Nature, Will and the Fall in Augustine and Maximus the Confessor: a Corrective

Abstract: This paper, through specifically engaging with the work of Ian A. McFarland on the soteriology and theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor, seeks to challenge the tendency among scholars of Byzantine and Orthodox thought to strongly contrast Eastern and Western approaches to soteriology. My argument compares the understanding of nature, will, and the fall in Augustine and Maximus the Confessor, and finds their accounts to be substantially identical. Given that these figures are often regarded as paradigmatic for Western and Eastern traditions of Christianity, respectively, this points to a need for a more nuanced account of the unity and divergences within and between Eastern and Western Christian traditions than that given by McFarland and others. I close with some remarks on the utility of Augustine and Maximus’ understanding of volition for contemporary debates on that topic.

It has become popular in circles sympathetic to Byzantine thought to contrast Western and Eastern Christian approaches to theological anthropology and soteriology, suggesting that the former have tended toward legalism and a pessimistic determinism, while the latter embody a more optimistic and mystical approach. Particularly central to this attempted dichotomy are the teachings of St. Augustine. For instance, Timothy [Kallistos] Ware, with Augustine clearly in mind, writes, “[Eastern] Orthodoxy repudiates any interpretation of the fall which allows no room for human freedom” (229), and Fr. John Romanides writes that Augustine “introduced a false moralistic philosophical approach [to the fall] which [...] was not accepted by the patristic tradition of the East” (8).

One Byzantine scholar who seems to have kept himself relatively free from the above mentioned biases is Ian A. McFarland. McFarland has done considerable work on the fall and the idea of the will in St. Maximus the Confessor, the 7th century Byzantine theologian whose diothelite Christology was vindicated at the sixth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 680.¹

According to McFarland, Maximus’ diotheliteism should be thought of as “a contribution to the Augustinian tradition” (2005, 430), since both thinkers share common ground in rejecting—against modern-day determinists and libertarians alike—a notion of the will as an autonomous reserve over and against the natural desires of the human subject (ibid., 431).

The underlying corollary, however, is that Maximus’ diothelite Christology and anthropology form a necessary contribution to Augustinian soteriology. Hence McFarland writes that “The diothelite
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” (2007, 3): while Augustine’s theology was appropriate to addressing the heresies of its day, the massive influence that Augustine has exercised on the Western religious tradition as a whole has deterred the development of a more balanced approach to the relations between nature, grace, and the will.

In this paper, I attempt to challenge this understanding of Augustine and Maximus’ relationship to each other. I will suggest that Augustine and Maximus’ accounts of human nature, the will, and the effects of original sin are substantially identical; the distinctions that McFarland draws between the two thinkers—consequent upon McFarland’s failure to adequately attend to the idea of nature as expressed by both fathers—leave him with a semi-Pelagian Maximus and a semi-Calvinist Augustine. Lastly, I close with some considerations on the philosophical import of Maximus and Augustine’s idea of freedom for contemporary accounts of free will.

1. **McFarland on Maximus and Augustine**

**On Augustine**

According to McFarland, Augustine’s great accomplishment in the Pelagian controversy was to reject Pelagius’ dichotomy between nature and will. His comment on this issue is worth quoting at length:

Augustine’s chief theological concern in his battle with the Pelagians was to deny that human beings are capable of securing their own beatitude. It would be a mistake, however, to view the essence of this debate as a disagreement over the capacities of the human will in which both sides worked with a common vision of the will as an anthropological datum and differed only in their views on its range of operation, with Augustine minimizing its capacities and the Pelagians maximizing them. Rather, Augustine’s debate with the Pelagians centres on a more fundamental disagreement over the nature of the will itself. While the Pelagians saw the will as a reservoir of autonomy over against all external sources of motivation, Augustine argued that such a perspective rendered human action unintelligible. By insisting that the will represented a source of action over and above the motives that prompted them, the Pelagians were left with a vision of humanity in which our own selfhood becomes opaque and, indeed, alien. (2005, 430)
In short, Augustine’s philosophy was able to avoid an unnecessary polarization between the will and its motivating factors. The failure of much modern philosophy to do the same, so thinks McFarland, is part of what makes Augustine so relevant today.

But McFarland is less optimistic about Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, which he views as being in need of correction by Maximus’ anthropology. According to McFarland, Augustine holds that “the fall did not simply afflict human beings with a propensity (however strong) to sin, but rendered them congenitally sinful – and thus incapable of following God’s will apart from grace” (2008, 402). Although McFarland does not reject the doctrine, he thinks that the conceptual tools of Maximus’ Christology can be used to recalibrate it so as to assuage the worry that a pure Augustinian account destroys free will, makes God the cause of sin, and undermines belief in the fundamental goodness of nature. So while McFarland praises Augustine for his refusal to submit to a harsh dichotomy between natural and voluntary acts, he still worries that Augustine’s interpretation of this delicate issue may end up being one in which nature is completely overpowered by grace.

