ACTING A PART IN THE ECSTATIC LOVE OF THE DIVINE:

PARTICIPATION, ENERGEIA, AND PERSON IN MAXIMUS THE

CONFESSOR, RICHARD KEARNEY, AND THE THEOLOGICAL TURN

IN CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

Beginning with Plato and reaching a climax in Maximus the Confessor, the doctrine of participation describes the relationship between the world and its source, in both its ontological and existential dimensions. Participation offers an account of the relation between the Many and the One, both in terms of a vertical hierarchy of being, as well as a horizontal evolution through time. *Embedded participation* designates the manner in which creatures unconsciously participate by nature in divine perfections and in existence itself, while *enactive participation* designates a consciously willed cooperation with the divine, which is ultimately a communion with the world as well. The related concepts of *energeia* (activity) and person (*hupostasis* or *prosopon*) are crucial both for describing these vectors of participation, and for resolving the problems they raise.

Remarkably, these primordial philosophical questions are as existentially and theoretically salient today as they were 2500 years ago. The work of Richard Kearney connects this study to the theological turn in French phenomenology (including Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Marion) and to one of the ongoing continental debates on

alterity (exemplified by John Caputo and Kearney). The perennial question of the one and the many is a question about similitude and difference, about what unites and what distinguishes things. As an account of the relation between these two poles, participation has relevance for this current conversation on otherness, specifically whether the alterity of the other is radical (Caputo) or in some way mitigated (Kearney). While honoring and incorporating the lessons of the former, I argue for the latter, suggesting that my creative retrieval of participation supports a chiastic-hermeneutic model of relative otherness—to use Brian Treanor's term—as against models of absolute otherness (Levinas, Derrida, Caputo). Moreover, Eastern Orthodox concepts like *prosopon* are directly taken up in Kearney's work on micro-eschatology and epiphanies of the everyday, creating a rich nexus of conversation between Maximus, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deep incarnation. As hermeneutic retrieval, this project seeks resources in the rich legacy of participation to address pressing contemporary concerns around social justice, ethics, the ecological crisis, and the divine's place in it all.

DEDICATION

To the Other, with whom we are always in relation.

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[God] is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love [*agape, ἀγάπη*], and by yearning [*eros, ἔϱως*], and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself.

–Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names*, 712B [1]

"So it is not just a generous and paternal love, a unilateral gift, but a craving for ecstatic relation that after all produces the world."

–Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible* (commenting on Dionysius above, 76)

God divested himself of his deity—to receive it back from the odyssey of time weighted with the chance harvest of unforeseeable temporal experience: transfigured or possibly even disfigured by it. In such self-forfeiture of divine integrity for the sake of unprejudiced becoming, no other foreknowledge can be admitted than that of possibilities.

–Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," 630

Significance

I was raised loosely Roman Catholic and even went through a phase of self-elected evangelical Protestantism in early high school. Christianity steeped my psyche until the discovery of philosophy late in high school, which prompted my outright rejection of religion. Since then it has been a slow process of realizing the subtle ubiquity of Christianity in Western civilization and navigating my strained relationship to it. While I do not consider myself a member of the faith, this project has helped me to sort the wheat from the chaff and to make peace with the

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[1] All citations of Dionysius are taken from *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid, unless otherwise noted.

tradition I woke up in, for better and for worse. To find resources within Christianity to redress the wrongs that Christianity has helped to inflict feels healing to me, both personally and collectively.

There is no escaping Christianity. Western society is indelibly marked by its influence. And so, we can only have a chiasmic relationship with it, perhaps similar to the one I am recommending here as a model of relationship in general. There is no cutting ourselves off from Christianity completely, and yet we in the West need not be defined by it. A creative retrieval of Christian thinking serves to transform the influence of Christianity from the inside, instead of naively attempting to find a way forward as though in a vacuum. As a society, Christianity has helped us and has deeply hurt us, but it is too rich and varied a tradition to make any blanket, black-and-white claims about its effects on social justice or the ecological crisis. I have found the tradition to be a worthy conversation partner, but that does not absolve its sin. I have no interest in defending Christianity, but nor do I think we should discard it—as if we could, even if we wished.

Academically speaking, I think the Eastern Orthodox tradition in particular and certain of its roots in ancient Christianity have something to offer to the contemporary conversation. Even the (in)famous Lynn White article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," only targets *Western* Christianity and indicates resources in the Eastern tradition that could have led to a very different outcome. White mentions the Eastern tradition of icons, which Richard Kearney and John Manoussakis bring into the continental philosophical discussion along with the concepts of

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prosopon and *perichoresis*. Additionally, I think the robust apophaticism associated with the *ousia-energeia* distinction (which is not accepted by the Western churches) helps to mitigate ongoing Enlightenment tendencies toward cognicentrism. As David Bradshaw has argued, the East may represent a road not taken that could help us make sense as to how we came to this calamitous precipice, and how we might right our course, if but minimally, at this late hour.[2]

Participation ultimately bespeaks a world of deep interconnection, a bedrock of relationship. And while the philosophies of absolute otherness represented by thinkers like Levinas and Derrida were necessary correctives to the epistemological mastery mania of modernity, participation helps us to split the difference—to find a chiastic-hermeneutic model of relative otherness that does justice to ethical singularity while providing a common ground for ecological communion with every other.

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[2] Bradshaw, *Aristotle: East and West.*

Introduction

"Contrary to what phenomenology—which is always phenomenology of perception—has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always escapes (*la chose même se dérobe toujours*)."

–Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*[3]

Music, like language, is an articulate form. Its parts not only fuse together to yield a greater entity, but in so doing they maintain some degree of separate existence, and the sensuous character of each element is affected by its function in the complex whole. This means that the greater entity we call a composition is not merely produced by mixture, like a new color made by mixing paints, but is *articulated*, i.e. its internal structure is given to our perception.

–Susanne Langer, "The Symbol of Feeling," 71

The question of metaphysics is *what is being?* And not just *what*, but *how, why*, and *from whence*? The title of this dissertation, "Acting a Part in the Ecstatic Love of the Divine," is ultimately meant as an answer to these fundamental questions. Exactly how so will become explicit in the course of this study, but let me try to give an intimation here at the outset. Among others, Plato and William Desmond, who inspire this prelude, have pointed out the affinity of metaphysics and childlike wonder, the sense of astonishment we initially have before the givenness of being. Before picking out this or that particular being, there is a sheer happening, a *something* rather than nothing. We do not know what preceded this something and we have no surety as to where it is going. It comes before we come, and it continues to present itself. We wake up in the midst of it.

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[3] Translated by David Allison in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, 104.

It is the intimate fabric of our lives and yet it also stands before us in otherness. There is a sense in which we are both *of* and *from* being. We are *a part of* being, and we are *apart from* being (my title should be read in this way: "a part" and "apart"). What presents itself is an articulated field, a community of being in which we partake, precisely by being a *distinct* participant.[4]

The question, *what is being*, has always preceded us, has always preceded the thinking that first strives to formulate such a query. For the question is already underway along with the striving, and we wake up inside that mindful activity. What is thinking if not the thinking of being, inquiry into the givenness that first astonishes mind, that rouses it from slumber to wonder, that gives mind to be by giving being-self to be thought? Being opens our mindfulness toward being. *Thinking is the child of being*, and the parent generously gives herself over to be thought. But even unconditional love cannot confer *identity.* Thinking can never catch up to the anteriority of being, any more than the child can catch up to the parent in age. Being always outflanks thinking—*the thing itself always escapes*. But this is what draws mind out (*ek-stasis*).

