulsion (that is, something done against the will). Indeed, Maximus’ strict correlation of the will with human nature means that the human experience of glory must be a function of willing if it is to be genuinely human at all. And if the example of Christ in Gethsemane shows that the content of this willing is obedience to God’s will, the same story makes it abundantly clear that this in no way means that the human will is simply overridden – let alone displaced – by God’s. It accords with this christological model that other human beings will be called to will destinies that are equally transcendent of their natural appetites and equally unique to their own hypostatic particularity. The deified will is unable to sin because it is fixed on God; but because God’s being is infinitely rich and the divine will for each rational creature unique, what obedience to God’s will means concretely will differ for each person – and discovering what it means is an adventure that is not so much terminated as fully enabled by deification.

In short, Maximus’ understanding of deification suggests that while the will is the means by which we live out our identities before God (that is, as rational creatures we are who we are willingly), it is not the source of those identities. Their source is God, such that the fulfillment of what it means to be human is to have one’s own will fixed steadily on God’s. Maximus’ insistence against the monothelites that Christ had a human will shows that this understanding of the place of the will entails no diminishment in the importance of the will as a constitutive feature of a distinctly Christian anthropology. On the contrary, his position is distinguished from that of his opponents precisely by his insistence that it is impossible to speak of humanity where there is no human will. Willing for Maximus defines our humanity as much as rationality does; indeed, it has a good claim to being the focal point of human existence, in so far as it is that feature of our being that defines our many passions and actions as ours. The will defines us as subjects able to respond to God in love, trust, and obedience – and thereby to participate in the divine life.

But if the will is central to our nature as human beings able to love God, it is not what defines us as particular hypostases who, having been loved by God, are called to love God in return. To be sure, we love God willingly – and no more so than when we have been deified – but who we are as individual hypostases is not to be identified
with our wills any more than it is with any other aspect of our shared nature as human beings. If in the eschaton there will continue to be, as Maximus insists, genuine difference among human beings, this will not be a function of their natural wills as such: with respect to logos, all human wills will be united in their immutable focus on God; their difference will be a function of tropos – the various ways in which those wills will individually be moved and shaped by God. Crucially, however, this variation will not be then (as it is now) a function of our wills’ gnomic mutability, but of their individual conformity to a divine will. It is, in short, God who makes the saints who they are – though it must be immediately added that the saints accept and live out these identities willingly in the same way that Christ willingly accedes to the will of the Father in the garden.

In effect, gnomic will amounts to something like freedom of choice; but for Maximus this freedom is emphatically not to be identified with human nature as such. On the contrary, it is characteristic only of our humanity in its earthly state and, far from defining what it means to will, it describes only a particular mode of willing that for Maximus is at best penultimate and at worst (and in fact) predisposed to sin. In effect, gnome takes the place in the present life that is occupied by God in the state of glory. But this very fact signals that for Maximus the drive to self-determination characteristic of gnomic willing is not to be identified with the self in the present – any more than God will be identified with the self in heaven.

Thus, for Maximus the gnomic will is that power which most immediately shapes our identity here and now, even as God will in the state of glory. Since all our willing in the present life is invariably gnomic in character, our virtues are as much a product of gnome as our sins – and Maximus is quite clear that deification is not realized apart from by ascetic cultivation of the virtues in the present life. Nevertheless, even in the present it is ultimately the gift of divine grace rather than any inherent capacity of the gnome that brings the saints to their appointed end. The gnomic will is incapable of securing human identity before God on its own because (unlike the natural will, which is moved by its own inherent – and therefore

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54 It needs to be conceded here that in so far as every human being’s place in God is for Maximus evidently proportionate to the desire for God felt during life (hekastou...methexontos, hoson epothese according to OTP 1 [PG 91: 24D]), the gnomic will is clearly a factor in determining the precise character of each person’s experience of deification; but in so far as among the saints the gnomic will is not an alternative to grace (as though deification were earned), but rather a filter through which it operates, God remains the ultimate author of individual human destiny. See below for further discussion of this point.

55 Maximus can say that in so far as the deified individual ‘has placed himself completely in God alone’ he ‘both is and is called God’ (Ambiguum 7 [PG 91: 1084C]) but the context makes it clear that there is no question of ontological identity (cf. Ambiguum 41 [PG 91: 1308B]).

56 See, e.g., DP (PG 91: 309C–312A).

57 See DP (PG 91: 297A): ‘Moses and David and whoever has been made open to the divine operation were moved by his direction in the putting aside of human and fleshy properties.’
God-given – appetites) it does not have any content: as a mere mode of willing it is in itself empty, directionless and (therefore) mutable.58 Thus while the effects of gnomic willing continue to mark human hypostases even once the gnome itself has been transcended in the state of glory,59 the this-worldly limit of gnomic willing rules out its being interpreted as either the source of or the key to human identity.