On Maximus

Here, Maximus’s theological anthropology is able to provide an important corrective. Drawing the contrast between the two, McFarland intimates that it is a legitimate worry that:

Augustine […] may end up with a picture in which sin does become […] the ultimate principle of individuation, with grace effectively eclipsing the will in a way that risks making the life of the blessed appear a featureless gray. By contrast, Maximus’ articulation of the category of the natural will […] provides a model of grace that mitigates this risk, because it depicts a moral movement that does not turn on overcoming sin and therefore sketches a narrative in which the advent of grace does not render the will invisible. (2005, 432)

On McFarland’s account, Maximus, who “does not share Augustine’s doctrine of original sin” (2007, 3), holds that Christ had two natural wills in accordance with his two natures. The underlying implication for Maximus’ anthropology is that natural will (θελεμα φυσικον) is not a reserve of human individuality over nature, but rather the expression of that nature, containing its own dynamism towards the good.
Besides natural willing, Maximus also refers to a second type of will, the gnomic will (Θελεμα γνώμικον), or gnome (γνώμη). While other important Byzantine scholars have suggested that ‘gnomic will’ in Maximus refers to the will according to the ‘bent’ condition in which it finds itself after the fall,\(^4\) McFarland takes a different approach. According to McFarland, the term ‘gnomic will’ refers to our way of willing, not under the dominion of sin and death, but within the more generic situation of ignorance and temporality that is characteristic of all human willing within this life. In other words, the gnomic will is not so much a second will as it is the way that the natural will operates under temporal conditions. Christ lacks a gnomic will, says McFarland, because he reflects our future state of glory even in his earthly life. He writes:

\[\text{[E]ven apart from the fall, the gnome is an inalienable part of human existence in time. Crucially, however, it does not follow that it is a part of human existence outside of time, for Maximus argues that in glory humanity will share the same deified state that Christ possessed during his earthly existence, so that ‘there will be no evaluation or deciding between opposite \[\text{courses of action}\] . . . since all uncertainty has been removed from things’. In this way, denying a gnome to Christ does not reflect a retreat from interest in Jesus as a particular human being among others, but rather reflects the conviction that Christ anticipates in his earthly existence what Maximus believed to be the destiny of all the saints. (2005, 419)\]

So on McFarland’s interpretation, natural willing is that movement by which humans naturally incline toward that which is good and appropriate to their nature, whereas the gnomic will is a particular expression of the natural will in the earthly condition of ignorance and temporality. McFarland holds that Maximus’ teaching on the distinction between gnomic will and natural will, as well as Maximus’ claim that man has a natural activity by which he moves toward the good, represents an important and necessary contribution to Augustinian theological anthropology.

II. Augustine and Maximus on Original Sin and Nature

Nature

But before accepting McFarland’s claims at face value, it may be useful to look at Augustine’s use of the word ‘nature’ (natura), especially because McFarland’s antipathy to an Augustinian account of original sin seems to be motivated by the worry that such an account destroys the goodness of nature.
The first meaning of ‘nature’ in Augustine is ‘that which a particular substance was created to instantiate: the thing as it was meant to be; its type’. In modern scientific terminology, this definition would roughly correspond to the idea of ‘species’, but Augustine goes beyond this insofar as he presupposes that every nature is good. Such an idea is expressed in his repeated statements to the effect that “blame belongs to no one unless their nature is praised” (*DLA* III. 38, see also III. 41; *CD* XI. 15, 17).

But this axiological understanding of nature leaves open the possibility that an individual may fail to fully instantiate its type. A three-legged dog is, in some sense, a less perfect dog, because its actual nature is defective with regard to the ideal. The aforementioned consideration thus makes possible two more analogical understandings of the term: first, nature as the substance that bears the nature; second, nature as the condition of the thing that is of that particular nature. Augustine uses the first definition when he states “God made all natures, not only those that would stand firm in justice, but also those that would sin” (*DLA* III. 32; also III. 36). Augustine contrasts the third meaning—which he justifies by appeal to its employment in the Pauline corpus (*DLA* III. 54, cf. Eph 2:3)—with the first when he writes, “the nature of man, indeed, was originally created faultless and without any defect; but in fact this nature in which each one is born of Adam now has need of a doctor, for it is not healthy” (*NG* 3; also 57, 62-63).

In summary, natures may be bad because they fail to instantiate their nature, and against their nature are naturally inclined to sin. While the fluidity of Augustine’s terminology can be exacerbating to deal with at first, a little attention to context is usually able to determine Augustine’s meaning more precisely.

