This article closely examines the content of an important passage in Maximos the Confessor’s *Ad Thalassium 42*, in which we can identify a ternary soteriological structure (Adam-Christ-us) recurring in the work of the Byzantine theologian. The main focus of the article is to highlight and analyse the relationship that he evokes, but does not detail, between human nature and the exercise of will – in the case of Adam, as the protological and lapsarian exemplar of humanity; in the case of Christ, as its teleological and soteriological exemplar; and in the case of us, as natural descendants of the former and possible spiritual followers of the latter.

**Contribution:** This article highlights a general soteriological structure and the circular dynamics between nature and will as the central anthropological mechanism of this structure, both of which are relevant to Maximos the Confessor’s entire work in general and to his moral psychology, including his concept of the passions, in particular.

**Keywords:** nature; volition; soteriology; *Ad Thalassium 42*; Maximos the Confessor.

### Introduction

Known, studied and quoted, the 42nd piece of the well-known work *Responses to Thalassios* by the famous Byzantine theologian and saint Maximos the Confessor (c. 580–662) does not, however, enjoy much attention.¹ Maximian scholarship seems to place it in a role of additional reference, of checking ideas presented with more performance elsewhere in the work. In the continuation of a research started to elucidate the possible understanding of addictive behaviours from the perspective of the Eastern Patristic concept of passion, passing through the unravelling of a general model of human behaviour, both investigated in the writings of St. Maximos the Confessor,² the present essay dwells on *Response 42* (hereafter QT 42) to examine more closely what it says explicitly and, especially, what it suggests, namely a dynamic, mutual relationship between human nature and its manifestation in the act of exercising the will, in the case of Adam, as the protological and lapsarian exemplar of humanity, of Christ, as its teleological and soteriological exemplar, and in our case, the natural descendants of the former and the would-be spiritual followers of the latter.

In the following, the article will first summarise this Response, re-reading its most significant elements, and then appreciate its role in the broader context of St. Maximos’ whole opera. Next, the article will address the question of the relationship between nature and will, an anthropological and moral couple at the centre of the author’s attention and of the present research. In the conclusion, the relevance of this relationship to the issue of passions and addictions is discussed.

### What we read in QT 42

QT 42 is a short text in which the author responds to the request of his correspondent to clarify the meaning of the Pauline verse ‘He who did not know sin, was made sin for us’ (2 Cor 5:21): because it seems more serious an offense for someone to do a sin without knowing it, than to do it and know it – perhaps to acknowledge and confess it, as is the case of repentance – what did St. Paul actually mean here about Christ?³

2. See previous pieces in Moldovan (2020, 2021).
3. For the Greek text of *Ad Thalassium*, the present author uses the editions of Sources Chrétiennes (Maxime le Confesseur 2010, 2012), with the number of the corresponding lines in brackets. For the English translation, the author follows Constas (Maximos the Confessor 2018:241–245), with a few modifications. The most important one concerns his option for ‘volition’ or ‘will’ instead of Constas’ ‘free choice’ to translate προαίρεσις, which Maximos uses here in a comprehensive sense, meaning the whole volitional act, in pair with the comprehensive meaning of nature, and not as a specific, central part of this act, as for example in his *Opusculum 1*. When a more concrete exercise of volition is meant, the author uses ‘will’ to suggest that meaning.

Note: Special Collection: Orthodox Theology in Dialogue with other Theologies and with Society, sub-edited by Daniel Buda (Lucian Blaga University, Romania) and Jerry Pillay (University of Pretoria).
The answer given is characteristic of Maximos’ usual style: ‘in many ways [and] succinctly’ (πολλαχῶς ... κατ’ ἐπιτομὴν [73]), as he himself describes it. We can easily recognise in it three sections and a conclusion.

In the first section, Maximos identifies two meanings of the notion of sin (ἁμαρτία), distinguishing between sin as a willful violation of God’s commandment – here with reference to Adam’s sin (Gn 3), which he describes as a first corruption (θερόρι), consisting in falling (ἐκκοπασία) ‘from the good toward evil’ – and sin as the negative consequence of this violation on human nature, which occurred without Adam’s will, which he describes as a second corruption (συνέφθειρα), consisting in ‘alteration of nature from incorruptibility to corruption’ (ἐὰς ἀθάνατος εἰς φθοράν... μεταποίησις [12]). Based on the distinction between a voluntary action and its involuntary consequences, Maximos states that sin in the first sense, manifested at the level of the will, is blameworthy (εὐδιάβλητος), while in the second sense, manifested as consequences on human nature, it is blameless (ἀδιάβλητος).