The lack instituted by thought's inability to encompass being, felt in contrast to the generosity of its givenness, leads to perplexity. On the

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[4] This idea of the participant being both *a part of* and *apart from* the participated bears some resemblance to Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of *partage.* Nancy expresses the idea that communion or contact emerges within a tactful touch that allows the other to remain untouched and intact. Cf. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural.* I am grateful to Sam Mickey for pointing out Nancy's relevance to the present study.

one hand, being coyly resists our advances, loving to hide, never quite revealing itself fully to thought, testifying to its ongoing, insistent otherness before us. The child asks: *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* And the parent offers, over and over, fantastic chapters in a story that never seems to wrap itself up or to arrive at a final word, never seems to yield to a definitive account. On the other hand, we would not be perplexed at all if being had not already given so much, if thought were not already in such intimate relationship with it. If being were wholly other to thought, the questioning of being would never arise in the first place. The story could not be in want of an ending if it had not already begun. Mindfulness is nested in being. Mindfulness is being waking up to itself, which also entails being waking up to itself as mindful. Mindfulness is part of the generosity of being, but mindfulness discovers itself as driven by a lack in relation to the excess of its source. Desmond writes: "Metaphysical perplexity is a *tense togetherness* of being at a loss *and* finding oneself at home with being."[5] We are at once *apart from* being and *a part of* being. This being in-between is being in the *metaxu* (μεταξύ), and the thought that thinks here, without trying to annul the tension, is metaxological.

Following Desmond's usage, we can say that the tension itself is created by the *agape* and the *eros* of metaphysics. Whatever else it is or is not, *being is agapeic*. There is something rather than nothing; there is

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[5] *Being and the Between*, 6.

givenness; there is sheer happening that just keeps happening. Being gives, and being gives in excess of what thought is able to articulate. The grand unified theory of everything never quite arrives, but this is obscured by the real advances thinking makes as it reaches toward being and being gives itself over to be thought. Each inability to speak what being is initially presents itself as a lack to be overcome. The *eros* of mind is the transcending gesture that seeks to dispel its own perplexity through a more complete understanding of being. It reaches toward the otherness of being and tries to mediate its foreignness, to determine its overdeterminacy, to make familiar its alterity. Erotic perplexity transcends itself by its drive toward a more comprehensive ordering of all that appears vague, partial, and undefined. What is other to mind is appropriated by the mind that understands it. By becoming intelligible, what eluded mind is integrated into a system of thought that surmounts mind's original indigence.

By contrast, agapeic perplexity stands astonished before being-as-other. If this astonishment spurs a self-transcendence, it is a more tactful and genuine going toward the otherness of being *as other*. Such perplexity acknowledges the excess of being, the overflowing self-transcendence of being that gives birth to mind in the first place, the inexhaustible surfeit of being that continually transcends mind as origin and ongoing plenitude. The double transcendence of agapeic being and erotic mind is what places us in between, in the *metaxu*. The erotic mind strives to determine that which is always given as overdetermined. The agapeic mind stands in renewed astonishment each time the erotic conquest is surrendered at the

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feet of being and we find ourselves, not yonder, but in between. Desmond notes that erotic perplexity and agapeic mind correspond roughly to the dialectical and metaxological senses of being. Let me briefly discuss his four senses of being, which will serve as a helpful heuristic for understanding the various metaphysics we will encounter in this study:[6]

1. **The univocal** emphasizes sameness, unity, and even immediate sameness of being and mind.

2. **The equivocal** stresses diversity, unmediated difference, and even opposition between being and mind.

3. **The dialectical** accentuates the reintegration of diversity, the mediation of difference, and the conjunction of being and mind. Here being is conjoined to mind *through* mind, indicating a form of self-mediation that privileges the side of the same in the conjunction.

4. **The metaxological**, by contrast, intermediates from the middle, emphasizing a community of being and mind, pluralized mediations beyond self-mediation, including mediation by the other, or the transcendent, out of its otherness.

As mind oscillates between *self-coherence* and *fidelity to otherness*—sameness and difference—there is a natural unfolding sequence or *explicatio* of the four senses of being. Univocity tries to pin down the truth of things determinately, only to find that its increased consistency with

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[6] *Being and the Between*, xii.

itself makes appear always finer grained inconsistencies. This other that resists thought reveals the equivocity of being, which if made absolute would shipwreck the mind in contradiction. The attempt to think a coherent equivocity drives mind to transcend equivocity through dialectic. By mediating the otherness of being through the self-sameness of thought, dialectic gives renewed expression to the will to univocity. But when dialectic is absolutized as self-thinking thought, the mind is orphaned and ultimately loses being by undermining the reality of being's otherness. The metaxological sense renews the openness to what transcends thinking, refuses to domesticate the ruptures of otherness, and makes room for the overdeterminacy of being that exceeds it. The metaxological is the coordinated truth of the univocal, equivocal, and dialectical—a pluralized community of intermediations between being and mind, hospitable to the many ways each transcends and is immanent to the other, a being *otherwise*—meaning in accord with the other *as other*—a being-in-communion in accord with the community *as community*.

Parmenides offers an especially clear example of univocity in his famous dictum, *the same is for being and thinking,* which leads to his notion of a pure, singular, unchanging being. But arguably by following through the logical implications of identifying being and thought, Parmenides has lost being, the actual changing world that no longer coincides with his unchanging idea of it. Equivocity threatens: is it changing becoming or unchanging being that is true? Plato dialectically relates being and becoming in his doctrine of participation, but he does not absolutize the dialectic. It is Aristotle rather, with his strong drift toward univocity, who

will be the first to sum up the cause of all things as self-thinking thought.[7]

But Aristotle is also a thinker of difference, who sets out to prove the reality of change against the Eleatics. The point here is not to categorize philosophers according to a system, but to use the fourfold sense of being as a hermeneutic lens to better track the tendencies of metaphysical thought. Philosophers exercise all four senses, but often favor a certain sense, and particularly at given moments. The fourfold illumines the characteristic ways in which *thinking moves*, and the characteristic ways that one philosopher may critically respond to a predecessor. The history of philosophy bears witness to this motion—what I will discuss elsewhere as a *diachronic dialectic of ideas*.[8] Thinking stops moving when it absolutizes the univocal, the equivocal, or the dialectical. To the degree that thinking continues to move, the metaxological is, at least implicitly, holding open the space between the first three senses of being, through which mind moves. Agapeic being draws mind out, and in this motion, erotic mind relates to being ecstatically.

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There was little doubt for early philosophers that trying to think being involved thinking something divine. Metaphysical attempts to understand our relation to being were simultaneously attempts to

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[7] *Being and the Between*, 16.

[8] Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy*, 14.

understand our relation to the divine as source, sustenance, and even substance of all things—the *agape* of being. Historically, the question of being converges with the question of God, so from the bird's-eye view of this introduction, I am prompted to present them under the same heading, not because they are identical, but because there is a large area of overlap. How do we relate to being and to the divine? How do they relate to us? Four key concepts/terms will aid our inquiry:

1. participation

2. *energeia* (ενέργεια)

3. *ousia* (οὐσία)

4. *hupostasis/prosopon* (ὑπόστασις / πρόσωπον)

I render the first term in English and will tend to use it that way throughout because it serves as the broader word and concept to translate multiple terms such as *methexis* (μέθεξις), *metousia* (μετουσία), *mimesis* (μίμησις), *koinonia* (κοινωνία), and so on. This study builds a synthetic typology of participation, so while the range of meanings embodied in such different terms informs the structure of the typology, the broadest concept remains "participation." Rendering the second and third words in Greek offers a similar advantage in terms of breadth, especially as their meanings shift throughout history. *Energeia* can mean activity, actuality, and energy—all of which are crucial to the singular concept. *Ousia* presents notorious translation difficulties and, depending on the context, can be rendered as being, essence, reality, substance, nature, thinghood, or

thing. The fourth Greek term, or rather two terms, presents a slightly different issue. While both could be subsumed under "person" and do justice to much of Christian thought, Neoplatonic thought uses *hupostasis* in a rather different way, often as a synonym for *ousia* rather than *prosopon.* Let me begin by considering participation and *energeia* together, followed by a look at *ousia* and *hupostasis/prosopon.*

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> "Pythagoras said that this world was like a stage,
> Whereon many play their parts; the lookers-on, the sage
> Philosophers are, says he, whose part is to learn
> The manners of all nations, and the good from the bad to discern."