**Ambiguity of ‘sin’**

Augustine employs the same fluidity with his use of the word ‘sin’ (*peccatum*). Luckily, though, he explains the relation between his analogical uses of the term in the third book of his *De Libero Arbitrio*:

Just as we call a tongue (*linguam*) not only the member that we move in our mouths when we speak, but also that which follows the motion of this member—that is, the form and rhythm of
the words, in accordance with which motion one is called the Greek tongue, another the
Latin—so not only do we call ‘sin’ (peccatum) that which is properly called sin (that is, [an act]
committed by free will and with knowledge), but also that which surely needs must follow
from it as its punishment. (DLA III. 54)

Consequently, the term “original sin” on its own need not imply an inheritance of responsibility for
Adam’s act, because the term has a wider signification than that of conscious culpable acts.

Original Sin

Having recognized the ambiguity of Augustine’s expression, let us proceed to outline his
understanding of original sin. As noted above, the proper sense of ‘sin’, for Augustine, is that of a
consciously committed evil act. Nevertheless, the term ‘sin’ can also be used to refer to the
consequences of that act. The consequences of the sin of Adam fall into two principal categories—death
(DLA III. 28, 57; CD XIII. 1-4; BP I. 8) and deficiency (DLA III. 52-53)—which are themselves each
subdivided further into temporal and eternal death, on the one hand, and ignorance and difficulty, on
other.

Now Augustine avoids plainly stating that Adam’s descendants inherit his guilt; instead, he
frequently resorts to circumlocutions in order to avoid this imputation. Infants inherit the “sickness” of
the original sin (BP I. 24); they are “poisoned by the bite of the serpent” (BP I. 61); they are “born with
the contagion of sin” (GPO II. 42) even though they themselves are free from personal sins (BP I. 22, 65)
and are not even capable of committing personal sins (GPO II. 42).

On the other hand, Augustine holds that the penalty for the first sin was not merely bodily
death, but also death of the soul, i.e. eternal damnation (CD XIII. 12). Therefore, while Augustine does
believe that unbaptized infants are condemned “by a most mild condemnation” (BP I. 21), this is not so
much because infants are personally guilty of Adam’s sin as it is because they are under the dominion of
death (BP I. 13, cf. Rom 5:14), which, for Augustine, refers to eternal death just as much as it refers to the
death of the body. The above point may seem minor (the end result, for Augustine, is much the same),
but it is important to show that Augustine’s analysis, far from being opposed to the idea that death, not
guilt, is the consequence of sin (cf. Meyendorff, 144-145), is actually consequent upon it.
Part of the reason for this error comes from Augustine’s use of the term ‘reatus’, which is commonly translated as ‘guilt’. But the sense of this term is considerably weaker than ‘guilt’, and probably closer to that of ‘indictment’. For instance, in his *Apology*, Tertullian (c. 180-220) writes, “Now, therefore, if the hatred is of the name [of Christian], of what [matter] is an indictment (reatus) of names, of what [concern] this accusation of words?” (par. 3). In this passage, the impropriety of a translation of ‘guilt’ is more clearly brought out by: a) the fact that we don’t traditionally think of names as the types of things that can be guilty; and b)Tertullian’s decision to juxtapose it rhetorically to the word ‘accusation’ (*accusatio*), which here acts as a synonym.

The terminological context and the juridical parallels that Augustine uses also show that ‘reatus’ does not mean ‘guilt’. Take the following passage as an example:

Indeed this law of sin, which is in the members of this body of death, is both remitted by spiritual regeneration, and remains in mortal flesh. It is remitted, because the charge against it (*reatus eius*) is acquitted by the sacrament [of baptism], by which the faithful are reborn; yet it remains because it effects the desires against which even the faithful strive. (*CJ* II. 5)

Here, a translation of *reatus* as ‘guilt’ would upset the courtroom-esque picture that Augustine is attempting to paint by disconnecting *reatus* from the verb of which it is the subject, namely ‘is acquitted’ (*solutus est*). While a defendant may be acquitted of the *suspicion* of guilt, he is not acquitted of *guilt*. The reality referred to here by Augustine’s use of ‘reatus’ is more relational than contemporary usage of the word ‘guilt’ would be liable to indicate.

Now besides death, for Augustine there is a second consequence of Adam’s transgression which is the proper referent of the term ‘original sin’, namely, the advent of ignorance and difficulty in the life of mankind (*DLA* III. 52-58; *BP* I. 68). These defects do not merely lead to sins of omission, but also bring about a defective *orientation* of the will, leaving the human person dominated by base desires of the flesh, referred to as ‘*cupiditas*’ and ‘*libido*’ (*DLA* I. 10). That this is the primary meaning of ‘original sin’ (as opposed to death) can be ascertained by the fact that while Augustine holds that Christ is without *libido* (*DLA* III. 31), free from ignorance and difficulty (*BP* II. 48), and therefore was without original sin (*BP* II. 51), he certainly confesses that Christ died.
So while Augustine does think of original sin in terms of an inheritance, it is not, *pace* McFarland, an inheritance of guilt. Augustine holds that the effects of Adam’s sin are bodily and spiritual death, on the one hand, and ignorance and difficulty, on the other. The inheritance of this latter set of defects entails that every individual is ruled by concupiscence, and becomes an actual sinner almost in tandem with the very possibility of becoming such.