Thus two sins came about in the forefather through his transgression of the divine commandment: the first was blameworthy, but the second was blameless, having been caused by the first. The first was a sin of volition, which voluntarily abandoned the good, but the second was of nature, which involuntarily and as a consequence of volition lost its immortality.5

Maximos continues the first section applying the distinction of the two senses of the sin according to the volition-nature binomial to Christ and his work of salvation: in order to restore humanity corrupted by primordial sin (in both its senses), he becomes man and assumes the corrupted nature (sin in the second, consequential, blameless sense), but not the corrupted volition (sin in the first, operative, blameworthy sense). In this way, Christ corrects and rightens both wickedness produced by Adam, that of volition and that of nature:

In this way, just as the alteration of nature from incorruptibility to corruption came to all men through one man, who voluntarily turned his will away from the good, so too, through one man, Jesus Christ, who did not turn His faculty of will away from the good, the restoration of nature from corruption to incorruptibility came to all men.6

The connection of this Adam–Christ parallel with the famous passage of Romans 5:12 ff. is obvious (which is probably why he does not mention it), a passage which Maximos interprets precisely in the sense of the mentioned distinction,7 but through another important text, also not mentioned, namely Hebrews 4:15, where it is stated about Christ that he was ‘tempted in all things after our likeness, except sin’.

If to this first section we add the conclusion, the answer is already sufficient and could be closed here. However, its author supplements two more, apparently redundant, sections. Each of them resumes the previous explanation of Christ’s work of restoration in contrast to the fall brought about by Adam, both in the same differential key of the will-nature binomial. On closer examination, however, we can see that the author’s hermeneutical attention is differently focused, in the second section on the role of the will and in the third section on the consequences of its exercise for nature.

Indeed, the second section mentions not only Adam’s will and Christ’s will, but also God’s will and, in addition, the author’s own will. In the foreground here are Adam’s sinful exercise, ‘for evil’, of his will, which Maximos describes by the expression ‘turning away of will’ (τροπὴ τῆς προαιρέσεως [35]) and Christ’s sinless exercise, ‘for good’, of his will, described as ‘immutability of will’ (ἀθανασία σαρκώς καὶ ψυχῆς [56; cf. 52]), and for the second, the ‘taking away of the common disgrace of corruption from the whole of nature’ and the acquisition of ‘impassibility, incorruptibility, and immortality’ (ἀπαθεῖας καὶ θανατικῆς καὶ θάνατον [53]). While in the first section Maximos merely states that these consequences are involuntary, this time he offers the explanation that they occur by a ‘judging of God’ (κρίναντος τοῦ Θεοῦ [47]). This is an important point, to which the article will return later.

Also, interesting here is the sudden change of expression from the third person, designating Adam, to the first person, after having immediately before mentioned the universal character of the consequences in Adam and Christ as well. The first person appears both in the singular, designating the author, and in the plural, designating the addressee, the possible readers, and, generically, all people as beneficiaries of Christ’s economy, but only in the singular does the first person explicitly assume both the will – ‘my sin’ (τὴν ἐμὴν ἁμαρτίαν [34]) – and the nature – ‘sin because of me’ (τὴν ἐμὲ ἁμαρτίαν [36]). The effect of this focus on subjectivity is one of emphasising personal responsibility, but also the quality of receiver of the justification in Christ:

The Lord did not know my sin, that is, the turning away of my free will: He did not assume my sin, neither did He become my sin, but [He became] sin because of me; He assumed the corruption of nature which came about through the turning away of my free choice, and He became, for our sake, man passible by nature, abolishing my sin through the sin that came about because of me.7

5.Καὶ γέγονεν, ὡσπερ δὲ ἕνος ἀνθρώπου τραπέντος ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τῆς προαιρέσεως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἁμαρτίαν ἀνελὼν ἁμαρτίαν οὔτε γέγονεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν δι᾽ ἐμὲ ἁμαρτίαν τὴν ἐμὴν οὐκ ἔλαβεν ἁμαρτίαν οὔτε γέγονεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν δι᾽ ἐμὲ ἁμαρτίαν τὴν ἐμὴν ἁμαρτίαν [34–39].