–Richard Edwards, *Damon and Pythias*[9].

How do we relate to being and to the divine? How do they relate to us? These are questions that participation and *energeia* are meant to answer. Most simply, we participate in the *energeia* of the divine, the activity that is being. To use the Pythagorean metaphor above, we are players on the world stage of being, which is a drama written, directed, produced, and costumed, by divinity. This play is the origination and perpetuation of the cosmos and us who live in it. The divine generates the being-universe and we participate in its ongoing dynamism and vitality. This can happen automatically, without us noticing, or this can happen consciously. In the first case, we partake of being as would any object or animal in the world (i.e., without reflection). In the metaphor, this would correspond to the willing suspension of disbelief that overtakes both

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[9] Cited in S. P. Cerasano, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 201.

audience and actors. The actors play the part given to them by being. I call

this *embedded participation*. But in the second case, we stop to consciously

reflect on being (as we are doing now), and we engage in *enactive*

participation.[10] We become "the lookers-on, the sage philosophers. . .whose

part is to learn."[11] By directing our attention back upon the fact of

participation, the drama-play, we partake in a new manner by actively

engaging that fact with the mind—what I more specifically define as

enactive-epistemological participation. But beyond just *thinking* with the

world, we can also *practically and morally* interact with it. When we engage

in this way with the ongoing vitality of being and the divine activity that

perpetuates it, *we* ourselves turn out to be active as well. The actors have a

will with which they play their part, better or worse, trying to discern "the

good from the bad." Sometimes such human activity is directed back

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[10] I draw the embedded/enactive distinction from Sean Kelly's "Participation, Complexity, and the Study of Religion" in *The Participatory Turn*, 113–18. Kelly notes that he borrows the term "embedded" from Charlene Spretnak, *The Resurgence of the Real*. Below in the "Literature Review," I situate my project in relation to Kelly and other contributors to *The Participatory Turn*. My usage of the term "enactive" departs from Kelly's usage, whose is more in line with how the term is used by thinkers like Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, and Evan Thompson (see for example *The Embodied Mind,* by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch). For these thinkers, enaction brings forth a domain of distinctions as the result of the mutual interrelation of organism and its environment. Knowing is understood otherwise than as representation—as the creative enaction or co-constitution of the world through one's engagement with it. Such enaction applies broadly to all living organisms. As will become clear, my usage, by contrast, emphasizes the higher-order capacity present in humans to consciously will in a reflexive manner, both in the form of non-spontaneous actions as well as considered thinking.

[11] Richard Edwards, *Damon and Pythias,* cited in S. P. Cerasano, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 201.

toward the divine (worship, prayer), or in tandem with it (magic, ritual, blessing, charity). In these moments, human activity cooperates with divine activity, what I call, with reference to Saint Paul, *enactive-synergic participation*.[12] *Energeia* and participation in their multiple types help elucidate the different manners of relating to being and the divine. The terminology will become clearer as we go.

Participation addresses the problem of the One and the Many, of Being and beings, of the first principle (*arche* [ἀρχή]) and the world it is meant to explain.[13] By doing so, participation provides an alternative to the oscillations between univocity and equivocity. It must steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis, neither allowing the One to be split like the many heads of Scylla, nor letting the Many be swallowed by the one whirlpool of Charybdis. As symbols of unity and difference, these two sea monsters represent two fundamental issues this study will trace: the *paradox of participation* and the *problem of the origins of otherness*. The first is captured by the difference between "acting a part" and "acting apart." What else is participation if not acting as *a part of* something. In this sense, the participant is the same as the participated, insofar as they participate.

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[12] Paul writes that we become "co-workers with God (*synergon tou theou* [συνεργών του θεού])." See *Holy Bible, New International Version*, I Thessalonians 3:2; see also I Corinthians 3:9 and II Corinthians 6:1. All translations from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

[13] For a good summary of the issue, see A. Pegis, "The Dilemma of Being and Unity," in *Essays in Thomism*, 149–184.

But if the participant were identical to the participated, then there would be no sense in talking about participation. The participant must be *apart from* the participated, must be other to it in some definite way, as a condition of possibility for participation itself. This conjoining of sameness and difference highlights the dialectical nature of participation. A more circumscribed example of this paradox shows up as the *problem of participation,* which asks how a unified principle may be present to the many particulars that participate in it without becoming divided (which would lead to equivocity and compromise the new univocity achieved by dialectical participation).[14]

Understanding how this narrower problem is in fact a pseudo-problem will take us a good way toward understanding participation and the *non-competitive* or *non-contrastive* relationship between transcendence and immanence upon which it depends.[15] I wish to stress that though such an insight is implicitly present in a compact form in Plato, it is only fully explicated and unfolded over the course of history, and heightened with the advent of Christianity. Kathryn Tanner identifies three manners of construing the relation between transcendence and immanence:

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[14] The classic version of this problem appears in the *Parmenides.* All references and translations of Plato are drawn from his *Complete Works,* edited by J. Cooper, except where noted.

[15] The language of "non-competitive" and "non-contrastive relationship" between God and creation comes from Kathryn Tanner, see for example, *God and Creation in Christian Theology; Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology*.

univocal, contrastive, and non-contrastive. To a significant extent for the earlier Greeks, divinity can refer to "a kind of being distinct from others within the matrix of the same cosmos."[16] Tanner says that divinity is thus attributed *univocally* to the realm of Ideas in Plato, and in this way, can be intimately involved with the world as its informing reality, as a shared kind (*ousia*). This is in opposition to a concurrent tendency that *contrasts* the eternal, changeless realm of Ideas to the temporal, unstable world of becoming. This latter tendency is heightened in Aristotle and Middle Platonism, which tend to posit a First or Primary Being within a cosmological hierarchy that sits below it. With Neoplatonism and the One beyond being, the *non-contrastive* sense of transcendence begins to emerge in earnest. The immanent world is not in a competition, a zero-sum game, with the transcendent founding principle in which it participates. Rather, transcendence is precisely the condition which allows the participated to be immanent to all its participants, just by being nowhere in particular. Christianity's creator-creature divide helps to sharpen this non-contrastive sense of transcendence and immanence, what I also refer to as the *dialectic of transcendence and immanence*—and which is finally just another name for the paradox of participation. Like the participant, the participated is *a part of* its immanent participants and *apart from* them in its transcendence. This is the necessarily paradoxical structure of participation, which we will encounter throughout our study.

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[16] *God and Creation in Christian Theology,* 39.

The second problem is *the origin of difference or otherness,* which asks how the Many become many since they come from the One. The inability of univocity to account for otherness leads back to equivocity. Must some diversity and difference be present at the origin? Must the giver possess what the giver gives? Can the One somehow be explained as self-diffusive? Or is the self-diffusive model finally a form of the mind's dialectical self-mediation? Iamblichus and Proclus try to solve these problems through imparticipables and henads (ἑνάς). Their theories attempt to mediate between the One and the Many, and thereby preserve the integrity of each. Yet, complex and nuanced as their proposals are, mediation seems to fail. To maintain its integrity, the One must not be participated by the Many; and yet to exist, the Many must participate in the One. This is the paradox of participation, and no amount of nuanced mediation is ever able to fulfill both conditions, leading instead to an infinite regress, an endless attempt to bridge the unbridgeable.[17] Porphyry instead tries to bring the One and the Many closer together, leading to unwarranted charges of pantheism and parricide. But the point is that collapsing their difference will also undermine participation, which demands both separation and togetherness, *apart from* and *a part of.* Explicit resolution of these issues will await Dionysius and Maximus, and even then, there will be more to say.

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[17] This is a simplification of Iamblichus and Proclus' approaches to participation, which we will examine with more nuance below.