**The Fall**

Having discussed Augustine’s understanding of original sin as an inheritance, let us now turn to his understanding of that same sin as an event, i.e. the fall. For Augustine, the immediate cause of the fall was Adam’s free choice (*DLA* I. 35). But even from very early on, Augustine recognizes that such an explanation of the fall is incomplete at best, since it fails to explain the genesis of the perverse desire upon which evil choices are made (*DLA* I. 30). Therefore, Augustine gives several additional answers to augment this first.

Augustine’s second explanation places his first within the wider matrix of privation theory, which holds that evil—both moral evil and otherwise—is a privation of good, a failure of an entity to maintain a degree of goodness appropriate to its nature. J. Burns writes:

> Augustine explained that this sinful operation of the will is not the turning of a natural power to an object which is itself harmful to the spirit. Sin is rather a defective operation, a failure to maintain that fullness of love inspired by the presence of the Spirit given in creation. The operation is evil because it is defective, because it fails to maintain a given level of perfection. Insofar as it is defective, it has no cause. (15)

In other words, the fall has no cause beyond Adam’s will, because evil itself has no positive being. Thus, the *possibility* of the fall is grounded in the fact that “created beings are made from nothing, and thus [...] have the ontological possibility of falling away from the good” (Couenhoven 2007, 286-287).

Augustine’s third explanation of the genesis of evil is in terms of a complicated theory of a hierarchy of goods. For Augustine, creation entails that the various created entities stand in hierarchical relation of qualitative goodness both to God and to each other. God is the highest good, while other beings are higher or lower goods in accordance with their likeness to the highest good. For instance,
those beings that have life are ontologically better than those that merely exist, and those that have understanding are better than those that have life without understanding (DLA II. 7). This hierarchy obliges human beings to order their loves in accordance with it; for instance, one ought to love virtue more than either corporeal goods or one’s own will (DLA II. 50, 53). Since the first man failed to do this, his disruption of the divinely-ordered hierarchy by rebellion against God was avenged by a second hierarchical disruption: the rebellion of his own flesh against his will (CI V.8; DNC I. 7).

Yet while the above points explain why the fall was possible, neither sufficiently explains why the fall actually happened. Thus Couenhoven writes that “Far from being inevitable, the fall was unlikely” (287). In fact, Augustine never gives an ultimate explanation for why the fall happened; instead, he explains why such an explanation is, in principle, impossible.

Couenhoven gives a partial explanation for why Augustine thinks that the fall is fundamentally inexplicable. He writes, “If the primal sin made sense, it would not have been as bad as Augustine believed it was” (289). But in order to explain this more fully, it is necessary to touch briefly on Augustine’s adaptation of Neo-Platonic metaphysics. Augustine writes that “A good is not able to be augmented or diminished except it be good from another good” (DeTrin VIII. 5). This ability to be changed for better or worse is inherent to all creation. But apart from this participatory metaphysics in which things have their ontological and axiological ground in the Deity (DLA III. 13), Augustine also takes for granted, based on the doctrine of Divine simplicity, the reciprocal identity of all of the virtues in God. He writes, “God is in many ways, in fact, called great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatever else is able to be said not unworthily; but his greatness is the same as his wisdom [...], and his goodness is identical to his wisdom and greatness, and his truth is the same as all of these” (DeTrin VI. 8). So for Augustine, it follows from these two facts that there is a relation of direct proportionality between the measure of an entity’s being and its degree of goodness and truth (i.e. its innate intelligibility). One consequence of this is that if evil is a privation of being, i.e. the failure of a creature to participate in the Trinitarian economy according to its own natural constitution and purpose, then that same privation of being is, at bottom,
also a privation of truth, and therefore radically unintelligible. While it may be possible to offer provisional explanations for evil acts (e.g. *Conf* II. 17), to ask for any sort of ultimate ground for Adam’s fall is to backslide into Manichaeism⁵ (*CJ* I. 36-43).

**Maximus on Original Sin**

From here, I would like to turn to another of McFarland’s claims, viz. that Maximus “does not share Augustine’s doctrine of original sin” (2007, 3).