6. The Adam-Christ parallel plays a prominent role in St Maxim’s thought (see especially Q7 21, 61, Amb 42).

7.Τὴν ἐμὴν οὖν μὴ γνοὺς ἁμαρτίαν ὁ Κύριος, τουτέστι τὴν δι᾽ ἐμὲ ἁμαρτίαν τῆς ἐμῆς προαιρέσεως, τὴν ἐμὴν οὖν ἁμαρτίαν οὐ γέγονεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν τὴν ἐμὴν ἁμαρτίαν τῇ ἐμῆς προαιρέσεως καταργοῦσα τῇ ἐμῆς προαιρέσεως κατά τὴν τροπὴν τῆς ἐμῆς προαιρέσεως κατά τὸν ἐμὸν ἐμαρτηματικόν τοῦ ἐμοῦ ἁμαρτήματος κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἁμαρτίαν τῇ ἐμὴν ἁμαρτίαν [34–39].
In the third and final section, Maximos’ attention focuses on the consequences of the protagonists’ actions. Paradoxically, Adam’s responsibility for the consequences of his disobedience – listed repeatedly, after he had already detailed them at the end of the previous section – is here reinforced: these were not from the beginning, that is, from God, but Adam worked and knew (ἐπόνιοι δὲ καὶ ἐγγό [58]) this negative transformation of nature (μεταμόρφωσις [58]) through the creation (δημιουργίας [59]) of sin. God’s previously stated role as judge is more blurred; in the foreground instead comes the result of his will regarding Adam’s deed, namely, the condemnation (κατάκρισις [55]) to death, but this too is described as the offspring (γέννημα [59]) of sin, thus imputable to Adam.

Through the paradox of an unintended consequence attributable to a guilty person, Maximos highlights the other, greater paradox of the voluntary assumption of this consequence by an innocent person, and the idea that what Christ achieves in this way is the condemnation of Adam’s condemnation, that is, the reversal of the consequence decreed by God for sin, but, again paradoxically, not by contradicting the logic of this decision, but precisely by affirming it. In the words of the author:

The condemnation of my freely chosen sin […] was assumed by the Lord, who for my sake became sin […] voluntarily by nature assuming my condemnation – though He is without condemnation in His free choice – so that He might condemn the sin of my free choice and nature as well as my condemnation, simultaneously expelling sin, possibility, corruption, and death from nature, […] for my sake and out of His love for mankind, voluntarily appropriated my condemnation through His death, through which He granted that I be called back and restored to immortality.\(^9\)

This quotation reveals not only the summary of QT 42, but also that of the entire soteriology of St. Maximos – and of the Byzantine tradition – which we find, like a red thread, in various aspects and details in most of the responses in QT and in almost the rest of Maximos’ opera and which has at its centre a two-act play, namely, the tragedy of the fall produced by Adam and its counteraffirming by Christ, through a wonderful exchange.\(^9\) Borrowing the terminology of Amb 10.28, slightly different from that of QT 42, if Adam, seeking life for himself, gave birth to death as a mortal life, Christ, the Life itself, appropriated precisely this death to restore us to immortality.

However, the two acts of the play always have an epilogue, which is the subjective soteriology, the appropriation of salvation by each of us, a decisive aspect, which Maximos emphasizes in various ways, here precisely by recourse to the voice of the first person.\(^10\)

**The relevance of QT 42**

Looking at QT 42 against the whole of the Responses and, further on, with the entire Maximian corpus, it is evident that this answer provides us – briefly indeed – with the structural paradigm of a Christocentric soteriology, a structure formed on the trinomial Adam-Christ-us through which the Byzantine theologian orchestrates the fundamental themes of his thought – such as the origin and meaning of human existence, the condition and constitution of humans, in the various existentia regimes that they go through (protological, lapsarian and post-lapsarian, Christological, archeological and eschatological) – as well as his fundamental concepts, such as those of divine logos, nature, powers, hypostasis, energy, relationship, volition, passivity, activity, use, virtue, and passion, all of them in the dynamics of their characteristic manifestations of these regimes.