Appreciating the character of the gnomic will as a mode of realizing hypostatic identity but not as its source is crucial as a means of blocking the inference that to claim one’s actions as one’s own is the same thing as to take credit for them as self-generated. As just noted, the gnomic will is intrinsically devoid of content. Its objects come to it from without, either (positively) from divine promptings and the intrinsic drives of human nature on the one hand, or (negatively) from the soul’s disordered passions on the other. From this perspective, the idea that human beings make themselves is true only to the extent that they drift away from their natural end toward self-destruction. By contrast, in so far as human beings follow their nature, they are emphatically not self-made, but God-made – and never more so than in their deification. At the same time, because what God first makes and then deifies are human beings – rational, responsible, self-conscious agents – the saint’s relationship with God is a manifestation of personal freedom as one who, by grace, not only knows and loves God, but does so willingly.60

Conclusion

If willing is not about choosing, then lack of choice with regard to sin, whether now or in glory, says nothing in itself about our integrity as free and responsible beings.61 The will is not, on this reading, the guarantor of our specific hypostatic identity, but rather that natural faculty by which our appetites and acts, many of which are

58 See OTP 1 (PG 91: 13A), where gnomic prohairesis is distinguished from natural will on the grounds that while the latter is ‘a simple desire that is rational and intrinsic to the life-process’ (haple tis orexis, logike te kai zotike), the former is ‘a compound of desire, deliberation, and decision’ (orexeos kai boules kai kriseos).
59 Bathrellos (Byzantine Christ, p. 157, n. 337) rightly cites OTP 1 (PG 91: 24D–25A) in support of this point: ‘To whatever extend anyone has desired, to that extent he participares in that which has been desired.’ Cf. the citation from Ambiguum 31 in note 52 above (though the latter antedates Maximus’ engagement with monothelitism).
60 For Maximus ‘it is obvious . . . that the grace of the Holy Spirit in no way leaves the natural faculty unengaged . . . but rather grace begins to make the natural faculty active again, leading it via the use of modes harmonious with nature towards the comprehension of divine things.’ QT 59.95–9 (CCSG 22.51), cited in Cooper, The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor, p. 58.
61 Though, as already noted, Maximus does not subscribe to the belief that fallen human beings are in a state of non posse non peccare, his doctrine of the will does not seem inherently inconsistent with the latter position: if our will remains intact when in glory we are unable to sin, there seems nothing inherently problematic about affirming the will’s integrity where sin is unavoidable.
functionally indistinguishable from those of other animals, acquire their distinctly human character. Thus, my hunger is the same as my dog’s in so far as its basic physiology is concerned, but I can (and, indeed, cannot honestly avoid) claiming my hunger as my own in a way that my dog cannot – even though I am no more able than my dog not to hunger when I have not eaten for a time. Of course, I am also distinguished from my dog by my ability to deliberate and decide with respect to the way in which I satisfy (or refrain from satisfying) my hunger, but for Maximus this distinction is not of final significance for my identity as a human being. If I am saved, there will come a time when my willing will no longer be characterized by deliberation and decision; but I will not be any less human. On the contrary, it is Maximus’ contention that only then will my calling and destiny as a human being have been fulfilled.

This distinction between willing and choosing cuts against any anthropological vision that equates humanity with radical self-determination. Though one might make a case that any such equation is itself conceptually incoherent, there is no questioning its hold on the modern, Western sensibility. Nor, as the difficulty that Maximus (and, a few centuries earlier, Augustine) experienced in fighting this equation shows, can the enduring resistance to the distinction between willing and choosing be chalked up simply to the lingering effects of ‘Enlightenment’ models of human autonomy. Indeed, the Enlightenment valuation of individual autonomy might just as well be taken as the resurgence of a much more fundamental desire to distinguish ourselves from our natures, as though our integrity depended on our being essentially other than God made us.

In this context, it is worth highlighting Maximus’ characteristic way of pressing home the implications of Chalcedon. Taking up a phrase from Leontius of Byzantium, he speaks of the two natures ‘from which, in which, and which Christ is’. The last clause is crucial because it highlights the fact that Christ’s hypostasis is not a further ‘something’ (logos) over and above the natures, but simply the way (tropos) that those natures are personally instantiated in the rabbi from Nazareth. What Christ is, is simply his two natures. Who Christ is – the divine Word – is a

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62 ‘If agents are so voluntaristically spontaneous, then their actions are not determined even by their own deliberations [since, if we are to possess genuine freedom of indifference, decision must finally stand independent of all other psychological processes]. 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), p. 54.

63 It is not hard to see the serpent’s temptation of Eve in precisely these terms: though she is already ‘like God’ by nature (Gen. 1:27!), she is persuaded that this is inadequate in so far as it is not something that she claims for her self over and above her nature.