To better explicate the types of participation mentioned above, I now briefly trace the historical trajectory leading up to Maximus, which we will revisit in the next section ("Historical Background"). The problem of the One and the Many begins with the natural philosophy of the Presocratics, who inquire into the single *arche* of all things. Participation and *energeia* are Plato and Aristotle's respective responses to Parmenides' assertion that only eternal, immutable being is real, while the world of becoming is illusion, and change unreal. Returning to the dramatic metaphor, Parmenides univocally declares that only the director offstage and the eternal script are truly real, while the play of the world is but a mirage of seeming. In response, Plato develops the doctrine of participation and theory of forms. He claims that the players participate in the vision of the director, creating a moving image of the script's eternity, and thereby partaking to some degree of its immutable reality. Sensible particulars have identifiable general qualities because they participate in the forms that ground those qualities. This is an example of *embedded* participation, which is an ongoing, automatic, and not necessarily conscious, partaking of the divine activity in the world.[18] But Plato also has a doctrine of contemplation (*theoria* [θεωρια]), by which we can *consciously* know the forms in which we embeddedly participate. This is an example of *enactive* participation, which is an *intentional and willing*

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[18] Plato does not use the term activity (*energeia*) in this way, since it is Aristotle who first coins the word.

reflection on the fact of participation. While *embeddedness* emphasizes the metaphysically objective matrix in which one participates regardless of volition, *enactiveness* stresses the subjective side that consciously decides to participate in a certain way—in this case through thinking. In the dramatic metaphor, the embedded moment is the actors and audience engrossed in the play, disbelief suspended, while the enactive moment is the philosopher-critics, consciously evaluating from the wings. I will identify two types of embedded and two types of enactive participation, so I call these first two *embedded-ontological* and *enactive-epistemological*.

Aristotle responds to Parmenides with his theory of potentiality (*dunamis* [δύναμις]) and actuality (*energeia*), showing how real change is possible. We could say he focuses on the actors and the dynamics that occur on stage, now that the actors have learned the script by heart and taken it into themselves (this is the intelligible forms sunken into the sensible). But still, the Prime Director off-stage is the ultimate cause of dramatic motion. By coining the word *energeia,* Aristotle will permit Plotinus to elaborate Platonic participation in more dynamic terms.

While the Platonic theory of forms offers an ontological account of the "whatness" or quiddity of sensible things, Neoplatonism will ascribe causation of being to the forms as well.[19] The forms become responsible not only for *what* a thing is, but *that* it is. While I call the first *embedded-ontological* participation (in the sense of "essence"), I call the second

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[19] E. Perl, "Methexis," 23–28.

embedded-existential participation (in the sense of "real being" or "existence"). However, the concept of existence is slow to fully emerge, and perhaps because the Neoplatonic tradition sees the forms as responsible for both essence and existence, they do not fully develop the latter. In attempting to address the paradox of participation and the origin of otherness, Plotinus synthesizes Plato's doctrine of participation with Aristotle's formulation of *energeia* to formulate his theory of double-activity or what we call in retrospect emanation. In this way, Plotinus offers a dialectical response to Plato and Aristotle.

But between Aristotle and Plotinus lies the birth of Christianity. The Jewish revelation of a personal creator God of awesome power is at once more intimate and more unapproachable than the divine source about which Greek metaphysics speculates. Philo is the first thinker to forge a synthesis between Greek philosophy and Judaism. While the embedded dimension of participation and its associated ontological issues are less prominent here, the enactive dimension of what one can know and experience of God comes to the fore. Philo applies a distinction between *ousia* (essence) and *dunameis* (powers) in this regard.[20] He interprets God's statement in Exodus 3:14, "I am that I am," as meaning: it is my nature to *be,* but not to be described by name.[21] Unnameable turns

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[20] See, for example, *De specialibus legibus*, in *Philo,* I.47.

[21] *De mutatione nominum*, in *Philo,* §11.

out to mean unknowable. While God remains unknown in his *ousia*, some knowledge of God can be gained through God's work in the world. From God's powers, we can infer that God exists. We can know *that* he is, but not *what* he is. This leads eventually to the *ousia-energeia* distinction, which remains a cornerstone of the Eastern Church up to the present day.

Philo registers early traces of apophasis (ἀπόφασις; literally "unsaying") or the *via negativa,* an approach that resorts to negative predicates and privative thinking in the face of God's unknowability. This theme will concern us throughout as it represents one of the basic poles of the paradox of participation, that is, the way we are *apart from* our source. Does God's unsayability represent an insuperable blockade, or is this unknowing a prelude to a deeper, perhaps mystical union? The coordinated opposite pole is kataphasis (κατάφασις) or the *via positiva,* which names God by the names of all things since God is their source, and they *a part of* God. In isolation from the former pole, kataphasis leads quickly to pantheism. The basic intuitions at work here are discontinuity or continuity with our source. The Abrahamic religions will tend to emphasize the former: the divide between creator and creature, the difference between divine omnipotence and mortal frailty. The Early Greek tradition especially emphasizes the latter: the connaturality of soul and divinity, the ability of human reason (*logos* [λόγος]) to know the divine order (*logos*). But these are just tendencies, which upon closer inspection always seem to turn over to their opposite: The People of the Book have an intimacy with their Lord not afforded by metaphysical

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abstraction; and Neoplatonism develops a rigorous apophasis that piles transcendence upon transcendence. Nonetheless, the original tendencies are also present in the traditions' respective accounts of the generation of the cosmos as *creatio ex nihilo* (discontinuity) or emanation (continuity). It is dangerous to put these two words next to each other, as if they are the only two games in town. In fact, the *ex nihilo* likely developed more in response to *ex materia* accounts than *ex deo* ones. This circumstance notwithstanding, *ex nihilo* emphasizes the divine difference by stressing the creature's absolute dependence on the creator. By contrast, emanation underlines a greater sense of continuity between human and divine, with the eternity of the cosmos also lessening the sense of existential contingency. Yet again, the point is not to categorize the traditions but to use the coordinated senses of apophasis and kataphasis—of discontinuity and continuity with source—as lenses to evaluate the varied and evolving tendencies of these traditions. I note in passing the way that apophasis is an ally to the metaxological, resisting the closure of a full metaphysical system of knowledge (what Levinas would call a *totality*, as opposed to an openness toward *infinity*). Such apophasis is often connected to religious faith, which may also curb the tendency of ontology to explain everything, the tendency of mind to try to swallow being whole.

Saint Paul resists such totalizing thought, focusing on the embodied and ethical realities of living an active and virtuous Christian life. He offers our first example of *enactive-synergic* participation, which I described above as directing our activity in tandem with the divine (I considered the alternative name, enactive-*cooperative* participation, whose

roots, like syn-ergy, mean "with-working" or "together-working"). The term "synergic" is based in Paul, who describes how we join our will to God, or allow God to work through us, becoming "co-workers with God" (*synergon tou theou* [συνεργών του θεού]).[22] Or as he famously writes, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."[23] This is closer to the meaning of *energeia* that is developing in contemporaneous pagan magical and religious practices. Among religious writers of the first to fourth centuries, the word takes on the meanings of "active power," "cosmic force," and eventually "energy." The divine "energy" is understood as a fluid reservoir of power that admits of sharing or participation. This popular usage then joins the philosophic stream via the incorporation of theurgy (*theourgia*) by Iamblichus, which is then sustained by Proclus. Theurgy engages in ritual soteriological practices as a means of enactive-synergic participation. Though *theoria* is still considered a means of enactive-epistemological participation, it is subordinated to *theourgia*. The emphasis here is not on subjective knowing (enactive-epistemological) but on subjective praxis (enactive-synergic). As is clear from its etymology, enactive participation has to do with the creature directing its activity (*energeia*) in a certain way, and in the case of enactive-synergic participation, that direction is in concert with the divine *energeia* (notice

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[22] I Thessalonians 3:2; see also I Corinthians 3:9 and II Corinthians 6:1.

[23] Galatians 2:20.