This structure faithfully expresses the series of paradoxes that QT 42 highlights, especially the specific mode of the economy of salvation. A glance at the graphical representation of this Response (see Figure 1) helps us to see that salvation, as a redress of the fall, could have had other modalities. For example, the direct correction by God of the corrupted human will and, consequently, the granting of the incorruptibility of nature, that is, immortality or eternal life (see Figure 1, the V-arrow). Another way of fulfilling this original purpose of creation would be God’s direct correction of human nature affected by sin, corruption and death and the granting, as a pardon for Adam’s condemnation, of sinlessness, incorruptibility and immortality (see Figure 1, the N-arrow). Both options would represent our salvation, without us, however. The first would nullify the role of human self-determination, which Maximos vehemently rejects precisely by defending the human volition in the person of Christ in the polemic against monothelitism. The second would represent the universal salvation of all people, regardless of their voluntary relation to Christ’s work of salvation, a view that seems difficult to ascribe to Maximos, at least in this place.\(^11\)

In the mode of the economy of salvation achieved by the incarnation and activity of Christ, neither human volition is annulled, nor nature is restored regardless of the exercise of will. Instead of simple, direct ways of salvation, the ‘mystery of Christ’ (QT 60) operates in a wonderful, paradoxical,\(^10\)

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\(^8\) ταύτην δὲ τῆς ἐμῆς προαιρετικῆς ἁμαρτίας τὴν κατάκρισιν,... ο Κύριος λαβὼν ἑκουσίως ὑποδὺς φύσει κατάκρισιν, ἀκατάκριτος κατάκρισιν, ἀσθενῶς ἐξενθέτησιν τῆς δύσεως,... τῆς ἐμῆς ὀψαλτήριας τῆς ἐμῆς ἐνεργείας ὄσιαςμενον διὰ τοῦ θανάτου κατακρατήσας κατάκρισιν, καὶ δι’ αὐτῆς χειροποιήματος μιᾶς τῆς πρὸς αὐτόν ἀνάλογως [60–72].

\(^9\) This is what Summerson very aptly discerned as the guiding theme in the whole Ad Thalassium. He mainly examines QT 1, 21, 61, but quotes here QT 60: ‘By his passion he grants to our nature apatheia, and by his sufferings, liberation, and by his death, eternal life’ (Summerson 2020:52). This theme is the kernel of the more general ternary soteriological scheme.

\(^10\) A very similar passage to QT 42 appears in QT 62, in which Maximos also resorts to the same first person when talking about the two curses ‘I was subject to’ (Maximos the Confessor 2018:454–455). On this personal appropriation of doing theology, see Summerson (2020:52–53) and, at length, Steven (2020).

\(^11\) There is a serious controversy about eschatological universalism in Maximos which cannot even be summarised here. In any case, QT 42 suggests that Christ’s work can have only two meanings: either the opening of a possibility of salvation whose individual appropriation presupposes a certain synergy with him, or simply the attribution of the result of his work to all humans, regardless of their own voluntary commitment. At first glance the text seems compatible with such an attribution, especially as it underplays subjective soteriology, but it is not at all clear how we could still keep it compatible with the ubiquity and emphasis on precisely this soteriology in the rest of the work. In fact, accepting the attribution variant would practically amount to substituting humans in the drama of salvation. See Andreopoulos (2015) for a recent overview.
‘diagonal’ way by uniting fallen nature with restored volition, more precisely by exercising the will in a way that corresponds to the divine logoi of human existence precisely in the conditions of a human nature affected by the fall; it is the way that saves both dimensions of the human constitution, fulfilling the purpose of creation and, mainly, gives each individual a personal role in achieving his or her own salvation. While the ways of salvation orthogonal to the human condition would have compromised its subjective significance, it is this dialogical way, which projects itself equally onto both dimensions, nature, and volition, that fully engages them, giving the largest content to personal participation in the realisation of salvation.

Although QT 42 focuses on the Adam-Christ binomial, the ‘new mystery’ (καινὸν μυστήριον [68]) through which Christ counter-acts the tragedy of Adam’s fall ultimately turns attention to the first person, that is, to each of us, and places the soteriological stake on how the interaction of nature and volition takes place in our own existential trajectory. But this directing of attention to our role as Adam’s heritors remains, at least at first glance, unrewarding, because that role is only evoked here, not presented. The situation is all the more interesting if we compare this text with similar ones.

A brief comparative overview

A careful comparison between QT 42 and the closest passages in Ad Thalassium, namely QT Intro, QT 21 and QT 61, is significant in what it reveals as having in common as well as in what as differing. In all four answers, the same ternary Adam-Christ-us structure can be identified,12 but the roles are highlighted differentially, depending on the hermeneutical context of the question and the edifying purpose of the answer. We can also identify a more particular ideational affinity between QT Intro and QT 21, on the one hand, and QT 42 and QT 61, on the other hand. The main common element in the first pair is the ontogenetic component of the genetic mechanism of the fall14 (detailed in QT Intro) and the solving of this mechanism by Christ (detailed in QT 21), while the common element in the second pair is the significance of the consequences that this pathological mechanism triggers and how precisely these consequences constitute the premises of the restoration in Christ. In fact, a paragraph of the first section (‘He corrected the possibility of nature […] making the end of nature’s possibility, […] into the beginning of the transformation of our nature into incorruptibility’) and the entire third section of this Response are taken up and developed at length in QT 61, the theme of which is precisely the reversal of the meaning of death as a result of sin through what he calls, here and there, ‘the condemnation of condemnation’ (κατάκρισιν κατακρίνῃ [66]).