The term ‘sin’ has a double meaning in Maximus similar to that which it has in Augustine. Regarding the incarnation, Maximus writes:

> Therefore the Lord did not know ‘my sin’ (αμαρτία), that is, the mutability of my free choice. [...] Rather, he became the ‘sin that I caused’; in other words, he assumed the corruption of human nature that was a consequence of the mutability of my free choice. (*QT* 42 = CCSG 7:287 = BW 120)

While Maximus’ use of ‘αμαρτία’ here is not quite identical to Augustine’s use of ‘peccatum’, there is an important overlap. Maximus’ distinction is fundamentally one between death, on the one hand, and sinful actions and dispositions, on the other. Maximus insists, like Augustine, on the reality of the death of Christ, but denies that Christ’s choice was ‘mutable’ i.e. that Christ was subject to what Augustine refers to as ‘concupiscence’, although he is subject to the “liability to the passions”, since he took on “the original condition of Adam as he was in the very beginning” (*QT* 21 = CCSG 7:129 = BW 111). For Maximus, Christ was subject to natural desires such as hunger and thirst, which in us might serve as the occasion for sin; but he was not subject to the disordered passions associated with the fallen state of post-Adamic humanity.⁶

Regarding the effects of original sin, Maximus’ claims are basically identical to Augustine’s. For instance, in one place he writes that “The punishment [for Adam’s sin] was death, which means that the capacity to render to God what is due to God alone, to love him with all of our mind, was destroyed” (*Amb* 7 = PG 91:1092D = BW 67); and again that “there is no human being who is sinless, since everyone is naturally subject to the law of sexual procreation that was introduced [...] in consequence of his sin”
In a more lengthy commentary on a passage in Ezekiel, Maximus writes the following:

[Christ] came to trample the wickedness into which, through deceit, our nature unnaturally fell at the instant it was created, thus depleting its whole potential. He came to bind to himself the faculty of desire [...], that it might take on a procreative disposition fixed and unalterable in the good; he came [...] to cleanse it of the taints of ignorance by washing it in the ocean of knowledge bestowed by grace; he came [...] to render its natural operation steadfast by the Spirit in the good for which it was created, and thereby to cleanse it of the decay of the passions [...] and to bring it fully to completion by securing it in [...] the principles (λογοί) of created beings. (Amb 42 in PG 91:1321B = BW 85)

From the above remarks, we can discern several similarities between Augustine and Maximus on the topic of original sin and the fall. First, Maximus affirms that Adam’s sin did not merely bring death into the world, but had a deleterious effect on natural human capacities as well. Second, he affirms, with Augustine, that the transmission of original sin is biological, and not merely sociological. Third, the effects of original sin are the “taints of ignorance” and the “decay of the passions”, which seem to be identical to the Augustinian categories of ignorance and difficulty. Fourth, everybody is a sinner by virtue of the passions incumbent upon their subjection “to the law of sexual procreation”. Fifth, as is evidenced by his statement that “our nature unnaturally fell,” Maximus is shown to exhibit the same freedom of expression with regard to the term ‘nature’ (φυσις) that we have already seen in Augustine.

One should especially attend to Maximus’ claim that Adam fell “at the instant he was created,” seeing as it has two consequences relevant to this essay: first, while it does not entail that the fall was unintelligible for Maximus, it does provide Maximus with a means by which to dodge the question of the fall’s root cause—and thus, like Augustine, Maximus leaves this question unanswered; second, it shows that McFarland’s claim that “even apart from the fall human beings would continue to have gnomic wills to the extent that they remain distinct hypostases” (2005, 417) is conjectural at best. McFarland bases this thesis on Maximus’ claim that gnome can be used in positive ways. But in this respect, the gnomic will is no different from the passions, which Maximus affirms can be put to good use while denying their pre-lapsarian presence (QT 1 in CCSG 7:47-49 = BW 99-101; cf. Blowers 1996). It is far more likely that γνώμη is a defective way of willing that admits of being put to good use, just as concupiscence for
Augustine is a disordered passion that can be put to good use (cf. *CJ* III. 42). On this reading, γνώμη, like the Augustinian category of *opinio* (cf. *DLA* III. 23), would be a privative way of willing that, though it might occasionally stumble upon truth, was more likely than not to lead one down the path of error.

A further reason to prefer this construal of the gnomic will to McFarland’s is related to its consequences for Christology. According to McFarland’s reading, because gnomic willing only takes place in ignorant, time bound humans, Christ, being omniscient, would lack this mode of willing (2005, 419); therefore his divine will is unaffected by his assumption of a human nature (2008, 412). The problem with attributing Christ’s lack of a gnomic will to his divinity (as opposed to his having assumed the original state of humanity) should become clear here. On McFarland’s construal, Christ’s omniscience acts as a hypostatic reserve against the deleterious effects of a fallen human nature, and practically ensures that Christ’s assumption of this nature is inconsequential with regard to the foundational impetus of his willing (even if it may have certain effects on the mode of that willing): this understanding—by McFarland’s own account (2005, 411; also Louth, 12-16)—is fundamentally identical to the Monothelite position that Maximus opposed. Hence, it can hardly be Maximus’ own position.