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the common root *ergon* [εργων], meaning "work" or "deed," in *energeia,*

synergeia, theourgia, and later in the Dionysian *hierourgia* [ιερουργία]). It is

no longer just the mind that permits an individual philosophical ascent,

but the whole person who through ritual enactment becomes a conduit for

the divinization of the cosmos at large. This has radical consequences for

the practice and goals of philosophy in general and also serves as a bridge

to the rituals of Christianity.

To sum up: *Embedded* participation describes our dependence on

our source or principle (*arche*) regardless of choice, while *enactive*

participation describes the way we can willingly engage our faculties to

interact with that same source or principle. *Embedded-existential*

participation describes the world's dependence on its source for the very

fact *that* it is (as opposed to its *embedded-ontological* dependence for *what* it

is), while *enactive-synergic* participation describes how we can *act* in

concert with that in which we participate (and not just *think* it in an

enactive-epistemological way). For convenience, I list the four categories of

participation in Table 1:

Table 1.

The Four Categories of Participation (A)

	Unconscious	Conscious
vertical whatness	embedded-ontological	enactive-epistemological
horizontal thatness	embedded-existential	enactive-synergic

Note. Author's table.

Conceiving of a vertical and a horizontal axis may help to coordinate these four senses of participation. The vertical axis is related to the great chain of being trope, which images an ontological and spatial dimension that concerns "whatness." We are ontologically embedded in the vertical *scala natura* and through philosophical "ascent" we can enactively know *what* we are in this order. By contrast, the horizontal axis is the temporal unfolding of existence which concerns "thatness." We are existentially embedded in being as thrown into time and we can cooperate enactively with the divine *energeia* within a chronological unfolding of history. While the first axis is synchronic, the second axis is diachronic. While the first is associated with ontology, the second will be associated with eschatology. These are two different kinds of givenness that we can distinguish within the *agape* of being (however, this should not be taken systematically or exhaustively; for example, embedded-ontological participation persists through time, so certainly exhibits a horizontal dimension).

How do we indicate the "whatness" of embedded-ontological and enactive-epistemological participation? One word for this "whatness" is *ousia*. How do we indicate the subject who accumulates historical experience in embedded-existence and who acts in enactive-synergy? One word for this subject is "person" (*hupostasis/prosopon*). Table 2 recaps the four categories of participation, incorporating *ousia* and person:

Table 2.

The Four Categories of Participation (B)

	Unconscious	Conscious
vertical whatness; *ousia*	embedded-ontological	enactive-epistemological
horizontal thatness; person	embedded-existential	enactive-synergic

Note. Author's table.

For example, in the Platonic worldview the forms are *ousia* in which we are ontologically embedded and which we can know enactively through *theoria.* For later Christianity, the person is the unique individual (distinct from the *ousia* as common genus) who is becoming in time, in part through exercising their will. However, this is again only intended to give a general sense, since these terms will shift in meaning through history. Let us look briefly at *ousia, hupostasis,* and *prosopon* to see how.

At the outset we asked, *what is being?* The Greek word for being is *on,* which took on its first philosophical sense with Parmenides. As we noted, he opposes the eternal, immobile, unchanging present of *to on* (το ον) to what he considers an illusory past and future of motion and change. *On* is the present neuter participle of *eimi* (I am [εἰμι]), and from it derives *ousia.*[24] *Ousia* was employed in ordinary Greek to name "property," in the

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[24] *A Greek-English Lexicon,* s.v. οὐσία, edited by H. G. Liddel. Aristotle says that *on* is the basic subject matter of metaphysics. See Perl, *Thinking Being,* 82, for a discussion of translation issues related to *ousia* and Perl's choice to translate it as "reality."

sense of real estate, as well as wealth and possessions.[25] Thus *ousia*

originally has distinctly immanent and physical undertones (as all abstract

words eventually reveal when submitted to etymological excavation), but

with Parmenides, *to on* has become abstract.

In its simplest philosophical sense, *ousia* means "(1) what

something is in itself, its being or essence."[26] Driscoll, whose article I

follow here, explains:

> The word *ousia* was put to philosophical use by Plato in his early
> dialogue *Euthyphro* to state a requirement on definitions. Asked
> what piety is, Euthyphro answers that it is what is loved by all the
> gods. Socrates responds with a clear statement of concept (1),
> saying that Euthyphro has mentioned merely something that
> qualifies piety externally and has failed to give the *ousia* of piety,
> what it is in itself that leads the gods to love it.[27]

A new sense of the word *ousia* emerges most clearly in the *Phaedo:*

"(2) an entity which is what it is, at least with respect to essential

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[25] Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy*, 38.

[26] Driscoll, "Ousia," par. 1.

[27] Driscoll, "Ousia," par. 2. See *Euthyphro* 11AB. Here we see clearly a crucial connection between the ethical, epistemological, and ontological quests. Euthyphro is trying to *think* what it means to *act* ethically. In order to do so he must isolate the *ousia* of piety, its essence. In the face of the sophistic relativism and decaying morality of his age, Plato sought to place ethics on a firm metaphysical footing. Socrates' equation of virtue and knowledge makes strides in this direction but is often criticized in light of modern psychoanalytic explanations as to why we sometimes do things we know are wrong (or how we manage to convince ourselves that those things are right). The marriage of ethics and epistemology leaves something to be desired. Rather than passing from ethics to ontology via epistemology, and vice versa, this study will draw out a more intimate, direct relation between the two. It is in this sense that Maximus can be seen as crowning Plato's quest to put ethics on a firm metaphysical footing.

attributes, on its own and without dependence on any more fundamental

entity of another type outside itself."[28] For Plato, this is the forms, such as

the just itself and the beautiful itself, which Driscoll notes that Socrates

speaks of

> as the *ousia* of other things, in the sense that other things become just or beautiful only by participation in the corresponding form. Each such form is an *ousia*: a being or reality that is always the same and unchanging, an object of thought rather than sensation.[29]

The *Republic* employs a similar meaning, but Socrates there speaks

of the forms collectively as *ousia*,[30] contrasting "this invariant, unqualified,

and cognitively reliable being. . .with the many sensible things, which can

appear, for example, beautiful in one respect but ugly in another"[31] and

which exhibit becoming and decay.[32] Thus the third sense of *ousia:* "(3)

being as opposed to becoming."[33] This usage is common in book VII,

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[28] Driscoll, "Ousia," par. 1.

[29] Driscoll, "Ousia," par. 3. See *Phaedo,* 65D, 101C, as well as 78D, 76D, and 77A.

[30] With the exception of the form of the Good.

[31] Driscoll, "Ousia," par. 4. See *Republic* V, 479C, 479BD.

[32] See *Republic* VI, 485B.

[33] Driscoll, "Ousia," par. 4.

where the study of math and geometry help the aspiring philosopher-king to turn away from becoming and toward being.[34]

In all three cases, *ousia* indicates something essential and truly real. It is in this way that *ousia* comes to be traditionally translated as "substance" in Aristotle. With his focus on biology and processes of change, the underlying reality for Aristotle is the organic whole, which in the *Categories* could often mean a particular horse or a particular person.[35] But in the *Metaphysics,* he explains that particular sensible *ousiai* are composites of matter and form and as such are "posterior" to both.[36] He then argues at length that form is primary *ousia*.[37] I mention this to illustrate how these words can shift and counter-shift their meanings through history, but for now the basic sense of *ousia* has been introduced.[38]

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[34] *Republic*, 525BC, 526E, 534A. At paragraph 4, Driscoll notes that such a strong distinction in the *Republic* between being and becoming has been questioned by some scholars (see, for example, Debra Nails, "*Ousia* in the Platonic Dialogues"). Regardless, the distinction is quite softened in certain later dialogues, such as the *Philebus*, where Socrates remarks, "every process of generation. . .takes place for the sake of some particular being [*ousias tinas hekastēs*]" (54C).

[35] *Categories*, 2A11–14, 2A34–B5, 2A35, 2B5–6.

[36] *Metaphysics*, 1029A30–32.