Returning to the overall comparison with the other three Responses, what stands out in QT 42 is not so much that our role, as Adam’s heirs and Christ’s recipients, though certainly evoked, is not fully addressed (our role is even more blurred in QT 21), but that the relationship between human action and its consequences on human nature, though the hermeneutical key to the Response, remains only sketched, in contrast to the more detailed analyses devoted to various aspects of this relationship in the other places. But the article will now follow this outline more closely in QT 42.

The volition – nature correlation

At first glance, their relationship appears unidirectional, from volition to nature: in both Adam and Christ, a certain exercise of personal will entails consequences for the condition of nature. However, apart from the opposite sense in which the two exercise their will and the quite opposite consequences entailed, there is another difference, which Maximos only suggests: in the case of Adam, the sinful exercise of the will immediately entails negative consequences, whereas in the case of Christ the consequences of the sinless exercise of his human will appear, ‘through the resurrection’ (διὰ τῆς ἀναστάσεως [54]) and ‘by the resurrection’ (κατὰ τὴν ἀνάστασιν [45]), as he put it. It is not clear whether he has in mind here the resurrection of Christ or the universal resurrection; most likely both, because everything Christ does is ‘for us’ (τοῖς ἡµῶν [22, 38]). But what happens until the resurrection is an equally relevant question. Maximos says something, without elaboration, only about what happens with Christ until his resurrection, namely, that he assumes corrupt human nature, but exercises his human will in an uncorrupted way, certainly during his earthly life. The role of this coexistence and correlation of nature and volition in Christ is fundamental because it is precisely through the paradoxical conjunction of the two that the rightening of not only nature – which it explicitly affirms – but also of the volition – which is implicit in the uncorrupted way in which he says Christ exercises the will – takes place. Now, although nature appears as the final – and, as such, the major – term of the correlation, both in the case of its corruption by the corrupted will in Adam and in the case of its restoration by the righteous will of Christ, the exercise of the will is the active and, as such, the decisive aspect of the nature’s fate.

12. The text in PG 90, 408B has it here άναστάσιος, an interesting, not absurd variant, given the universalist approach made by Maximos in this Response.

13. Of course, with different details and touches. For further argument and similar graphic illustrations, see Moldovan (2021).

Moreover, the first term of the correlation is in fact nature, because it represents what humans receive through the act of divine creation, in Adam’s case by original creation; in the case of humans, phylogenetically, through heredity; and, in Christ’s case, through free assumption. This means that there should also be a directed relation from nature to volition, that is, their relation must in fact be mutual or bidirectional. And, indeed, Maximos gives us some hints in this regard, some direct, some indirect.

He directly indicates this connection when he says of Christ: ‘He became, for our sake, man passible by nature, abolishing my sin through the sin that came about because of me’. That means, it is by assuming the corrupt nature that Christ accomplishes the correction of the corrupt volition. Likewise, at the end of the Response, recapitulating the distinction between the two meanings of the term ‘sin’, after stating that sin in the proper, operative sense represents separation from God, the author adds that sin in the secondary, consequential sense ‘quite often hinders evil, not permitting the evil of our will to proceed to the level of action, because of the weakness of nature’ (τὸ δὲ κακίας πολλάκις γίνεται κατὰ προαίρεσιν ἀφθαρσίᾳ, μὴ συγχωροῦν εἰς ἔργον προβῆναι, διὰ τὴν φυσικὴν άνθενειαν, τὴν κακίαν τῆς προαίρεσιος [83–85]). At least certain aspects – not displayed here – of the corrupt nature play a preventive role against the corrupt, sinful exercise of the will.