Maximus bears several further similarities to Augustine regarding the matter of the fall: first, he holds that the immediate cause of the fall was Adam’s free choice; second, he, like Augustine (*DLA* II. 53), thinks of the fall itself as a turning from higher goods to lower goods; third, he locates the ontological condition for the possibility of the fall in the chaos inherent to matter itself.  

While there are differences between Maximus and Augustine’s respective accounts of the fall and original sin, the two accounts remain substantially identical. Both thinkers use their respective terms for nature and sin freely; both think that Adam’s sin brought about a weakening of the natural capacities of post-lapsarian man; both identify the effects of the fall with death, on the one hand, and ignorance and weakness, on the other; both think that original sin is transmitted via sexual procreation; both locate the immediate cause of the fall in Adam’s will, the nature of the fall in a disruption of divinely-ordered hierarchy, and the ontological condition of the fall in the fact of creation from nothing. McFarland’s
attempt to correct Augustine via Maximus seems to have been grounded in a failure to disambiguate between the manifold uses of ‘nature’ in both Maximus and Augustine. McFarland adds to this an aversion to an Augustinian account of grace, that, in spite of McFarland’s explicit disavowal of a libertarian notion of free will, \(^9\) leads him frequently to revert to such a notion, and leaves his overall project somewhat muddled.

III. “We hold this treasure in earthen vessels”

In this last section I would like to return to an aspect of Augustine and Maximus’ understanding of freedom that might help us to move beyond Dr. McFarland’s impasse. For both Augustine and Maximus, freedom is not so much a spontaneous ability to choose between opposites as it is a right orientation of the self with respect to God and the rest of creation. In other words, the type of freedom envisioned by both thinkers is a freedom from death and sin, characterized not in a reciprocal relation to, but in direct correlation to the presence of a higher principle at work in the self. This concern to not disconnect freedom from moral liberation and spiritual openness shines through, for instance, in Maximus’ claim that Christ “is alone truly free and sinless” (Amb 42 in PG 91:1348C = BW 94), and in Augustine’s relativizing of freedom in the following passage: “There is always a free will in us, but not always a good one. Either it is free from justice, when it serves sin, and then it is evil; or it is free from sin, when it serves justice, and then it is good” (GLA 31). The cosmological dimensions of both thinkers’ thought, especially when combined with an emphasis on Christ as savior of a fallen human race, leave one with the impression that a definition of freedom in terms of spontaneity and autonomy would strike them both as boring at best. Hence, both figures find ways of grounding their idea of freedom in the creative and redemptive activity of God, and both, coincidentally, do so through the medium of nature.

Augustine does so via his understanding of what one might call “second nature”. For Augustine, any semi-deist idea of “pure nature” would be too much of an abstraction to be of any consequence for his theology; the difference between Adam and the blessed in heaven is not that the latter rely on grace while the former relied on nature, but that the latter have a qualitatively greater participation in the
The grace of God. Hence, questions about the abstract nature that one participates in are always rounded out by existential concern for one's present place in the economy of salvation—questions about the way that that nature is (or fails to be) actualized. In the fallen, this second nature consists in one's privative bondage to disordered desires (cf. *NG* 3); the faithful, however, are the subjects of a second creation, created anew “in good works” in Christ by God (*GLA* 20).

So Augustine takes his first step by connecting freedom, not to free choice between good and evil, but to the right operation of nature. Augustine takes his second step by defining human nature not in terms of innate potencies, but in terms of a receptive openness—or *capax*—to being shaped by outside forces. Hence, he writes that “although [human nature] is able to be corrupted, since it is not the highest [nature], nevertheless, because it is open to the highest nature (*summae naturae capax est*), and is able to be a partaker thereof, it is a grand nature” (*DeTrin* XIV. 6).

By making the above claims Augustine is able to safeguard two theses: first, that the fact that existence does not take place in a vacuum is not a threat to freedom; second, that free will is not an inalienable and categorical given of human nature (hence why we do not hold small children culpable in the same way as adults), but is attained gradually through education, ascetic struggle and prayer.

Maximus obtains this same ground via his distinction between nature and *logos* of nature. As mentioned earlier, Maximus’ use of the term ‘nature’ (φυσις) admits of the same variability as Augustine’s use of ‘natura’. However, the term ‘logos of nature’ (λογος φυσεώς) does not admit of such multiplicity of meaning. As John Zizioulas notes, “‘Logos of nature’ is for Maximus an expression that points not to nature as it is but to nature according to its aim (σκοπος) or end (τελος), that is, to nature as it exists in the *hypostasis* of the divine *Logos*” (64). So for Maximus, nature is not an ultimate ontological ground, but each nature is itself differentiated from other natures by virtue of its unique mode of participation in the divine life, and defined precisely as itself by its reference to its own eschatological vocation. So like Augustine (cf. *DLA* III. 13; *DeTrin* XIV. 6), Maximus can both affirm a fundamental dichotomy between God and creation, writing that the whole of creation “receives its
being from becoming” (Amb 41 in PG 91:1304D = Louth 156); and yet Maximus can transgress this dichotomy by writing that “all things, in that they came to be from God, participate proportionally in God, whether by intellect, by reason, by sense-perception, by vital motion, or by some habitual fitness” (Amb 7 in PG 91:1080B = BW 55). Thus, Maximus defines natures not by their distance from God, but by their divinely-intended relation to him. Because Maximus holds that a nature is constantly receiving its being from its divine source—in other words, is a nature precisely in proportion to its graced status—he is able to avoid the sort of worries that McFarland has about nature being overpowered or destroyed by grace.