[37] *Metaphysics,* 1037A5–7 and 1037A27–30; Cf. 1032B1–2.

[38] Driscoll, "Ousia," par. 5–6.

The Greek word *hupostasis,* a verbal substantive, depends for its meaning on the verb *huphistemi* (υφιστημι; literally, "stand under"). Pearson, whose article I follow here, explains that "it can mean the act of 'standing under' or the result of that action. A wide range of meanings flow from these possibilities, including such abstract meanings as 'origin,' 'substance,' 'real nature,' and so on." [39] The fifth-century Christian historian Socrates records that the first Greek philosophers do not use the term *hupostasis,* although they do often use the term *ousia.*[40] He indicates that more recent philosophy uses *hupostasis* as a synonym of *ousia.* The Stoics are the first to use *hupostasis* as a philosophical term, in referring to being that has objective and concrete reality. Objects in nature such as rain have *hupostasis* (i.e., reality), in contrast to the rainbow, which only appears. Middle Platonists deny that sensible things have their own *hupostasis,* since the truly real is intelligible. Here we see how *hupostasis* can function as a synonym of *ousia.*[41] Plotinus develops the Neoplatonic doctrine of the *hupostaseis* or first principles (*archai*), which in a descending series include the One, Being or the forms, and Soul.[42] According to the

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[39] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 1.

[40] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 2.

[41] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 5.

[42] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 6.

theory of double activity mentioned above, each lower *hupostasis* is

realized as a result of the next higher one's *energeia*. In later Neoplatonism,

hupostasis is distinguished from *huparxis* (existence [ὕπαρξις]) and *ousia*.

While *ousia* may be used as a synonym of both *hupostasis* and *huparxis*, the

latter connotes unity, while the former connotes triplicity. *Ousia* is thus the

more flexible term.[43]

    Hupostasis occurs 27 times in the Septuagint (Greek Bible).[44] Philo's

use of the term reflects both Stoic and Middle Platonic usage, adopting as

he does much of the philosophical apparatus of Platonism to the Jewish

faith. In the end, Philo attributes ultimate reality to God alone. Employing

a verb-form of *huphistemi*, Philo writes, "God alone subsists in being."[45]

The term comes to be used technically in dogmatic formulations of the

Trinity and in Christology from the fourth century on. In these contexts,

the Greek philosophical influence is apparent.[46]

    I mentioned how *hupostasis* and *ousia* are first used equivalently by

Greek philosophers, but then achieve greater specificity in late

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[43] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 7. See also Gersh, *Kinesis Akinetos: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus*, 31–37, cited in Pearson.

[44] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 9.

[45] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 10. See Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better,* 160, cited in Pearson.

[46] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 11.

Neoplatonism. Likewise in Christian theology, Origen sometimes uses the terms as near synonyms, but also writes that God is both monad and trinity, containing three *hupostaseis.* Origen postulates a unity of *ousia* (as genus) and a trio of *hupostaseis* (in the sense of three distinct species).[47]

Debate as to whether Christ is of the same *ousia* as the Father comes to a head at the Council of Nicaea in 351, leading to the *homoousios* definition ("same *ousia*"). But it is not until the fifth century that the *ousia-hupostasis* distinction becomes standardized for Greek Trinitarian theology at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, in large part due to the intervening thought of the Cappadocian Fathers who help to differentiate *ousia*, the more common term, from *hupostasis*, the more particular. The Council of Chalcedon defines the unity of God as a unity of *ousia* and characterizes the individual members of the Trinity as three perfect *hupostaseis* or three perfect *prosopa*. Thus, *hupostasis* is differentiated from its original equivalence with *ousia* and becomes newly equivalent with *prosopon. Prosopon* originally means face or mask, but in the Christian context, *prosopon* and *hupostasis* distinctly take on the sense of person. For it is the personhood of Christ that is the bigger issue at Chalcedon, where his two distinct *ousiai* (one divine and one human) are declared united in a single

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[47] Pearson, "Hypostasis," par. 15. See also Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 322, cited in Pearson.

divine person (*prosopon/hupostasis*).[48] In the course of distinguishing

Christ's particular personhood (*hupostasis*) from his shared Trinitarian

divinity (*ousia*), precise terms are developed for distinguishing the

particular individual (*hupostasis*) from the shared nature (*ousia*). This

sharpened terminology can also be used to talk about ordinary people. For

example, I have a human *ousia* that I share with the species, but my

unique *hupostasis* is Travis. This usage of the *ousia-hupostasis* distinction is

different but related to the Trinitarian one (anything attributed to both

God and creature is attributed analogically). We should emphasize the

importance of the category "person" for Jews and Christians. Only a God

who can perform speech acts, to use a modern term, can make promises

and keep covenant. Essences and substances do not, as such, make

promises.[49] This is the fundamental difference between the God of the

People of the Book and the god(s) of the philosophers, though again,

broad generalizations have a tendency of subverting themselves, and this

dissertation is all about the entwining and cross-pollination of these two

traditions.[50]

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[48] For discussions of the term *hupostasis* in the Chalcedonian and pre-Chalcedonian historical context, see Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 222–35.

[49] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cited in Merold Westphal, "Hermeneutics and the God of Promise," in *After God,* 86.

[50] To add more nuance here, one should keep in mind that the Greek gods were personified and could talk, often speaking through oracles such as the oracle at Delphi. Even Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence,* asks for a sacrifice to Asclepius.

There is a continuity of thought from the initial Platonic encounter with the paradox of participation and the problem of the origin of difference through to their resolution in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. Dionysius does not so much solve the paradox of participation as face it head-on, perhaps more so than any thinker before him. As we read above in the opening epigraph: out of love, God leaves the transcendent oneness of his dwelling and comes to be many in all things—*and yet* remains one within himself.[51] *This expresses the dialectic of transcendence and immanence that historically will be and metaphysically must be the only way to face the paradox of participation.* The same first principle must be fully transcendent from *and* fully immanent to the particulars it animates—for only by totally transcending every particular instance can it be wholly present to every single instance. Although Plotinus and Proclus say this much at various moments, it is Dionysius that articulates the point with the utmost clarity. In contemporary conversations, we sometimes see the transcendence and immanence of the other pitted against one another, as if they are in a zero-sum game. To say that the other is immanent and can be understood and received as present, is sometimes taken as an affront to their transcendent singularity. But this is where I believe the Christian understanding of a non-competitive relation between transcendence and immanence in terms of God's relation to creation can help inform discussions of the relation to any other—be it

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[51] Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 712B.

God, a person, the more-than-human world, or any given thing.[52] The other is both transcendent and immanent; my ability to engage and commune with the other's immanence does not efface their transcendence by consuming them into a totality. Here too the paradox of participation is at work: the other is immanently *a part of* our relationship and transcendently *apart from* it—both at once.

Interpreting the Neoplatonism of Dionysius and Maximus liberally, I submit that God, or the One, ecstatically comes to be many and nevertheless remains one. Likewise, the world, or the Many, is nothing but the self-impartation of God (One), and yet it is many. The world is God in otherness. God is both Godself (One) and the world (Many); the world is both itself (Many) and God (One). Creation is the self-othering of God. But where does this otherness come from, if all we begin with is the one God? Maximus proposes that the *free choice* of the creature is the source of the necessary otherness of creation. Diversity emerges from a unified cause by grace of the difference given in the creature's free will.[53] This grounding in free will was made possible historically by the

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[52] In this list of others (God, person, more-than-human-world, things), I anticipate additional contemporary interlocutors I intend to bring into the final sections of the dissertation, such as those working in the overlapping fields of ecopoetics, object-oriented ontology, and the new materialisms.