64 This phrasing is found in OTP 1 (PG 91: 36C), 6 (PG 91: 68A) and 19 (PG 91: 224A); Ambigua 5 (PG 91: 1052D) and 27 (PG 981: 1269C); and Epistles 12 (PG 91: 488C) and 15 (PG 91: 573A); cf. DP (PG 91: 289B), OTP 9 (PG 91: 121B) and 19 (PG 91: 224AQ). For a discussion of the derivation and significance of the three clauses, see Bathrellos, Byzantine Christ, pp. 108–11.
matter of hypostasis, but to make this point is not to add any ontological content to Christology; it is simply to specify how the human and divine natures concretely subsist. The fact that the answer to this ‘How?’ is ‘divinely’ does nothing to compromise Christ’s humanity for Maximus, because the integrity of human nature is a matter of what, and not who (or how) an entity is. In short, a given logos may be instantiated according to a range of possible tropoi. The full humanity of the will is thus unaffected by whether the tropos by which it operates is gnomic deliberation or the immediate presence of God characteristic of deification.

This technical distinction allows the will to be understood as a matter of nature and not as some kind of ontological reserve whereby we stand over against our natures. To be sure, in concrete acts of willing we may violate our natures (namely, through the gnomic willing of sin) or transcend them (namely, through the willing of our callings that may be a product of gnome or deification); but for Maximus this is not what makes us human. It merely names various ways in which we go about living out our humanity – a humanity which has its natural end in a life with God that exceeds its natural capacities. Thus, for Maximus our task is not fundamentally a matter of our trying to master – let alone resist – our nature through an act of will. On the contrary, our misery has its source exclusively in our (gnomically) willed deviation from our nature, since it is in and through rather than despite our nature that God wills to bring us to that life that perfects nature.

Part of our nature is our capacity to will. Indeed, for Maximus willing stands at the center of our nature, rendering us responsible agents rather than creatures of instinct. It follows that the will, too, is subject to deification; moreover, because the will has a particular role in rendering our being specifically human, deification necessarily implicates the will – to the extent that only when deified do our wills operate with what Maximus views as their proper freedom, untrammeled by uncertainty, doubt, and ignorance. Once again, this is not to say that deification is an achievement that we either merit or maintain by our own effort; but it is to recognize that deification, as both a process and a state, is something in which our will is ineluctably engaged. We love and know God by grace, but by grace it is nevertheless we who, willingly, love and know God.

This way of conceiving the will is a direct consequence of Maximus’ decision to associate the will with nature rather than hypostasis. Against his opponents, Maximus insisted that it was impossible to follow Chalcedon and confess that Christ existed in two natures while denying that he had a specifically human will. Yet this affirmation of the will as a property of human nature invariably relativizes its significance for the individual human being’s hypostasis. To be sure, who we are as particular individuals is inseparable from our wills; but the same could be said of our minds, bodies and all other intrinsic properties of human nature: we are who we are

65 Note that this is not to reduce the hypostasis to the natures, but only to insist on the ontological distinction between the two. See the discussion in Felix Heinzer, *Gottes Sohn als Mensch: Die Struktur des Menschseins Christi bei Maximus Confessor* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1980), pp. 117–32.
in and through our bodies, minds and wills. Indeed, given the will’s particular place within human nature, we may even go so far as to say that the kind of bodies and minds we have is to some extent a function of the will, since the will directs them; but the will itself, as an inherent property of human nature, can no more be viewed as the source of hypostatic identity than the body is. As part of human being, will is the (natural!) context within and through which we live as persons, but not the source of personhood. Founding our personhood is not an achievement of the will (even though it is done willingly), but a matter of grace. Willing is not itself the object of the will, but simply the mode in which we do whatever it is we do. The content of willing – and thus the hypostatic particularity of how our humanity is realized – comes to the will from without. Though it is realized by and through the will, it is not the will’s own creation.

It follows for Maximus that our fulfillment as human beings is therefore to have our wills fixed on God in such a way that the will’s movement is continually and invariably one of obedience. Short of glory, our wills lack this constancy. Because they act gnomically, they both can and do swerve in profoundly unnatural directions. Far from being a sign of the will’s freedom, however, this ‘capacity’ is for Maximus a sign of its instability: in so far as it is not moved and shaped by God, it is moved and shaped by other forces. Its powers of choice are thus not a sign of perfection but rather reflect the willer’s ignorance and distance from God. Correspondingly, the will’s healing involves the willer’s recognition that one’s identity is secured not by one’s own capacities, but by the gift of God. In short, the will’s task is not to create personal identity, but to (willingly!) receive it, knowing that the infinite richness of the God who is its giver promises a content that is ever new, surprising, and more fully one’s own than anything of one’s own creation.

66 Von Balthasar makes this point nicely, describing deification as a process by which ‘the free moral act... is changed progressively into the act of God himself, who lifts us out of our own freedom into his’ (Cosmic Liturgy, pp. 325–6).