But the above does not yet explain how such considerations are relevant to free will. In order to fully accomplish this goal, let us examine the following passage:

Therefore he [i.e. Christ] did not abrogate the constitutive energy of the assumed nature, nor does the teacher [i.e. Pseudo-Dionysius] support such a notion when he says, ‘he assumed being in a mode beyond being, and performed human activities in a way beyond human’, but he shows in both the newness of the modes [tropoi] preserved in the constancy of the natural logoi, without which no being is what it is. And if we say that the transcendent negation entails the affirmation of the assumed nature but the destruction of this [sc. The human] constitutive energy, by what reason do we show that the same thing equally affirmed of both [natures], in respect of existence in respect of this [sc. the human nature]? And again if the assumed nature is not self-moved, since it is moved by the Godhead that has been truly united to it hypostatically, and we do not take away its constitutive movement, neither may we confess the same nature to be manifest as an independent hypostasis, that is by itself, but as receiving being in the very God the Word that has in truth assumed its being. And since with both we have the same reason for refusal, we confess together with the nature the movement, without which there is no nature. (Amb 5 in PG 91:1052AB = Louth 173-174)

Since the logic of the above passage, concerned with Christ’s assumption of a human nature, can be somewhat difficult to follow, it may be useful to explain it in more detail. Maximus’ monoenergist opponents, appealing to the authority and logic of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, argued that since Christ performs all of his acts in accordance with his divine nature, it would have been wrong to think of him as willing according to a human way of willing; instead, Christ wills in a mode beyond human willing. Maximus’ main strategy against this position is a reductio. Maximus’ first argument (beginning at the words “And if we say”) states that there is no reason why this same logic should not be applied to Christ’s assumption of human nature. In other words, why not state that Christ assumed human nature
in a mode beyond humanity, and therefore by a “transcendent negation”, be lead to a Docetic\textsuperscript{10} denial of the Incarnation? Maximus second argument (“And again...”) suggests that by positing a distinction between self-movement and being moved by God, the monoenergist position has sanctioned a logic by which it would be necessary to deny that Christ could assume a human nature at all. For if Christ’s assuming a nature precluded that nature having any other movement than that given to it by Christ himself as the one assuming it, then the nature would lack precisely the contours, delimitations, and innate \textit{telos} (for these are what Maximus insists on when he suggests that “there is no nature” without its constitutive movement) to be \textit{this} nature as opposed to any other: if the nature assumed by Christ lacks its own constitutive movement, then there is no different between Christ assuming a human nature and his assuming the nature of a dog—which is to say that the very idea of Christ “assuming” anything becomes meaningless.

The relevance of said argument to modern debates about free will is as follows: Maximus’ monoenergist opponents accept precisely the sort of dichotomy with regard to human and divine wills that many contemporary determinists and libertarians alike accept between fate and free will. For Maximus (as for his opponents), it was an accepted datum that all created natures—including the human nature that Christ himself became—had received their very constitution from the Logos of God. But if one argues that Christ’s human nature lacked its own motion \textit{because} it was moved by God, that nature itself ends up slipping away from one’s grasp. When universalized, Maximus’ argument suggests that there is no formal difference between the logic behind fatalism, on the one hand, and radical monism, on the other. Contrary to this position, Maximus (like Augustine) holds that Christ’s human will (and ours) is free in direct proportion to its reception and openness to the divine will in accordance with the contours of the human nature that it expresses; thus, Christ’s status as Son of God does not annihilate, but confirms his status as Son of Man, marking him out not as an unrepeatable anomaly, but as a model for imitation.

\textbf{Conclusion}
This paper has sought to achieve two goals: one being of a more ecumenical stripe, the other being of a more philosophical nature.

My first goal has been to show that dichotomies between Eastern and Western approaches to the economy of salvation cannot be sustained, even in the attenuated form taken up by McFarland. By comparing what are arguably the two most significant figures of the eastern and western Patristic traditions and showing the substance of their views to be identical, I hope to have helped to uproot long-established prejudices about the relationship between East and West in favor of a more serious and nuanced appreciation of the unity and diversity present within the Christianity of the first millennium. I hope to have shown through this study of Maximus and Augustine that such dichotomies stem not from the thinkers themselves so much as from oversimplified readings of their highly complex insights that, in this case, replace Maximus and Augustine with semi-Pelagian and semi-Calvinist caricatures of their true selves.