[53] We must ask however: how does this solution work for those parts of creation that do not possess freewill? This brings out the human's special status in creation and special duty to unite creation as its microcosm and mediator, to borrow from the title of Lars Thunberg's famous work on Maximus. We will return to this question in our discussion of the difference between creation and incarnation, and the relevance of contemporary deep incarnation scholarship.

development of the concept of *energeia,* which after being coined by Aristotle, expands through both pagan theurgy and Pauline synergy, and is further developed by the Cappadocians. *Energeia* comes to mean an active reservoir of force that can be directed by choice. The Cappadocians join this enactive usage to the more embedded concerns of the *ousia-energeia* distinction, that is, what can and cannot be known about God, what can and cannot be participated.[54] This culminates in the Dionysian conception of a God who is at once participable and imparticipable, immanent and transcendent, being-itself and yet beyond being. It is God's *energeia* that abides in all things and is participated, while God's *ousia* remains within himself. The persistent difference between God and creation, which keeps it from collapsing into a univocal identity, is the fact of participation itself: we *borrow* or come to possess what God *is* inherently. As creation, such participation happens automatically, in an embedded manner. But when it comes to enactive participation, there is conscious will and free choice. Such freedom means that the creature must discern "the good from the bad," as it was called in the Pythagorean metaphor. The bad leads to the fall from grace, but the good leads to deification (*theosis* [θέωσις]), a *realization* of our participated identity with the divine—in realization's double sense of knowing and effecting.

I see in Maximus' vision a delicate balancing of the different categories and axes we have encountered in this introduction: embedded

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[54] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology,* 186.

and enactive, *ousia* and *hupostasis,* vertical and horizontal, ontological and ethical. The horizontal time axis of existence ultimately has to do with ethics. We live in a time-directional world where our personal actions have irreversible consequences. Our choices matter, since they leave marks on us and on others. It is on this axis that I encounter the other person as a singularity that I cannot fully know, and to whom justice can only be done by my stretching beyond myself. Ontologically, it is straightforward enough to "be kind to humans," but it is something else to do right by Travis in all the unique particularity of his individual needs. On the one hand, a metaphysics that privileges *ousia* and universal categories to the neglect of the unique particularities of *hupostasis* always risks slipping into vulgar two-world Platonism and ontotheology: By thematizing form and the universal, the everyday world of becoming is degraded and God risks being conceived as the highest intelligible object, the supreme being among beings (a classic example of contrastive transcendence). On the other hand, a metaphysics that privileges *hupostasis* and the unrepeatable singularities of the world of becoming always risks losing touch with or degrading the common nature of things that is an indicator of and basis for our communion with one another, with God, and with the cosmos at large. For example, the Christian existentialism of Christos Yannaras and John Zizioulas conceives of *ousia* as a biological determinant to be broken away from through the personal

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freedom of *hupostasis*.[55] Or consider the radical alterity of Levinas and

Derrida, which puts into question what can be known or shared with the

other at all. Rather, *ousia* and person exist in mutual interpenetration, in

which *hupostasis* expresses the *energeia* of the *ousia*.[56] While it was one of

Maximus' great achievements to valorize the realm of becoming in the

face of Platonist tendencies to privilege being, he can also be credited with

the circumspection not to allow the pendulum to swing too far in the

other direction, keeping balance and interdependence between being and

becoming, *ousia* and *hupostasis*, ontology and ethics, universal and

particular. It will be our task to constantly honor this unconfused union,

giving balanced expression to each aspect and to their alliance. In these

senses, Maximus is a metaxological thinker.

Throughout the dissertation, but especially in Part 2, I examine the

relevance of participation, *energeia*, and person for contemporary

conversations. The primordial philosophical questions entailed here are as

existentially and theoretically salient today as they were 2500 years ago.

Let us briefly consider the theological turn in French phenomenology and

an ongoing contemporary debate around the alterity of the other. While

for the Neoplatonists the good must be beyond the being that it sources,

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[55] See, for example, Yannaras, *Person and Eros;* Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* and *Communion and Otherness.*

[56] Mutual interpenetration alludes to *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις), which we will discuss below; on *perichoresis,* see Perl, "Methexis," 131–35; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 23–27; Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 253–60.

Levinas insists that that which justifies being must be otherwise than the order of being. While the Neoplatonists can be accused of ontotheology, Levinas is open to the charge of voluntarism, insofar as he makes ethics the foundational explanatory reality. Must we choose between the two? No. Maximus' understanding of free choice as a solution to the ontological problem of difference allows a constructive metaphysical and theological reading which can accommodate the Neoplatonic *epekeina* of eminence (guarantor of being) alongside the Levinasian *epekeina* of immanence (meaning of being).[57] Ontology and ethics are conjointly first philosophy.

Ontological being is always already ethical encounter and event. The patristic *ousia-hupostasis* distinction helps differentiate the domains of repeatable ontological genres and unrepeatable existential singularities, although in the end they function in tandem. Such a reading can accommodate the insights of Levinas and Derrida without the obstacles to communion inherent to radical heteronomy and alterity. As Catherine Keller points out, irreducible difference turns out to be indispensable to communion by way of participation.[58] You cannot participate in something that you have fully absorbed into yourself any more than you can participate in something that is fully barred from you. Jean-Luc

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[57] For an excellent discussion of the Levinasian *epekeina* in its Platonic and Neoplatonic context, see Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Levinas and the Greek Heritage,* especially 42–65.

[58] *Cloud of the Impossible,* 62f.

Marion, very much in the vein of Gregory and Maximus, indicates as much when he argues that paternal "distance brings about separation in order that love should receive all the more intimately the mystery of love."[59]

The perennial question of the One and the Many is a question about similitude and difference, about what unites and distinguishes things. As an account of the relation between these poles, participation has relevance for ongoing conversations as to whether the alterity of the other is radical or in some way mitigated. The radical alterity of Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and John Caputo threatens the prospect of personal communion with the other, espoused by Richard Kearney and other thinkers such as Gabriel Marcel, Paul Ricoeur, Catherine Keller, and Brian Treanor. In *Aspects of Alterity*, Treanor argues for an account of otherness that sees it as a chiasm between similitude and difference. I would like to build on this approach by seeing the repeatable genera of *ousia* as a domain of similitude that is always already entwined with the unique particularities of *hupostasis* as a domain of difference. The whole person is always both of these, and the two can only be separated conceptually, not actually.

Parmenides declares *the same is for being and thinking.* While being and thinking coincide on the level of *ousia,* we have seen how this is only half the picture, since the level of existence and person, though it can be

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59 *The Idol and Distance,* 156.

conceptually framed, exceeds the generality of thinking—this is one of the ways that being outflanks thinking. The level of *hupostasis* is that of unique particulars, the haecceity or "thisness" that cannot be subsumed under the "whatness" of any universal.[60] The totalizing effects of ontotheology seem to come from the univocal will to equate being and thinking: we fail to think what cannot be thought and thus think God as a being; we fail to think the unthinkable singularity of every other and thus generalize them under the rubric of being, not adequately honoring their unique unknowability and thereby failing in our ethical duty. We have not held open the *metaxu*. I will continue this argument in the body of the dissertation—for if being is conceived differently, then the whole ontological picture changes.