Indirectly, the existence of a nature-volition determination becomes apparent if we approach and compares two distant statements in the text:

‘Our Lord and Savior corrected this mutual corruption and alteration of nature when He assumed the whole of our nature, and by virtue of the assumed nature He too possessed passibility adored by the incorruptibility of His will’ and ‘[...] so that He might condemn the sin of my will and nature as well as my condemnation, simultaneously expelling sin, possibility, corruption, and death from nature’.15

Remarkable in the second statement is the association of the terms in the pairs volition-nature and sin-condemnation, although up to this point they appear associated differently, as volition-sin and nature-condemnation. One may wonder what the significance of a third possible association of the terms in two pairs would be, namely nature-sin and condemnation-volition. The inquisitiveness is not gratuitous if we note that, in fact, the author does make the association nature-sin in the continuation of the same sentence, when he includes sin as a corruption of volition in the list of corruptions removed by Christ from nature. If it is possible that sin has somehow entered the nature – from where Christ removes it – would it not be logical to also suppose the existence of a condemnation of volition, that is, a compulsion to sin exercised by the corrupted nature on the will? Precisely such a possibility Maximos indirectly indicates in several places, either by denying it in the case of Christ, when he says that Christ, though assuming the corruption of nature, is completely free from the corruption of volition, or by affirming the rightening of the volition in Christ, as we have seen. It is what the first of the statements quoted above also indicates, if Christ’s ‘adorning’ (κοσμοῦμεν [21]) of the corrupt nature with an incorrupt volition represents, not a mere, curious juxtaposition of the two, but rather the antithetical, positive alternative to the inclusion of the corrupt volition in the corrupted nature spoken of in the second of the quoted statements. Both alternatives confirm an association between (corrupt) nature and (corrupt/inciprant) volition.

Also remarkable is a statement in the first phrase, ‘this mutual corruption and alteration of nature’ (τὴν διάλληλον φθοράν τε καὶ ἀλλοίωσιν τῆς φύσεως [18–19]), which seems to refer, by repetition, only to corruption of nature, though neither here nor further on does Maximos make any reference to more pathological aspects of nature that would condition each other.16 Might not ‘corruption of nature’ and ‘alteration of volition’ rather be here the proper terms in mutual relationship?17 There is no proof for this in QT 42 beyond any doubt. But the central argument of the Response, about the ‘diagonal’ way of salvation, the only one that gives humans a role in this drama, warrants this interpretation. If nature had no influence on volition, why would Christ’s incorruptible manifestation and preservation of the human volition be so important, so wonderful, given the assumption of nature’s corruptibility? Of course, Maximos emphasises the unchangeability or steadfastness (ἀτριβότης [24, 48, 56]) of Christ’s will in contrast to the versatility (τρέπω [36, 38, 54]) of Adam’s will,18 each with its consequences on nature. But if we look at it from our perspective, significant differences emerge: unlike Adam, we inherit a corrupt nature; in the first instance, we do not generate it as a result of a corrupted will; and, unlike Christ, we cannot alone preserve the incorruptibility of volition (otherwise his incarnation and work would perhaps be useless). What Christ achieves in his humanity is precisely ‘for us’, in order to give us, too, the possibility of achieving an incorrupt exercise of our will in the conditions of the corruption and weakness of nature. An expression like ‘called back to immortality’ (τὴν πρὸς ἀθανασίαν ἀνάκλασιν [72]) may precisely suggest this new condition and experience, especially if we read it in contrast with ‘the man who had used his will for evil’ (τὸν κακισθητὸν τὴν προαίρεσιν ἀνήγαγον [43]) or ‘the evil of our will’ (τὴν κακίαν τῆς προαίρεσιος [85]), the former with reference to Adam, the latter with reference to us.

15.Ταῦταν οὖν τὴν διάλληλον φθοράν τε καὶ ἀλλοίωσιν τῆς φύσεως ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν ὁ Παπάς, ἡμᾶς διὰ τὸν κακισθέντα ἐμεῖς διὰ τὸν κακισθήναι κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν ἀφθαρσίαν ἀφθαρσίαν κατὰ τὴν παρακαταλήψειν τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς προαίρεσιος [65–68]. The two can be considered as a single statement, which textually and semantically includes the core of the whole Response.

16. The enumeration of possibility, corruption and mortality does not seem to suggest any significant distinction between them except for a degree of intensity of corruption, or perhaps a chronological sequence.

17. ἀλλοίωσις is no longer used in QT 42, but has a total of seven occurrences in Ad Thalassium. In four of these (QT 42, 53, 60, 61), it appears in relation to nature; in two of them (QT 54, 64) it appears in relation to volition; and, in one place (QT 65, where the adjectival form also appears), it refers to both.

18. The two terms appear three times each, once in direct opposition (52, 54). Also, τρεπεῖ appears three times (29, 32, 50), once about Adam, and twice, with negation, about Christ.
A mutual relationship?