My second goal has been to show how Maximus and Augustine’s arguments and insights can be used to combat the often pre-critical assumptions that undergird determinist and libertarian accounts of freedom alike. To this end, I have argued that not only nature/free will dichotomies, but also nature/grace dichotomies of the sort subconsciously advanced by McFarland, fail. I have suggested that grounding freedom in a soteriological framework sensitive to the relation between freedom and moral and ethical improvement, combined with a Neo-Platonic ontology of participation that is not inimical to our creaturely givenness, can provide an account of Divine and human cooperation that is able to safeguard both free will and Divine providence.

In short, Maximus the Confessor and Augustine hold substantially the same understanding of original sin, the fall, and human nature. Both advance a compatibilist account of human willing that is able to affirm the givenness of that willing. Both give credence to an understanding of the human condition that may seem at first sight to be pessimistic, but which actually undergirds an account of human freedom that is able to recognize that the conditions for the exercise of freedom are not inborn
or innate, but are dependent both upon certain factors both intrinsic (e.g. right knowledge) and extrinsic (e.g. the need for grace). Thus, both figures are able to give form to the insight that freedom is not a categorical right of an untarnished nature, but the grace-given right orientation toward one’s ontological ground and eschatological vocation.

**Abbreviations**

Augustine’s works are cited by book, in Roman numerals, and paragraph, in Arabic numerals. All translations from Latin texts are my own, based on either Migne’s *Patrologia Latina* or, where available, the *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*. References to Maximus’ *Ambigua* follow the pagination of Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca* vol. 91, with translations being taken from either Louth 1996 or Blowers and Wilken 2003 as indicated. References to Maximus’ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* are according to the page numbering of the *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* vol. 7.

**Works of Augustine**

- **BP** = *De Peccatorum Meritis et de Baptismo Parvulorum*
- **Conf.** = *Confessiones*
- **CD** = *De Civitate Dei*
- **CJ** = *Contra Julianum*
- **DeTrin** = *De Trinitate*
- **DCG** = *De Correctione et Gratia*
- **DLA** = *De Libero Arbitrio*
- **DNC** = *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*
- **DP** = *De Dono Perseverantiae*
- **GLA** = *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*
- **GPO** = *De Gratia Christi et de Peccato Originali*
- **NG** = *De Natura et Gratia*
References


Diothetism was Maximus’ response to the heresies of Monoenergism and Monothelitism. Monoenergism held that Christ had one divine-human “energy”, or operation; Monothelitism held that Christ had one divine will, corresponding to his divine hypostasis. Maximus’ diothelite Christology held that Christ had two wills corresponding to his two natures. See Louth, 12-15.

“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” (2007, p. 22).

“For Maximus the primary manifestation of the natural will is in our natural appetites” (2007, p. 9).

“the ambiguity of embodied, historical existence reveals itself not only in the passions that waver between deviance and tractability, but in the stunted ‘gnomic’ will (γνώμη) that accompanies humanity’s ‘mixed’ knowledge after the fall” (BW 32).

Manichaeism held a belief in two ultimate principles of the world, one good, one evil. All goods were traced to the supreme good, while all evils were traced back to the supreme evil force.

Cf. his claim that “of course the Savior in his incarnation did not assume this sinful passion [i.e. sexual desire], and corruption” (Amb 42 = PG 91:1317B = BW 81). This is directly in accordance with Augustine’s remarks on the same subject at NG 71.

Indeed, insofar as he holds that there was no sexual differentiation before the fall (Louth, 73) and will be no sexual differentiation in Paradise (Amb 41 in PG 91:1305C = Louth, 157), his ‘pessimism’ with regard to sex is somewhat more extreme than that of Augustine, who explicitly affirms that Adam and Eve had sexual relations prior to the Fall (GPO II. 40).

Regarding the first two of the above, he writes, “Our forefather Adam, however, used his freedom to turn toward what was worse and to direct his desire away from what had been permitted to what was forbidden (Amb 7 in PG 91:1092C = BW p. 66); regarding the third, he writes that God “wisely sets the chaos of matter in good order, according to the better plan which transcends us and leads toward the beneficial outcome that God himself knows” (Amb 8 in PG 91:1104C = BW p.77).

cf. his remark that “if the divine hypostases have no gnomic will, then there is no need to view gnome as a condition of freedom” (2005, p. 420), which is unfortunately contradicted by his remark in the same paper that “it would seem that we need a gnome in order to be free” (2005, p. 417).

Docetism is a heresy according to which Christ only appeared to be human, though he was not so in reality.