The claim that what nature suffers as a result of the sinful exercise of the will is an involuntary consequence from a human perspective, but an intended one from a divine perspective is a recurring statement in the writings of Maximos and deserves closer examination.19 The idea that God punishes with pedagogical intent is a constant in the Judeo-Christian tradition,20 but the nuance of interest to us is that this divine corrective intent has a correspondent in the dynamics of nature, a correspondent which Maximos calls in QT 52 ‘a divine rule and law within created beings’.21 A most relevant passage appears in Amb 10.31:

For such is nature, punishing those who undertake to violate it to the degree that they actually live in unnatural opposition to it, by not allowing them to acquire naturally all of nature’s power, for they have been partially deprived of its very integrity.25

This passage highlights another key notion in Maximos’ theology, anthropology and moral psychology, that of power or faculty (δύναμις) as the content of nature, which is indispensable for understanding the relationship between nature and volition, in general, but also in the context we are dealing with.22 For our author, the exercise of the will consists in the personal actualisation of the natural powers with which we are endowed, and in this sense, the corrective mechanism described as ‘divine rule and law within created beings’ can be considered a particular manifestation, in the case of acts ‘against nature’, of a more general mechanism within the very functioning of natural powers, namely, the involuntary retro-determination of these powers through their voluntary actualisation.23

Thus, on the one hand, there is the original relationship between nature and volition, whereby volition as the operative power par excellence is an essential component of nature and manifests itself hypostatically as the exercise (ἐνέργεια) of the component faculties by which nature is endowed,24 on the other hand, this concrete exercise itself configures in a certain state (and not in others, originally possible) the powers in question, which constitutes the premise of their subsequent exercise. This configuration and re-configuration, carried out continuously through each exercise of the natural powers at the disposal of the volition, represents their training and results in the formation of a certain acquired condition. In this sense, we speak of the training of a power through its exercise, that is, of its functional plasticity, an idea that we find in another central notion in Maximos’ moral psychology, that of the habit (ἐξόντα).26

In this perspective, it follows from what Maximos says in his statements on the corrective law that the voluntary exercise of the powers ‘against nature’ (i.e. against the divine intention expressed in the logoi) generates a defective, corrupting training of them, one that negatively, involuntarily and inevitably affects the content of nature and, as such, the possibilities of subsequent voluntary exercises. Therefore, the corruption of nature and the corruption of will are truly circular. In QT 42, Maximos explicitly affirms the retro-corruption of nature through the corrupt exercise of the will, but the only statement in which we can read a determination of volition by nature (here previously corrupted by volition) occurs at the end of the text, after the conclusion, when he states that the weakness of nature is paradoxically a hindrance to the manifestation of the wickedness of the will (which is actually a positive manifestation of this determination). Now, what in QT 42 looks only as an additional idea, perhaps worth dwelling on, but which he omits to do, appears more explicitly in other places, where he speaks more fully of the consequences of the fall.

Maximos never treats in one place all these consequences he identifies – which I have done here only selectively and illustratively – from the whole of his work.27 Obviously, the first is death, as mortal life (Amb 10.28), characterised by the decomposition of the body, by necessities (Amb 45), by coming into the world through sexuality and birth (γέννησις as opposed to creation, γέννα, Amb 42), an animal-like life,28 followed by demise. Along with these somatic characteristics – which we inherit along with nature, representing the phylogenetic component of the fallen human condition – come two major classes of behavioural implications, which represent the ontogenetic component of this condition, namely, the struggle for survival (QT Intro, QT 6) and the passions, the latter through the combined action of three psychological and spiritual factors: ignorance of the Creator, affective dysregulation (the famous pleasure-pain circular dialectic (QT Intro, 21, 61) and, not the least, the demonic action (QT 26).

An important passage from Amb 4, conceptually akin to QT 42, where Maximos describes how Christ manifests his ‘form of a slave’ (Phlp 2:7), that is, the human nature as he has appropriated it, and the corresponding ‘obedience’ (ὑπακοή), that is, the manner of exercising his human will, states that Christ assumed the first two aspects of the fallen condition – mortal life and natural necessities (implicitly the effort required to satisfy them), described by the concept of passibility (τὸ παθητικόν) or ‘blameless passions’ (μετὰ τῶν ἀδικωτῶν παθῶν) – but not the third one, which consists in obedience as enslavement to the devil and to sin, which are the moral passions, and which he describes as:

[Further discussion and references are provided, but the full text is not transcribed here.]
to his gifts – primarily our own bodies as the material support of the fallen life – in an attempt, all the more stubborn because it is futile, to ensure our survival (‘fear of pain’) and acquire fulfilment (‘desire for pleasure’). The only liberation from this fatal circuit expressing the coupling of the two corruptions, Maximos believes, is achieved only by Christ, who lives the same experience of nature’s corruption as we do, but uncorruptedly exercises his will, unabashed from the relationship with the Father, and only in and through him can we share in a similar restorative experience. Maximos describes at length this restoration by Christ and appropriation of it by those who follow him throughout his work, but this is no longer the object of interest of this article here.

**Conclusion**

Returning to QT 42, the above analysis highlights in this Response the general dialectical structure of soteriology according to St. Maximos the Confessor, centred on the Adam-Christ pair and antimony. Quite remarkable is that this structure implies the universal relevance of this soteriology: the specific, ‘diagonal’ mode of Christ’s realisation of salvation has full value insofar as it co-opts us, the descendants of Adam. However, QT 42 only evokes, not presents this relevance directly, which is, in the author’s opinion, a feature of Maximian writing that here, as in many other places, uses a metonymic style. This text, for instance, does not present the genetic mechanism of the fall, but assumes it; on the other hand, in passages where this mechanism is detailed, the structure revealed here is often partially present (e.g. QT Intro, QT 61) or even absent (e.g. QT 21), but it can legitimately be assumed.

Secondly, the finer composition of this general structure is remarkable, given by the circular, mutually conditioning relationship between nature and volition. Although surely invoked here in part, by highlighting only the conditioning of nature by volition and by a very discreet final suggestion of reverse conditioning, this relationship makes the central subject of anthropology and moral psychology which Maximos engages through his writings, irenic and polemical, when he details various aspects and implications of this soteriology. It should also be noted that, when referring to Adam or his descendants, the mutual relationship is usually described in its lapsarian, mutually corrupting context, whereas the positive relationship of mutual beneficial conditioning is invoked in the case of Christ, the saints, or those who practise ascetic devotions. This is an expected contextualisation, but only a careful study of both contexts would allow us to identify all the pertinent details of this truly essential relationship.

Finally, the present investigation is also important for understanding the concept of this Maximos. In addition to the ontological possibility of human existence, the circular relationship between nature and volition, which in fact is the subject of anthropology and moral psychology which Maximos engages through his writings, irenic and polemical, when he details various aspects and implications of this soteriology. It should also be noted that, when referring to Adam or his descendants, the mutual relationship is usually described in its lapsarian, mutually corrupting context, whereas the positive relationship of mutual beneficial conditioning is invoked in the case of Christ, the saints, or those who practise ascetic devotions. This is an expected contextualisation, but only a careful study of both contexts would allow us to identify all the pertinent details of this truly essential relationship.

Thus, it is precisely the experience of the corruption specific to fallen nature and the various sufferings that this corruption causes us that impose a massive and severe, corrupting constraint on the exercise of our will; by ignoring our Creator and true Giver of goods, we irrationally attach ourselves only to fallen nature and the various sufferings that this corruption of nature specific to fallen nature to the corruption of the exercise of the will. Elsewhere he calls this ‘the law of sin’ or ‘the law of the flesh’, which strongly suggests its involuntary character, but which he nonetheless explains by a determination resulting from a pathological exercise of our will. For example, in a long and detailed passage in QT Intro:

[All who share in human nature possess [...] a vital and active affection for the visible part of that nature, by which I mean the body. This affection forces man, as if he were a slave, to contrive all kinds of passions in his desire for pleasure and fear of pain. [...] Insofar as the entire nature of physical bodies is corruptible and subject to dissolution, whatever a person does to keep it in a condition of stability, he succeeds only in hastening the body’s corruptibility, for out of fear [...] contrary to all sense and his own free will, he pursues what he does not desire through what he desires, having become dependent on things that by nature can never be stable. He is consequently subject to change together with those things that break up and scatter the disposition of his soul, [...] while he himself fails to perceive his own destruction, for the simple reason that his soul is completely blind to the truth.]
will is so severely conditioned by its own struggle to overcome inner and outer corruption that it cannot practically avoid its own moral corruption. The passibility or involuntary weakness of nature, granted by divinity precisely to limit or even expel the future possibilities of the voluntary corruption, turns out to be no less than the very matrix of the pathological exercise and training of our will in the form of the passions. This is a serious warning from St. Maximos, even for us today.

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