In Maximus' hands, the Platonic forms become the dynamic *logoi* of creation. For Maximus, ontology *is* ethics, as the dialogical working out of the proposals of creation (*logoi*), which proposals are analogic to each unique creature and are of a piece in the Christ *Logos*, making the conversation of each creature with God simultaneously a conversation with all the other creatures. Maximus helps us to envisage an active and developmental sense of being, which resembles less a static essence than a yet-to-be-determined dynamic process. Being as becoming-in-communion is the site of the working out of the divine existential gesture of free,

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[60] R. Cross, "Medieval Theories of Haecceity," par. 1. *Haecceitas* comes from the work of Duns Scotus and will return in our final sections.

loving creation and the human counter-response as free existential choice in a historical field of ethical interaction. It is in our personal existential freedom that we reflect our creator, and seeing that same freedom in another, seeing them as the God-image, underlines our already present ethical obligation to the other. What is given to beings by the divine *logoi* is not a concrete and immutable essence but, fundamentally, the possibility of an abyssal free response to God and to one another—essence as a potential for relationship. For Levinas, the face as a site of transcendence is a marker of God irrupting into immanence, but I contend that so too are all the *logoi,* which can be revealed through natural contemplation (*theoria phusike* [θεωρια φυσικη]). The whole cosmos is the face of Christ. Thus, there is an ethic of responsibility before *every* other, not just *anthropos* (ἄνθρωπος), but the ecological cosmos as a whole. There is no static being or essence, for essence always already points beyond itself toward the *eschaton* (ἔσχατον), toward a divine promise that the creature can choose to fulfill. Essence is inherently "beyond essence," as it was never really there to begin with except as the divine ethical call of God's *energeia* that elicits our enactive free response. This is *acting a part in the ecstatic love of the divine.*

Derrida says: "one should say of no matter what or no matter whom what one says of God."[61] He mobilizes God's radical transcendence

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[61] *On the Name,* 73.

to help us think the transcendence of any particular thing. But just as God is unknowable in God's *ousia*, but knowable and participable in God's *energeia,* so too does any particular thing offer up a knowable side, with perceivable characteristics.[62] We complex human beings are able to share something of our inner lives with one another, even if such sharing can never be total. It is as if Derrida only considers the analogy with the divine *ousia*, thus making every other totally other. But that misses half the story: every other is both wholly other by analogy with the *ousia*, but also knowable and participable in their activity or *energeia*. This makes understanding, compassion, synergy, and cooperation possible, not merely as humble surrender before the other's mystery, but as positive knowledge and a true joining of streams of effort and activity. In this analogy, the alterity of the other is guarded intact on the level of *ousia*, but an interpenetration of energy and activity is also availed on the level of person. Both sides of the coin are necessary, alterity so we stay open to the mystery of the other and our inability to encapsulate or comprehend them fully, but also communion, so that true compassion and mutual understanding are possible. This is, again, the paradox of participation—

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[62] Because *ousia* means "essence," it takes on different senses when referring to God versus the creature. *Ousia* is the domain of *knowable*, repeatable genres for creatures, but inversely, it is the *unknowable* essence of God. And in fact, it also gets used in this latter sense when referring to creatures' *core* essence or *bottommost* essence as unknowable. While we can know something of a creature's form, we can never know them wholly *in essence* because they are a unique hypostatic being. Such a case seems to refer to the bottommost essence of the whole creature (particular *hupostasis* plus general *ousia*). This causes considerable confusion, which we will try to adjudicate.

but this time it is with another human being rather than with God, two

relationships whose structures end up having a lot in common. Such

participation does not lead to a final totalizing grasp of the other; the risk,

on the contrary, is that a too great insistence on alterity may completely

isolate us from one another. I believe a dialectic and hermeneutic

approach can remedy the excesses of radical alterity. Let me trace out the

two positions, following Treanor in *Aspects of Alterity*.[63]

If otherness is considered an absolute, all-or-nothing affair, then we

are prompted to protect and preserve the otherness of the other as our

main objective. There's no questioning the other since their otherness is

absolute, so the appropriate response is to maintain distance and respect

for their alterity. Because of this emphasis on distance and respect,

philosophies of radical alterity tend to promote *justice* as the model of

relating to others. Good fences make good neighbors. Treanor points to

Levinas here, and later Derrida and Caputo.

By contrast, if otherness is considered relative, questioning and

understanding the other is not violent or impossible. Because the

difference between me and another is not absolute, there is no ethical

injunction to protect and preserve the otherness of the other. Rather the

injunction is to understand the other better, since otherness is only

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[63] *Aspects of Alterity*, 8. Here I am transferring the metaphysical structure of participation from a divine–human relation to a human–human one. This, of course, is not something our antique interlocutors would have done. Furthermore, the analogy cannot be taken too literally, since the divine–human participation is an asymmetric dependence relation, while the human–human participation I describe is a symmetric relation.

relative, making such understanding possible. This opens the way to intimacy and participation. Such concern for bridging distance rather than maintaining it prompts philosophies of relative otherness to privilege *love,* rather than justice, as the model of relating to the other. Treanor points to Marcel, and I believe we can add Maximus, Kearney, and Treanor himself to the list. The claim is that we can think otherness in non-absolute terms and yet still be respectful of the other as other. In this way, Treanor argues that such a chiastic-hermeneutic model can address the main ethical and epistemological concerns of philosophies of absolute otherness without leading us into isolation, aporia, or hyperbole.[64] This contemporary point of view is closest to the one I will develop with regard to Maximus.

Levinas, Derrida, and Caputo are all responding to the will to univocity that expresses itself as ontotheology. Ontology has a tendency to explain everything, including God-the-Big-Other, under the same rubric, making the divine apex of singularity into another being among beings. It tends to do the same thing to every other—people, animals, things—their singularity disappearing behind the categories that define them. However, in the act of resisting such univocity, philosophies of absolute otherness often lead to aporiae and equivocity (e.g., *a necessary condition of giving a gift is that neither the giver nor the receiver know that gift-giving is occurring;* see infra section 2.2). The radicality of the break with the other challenges our ability to understand how any relation can transpire across such a

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[64] *Aspects of Alterity,* 258.

chasm.[65] Between these two extremes, the hermeneutic approach attempts

to maintain an open dialectic or metaxological intermediation—Kearney

even calls his work *metaxology*.[66] The chasm becomes a chiasm.[67] This

involves application of the non-competitive dialectic of transcendence and

immanence not just to God, but to every other.

The question of metaphysics is *what is being?* And from there we

have moved through the question of the divine to arrive at that of singular

beings—suggesting that in each case a similar structural dynamic is at

play. When it comes to the adequation of mind and its object, we are

always stretched between. As between, we are *a part of* what we wish to

know and we are *apart from* it. We will never escape being between, but it

is here that love grows, by reaching ecstatically beyond itself, and

receiving the beyond that reaches back.

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[65] In fact, because alterity is absolute, the others' singularity again tends
to disappear behind the blackbox of their otherness. Every other becomes the
same, i.e., absolutely other, and their uniqueness is lost.

[66] *The God Who May Be*, 6.

[67] We could say that the chasm becomes a chiasm by introducing an "i,"
or rather an "I," i.e. the personal dimension that is otherwise effaced by both
ontotheology and radical alterity.

Literature Review

Torstein Tollefsen has suggested that "the concepts of participation [*methexis*] and activity [*energeia*] should be linked systematically."[68] Eric Perl's dissertation, "Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in St. Maximus the Confessor" focuses on the first concept, while David Bradshaw's *Aristotle: East and West* follows the second—two texts I reference throughout. Synthesizing their work under the rubric of embedded and enactive participation has been a constructive way of acceding to Tollefsen's injunctive. While Bradshaw's approach is more historical and philological, Perl's is decidedly metaphysical and synthetic. Perl's method continues in his book on Dionysius, *Theophany*, as well as his latest work on Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Aquinas: *Thinking Being.* Though he draws out a coherent metaphysics from the figures he treats (even arguing that the latter four thinkers essentially espouse the same version of Neoplatonism), Perl has been criticized for neglecting the actual historical context and circumstances that lead to certain philosophical insights.[69] For example, he does not consider the *Parmenides* commentary tradition as the framework within which Dionysius makes the breakthrough of conceiving the first principle as both transcendent and immanent by applying it to both the first and second hypotheses. My

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[68] *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*, 7.

[69] See, for example, Christophe F. Erismann, "Book Review: *Thinking Being* by Eric Perl."

approach will be to split the difference between Perl and Bradshaw, providing more historical context than Perl's metaphysical reconstructions permit, but ultimately being guided by a philosophical and theological argument rather than the historical tracing of a single term like Bradshaw. While Perl's focus is primarily on embedded participation, my work is further differentiated from his by emphasis on the existential dimension of enactive participation and person.

This latter elaboration is undergirded by primarily two figures: Nikoloas Loudovikos (especially his *Eucharistic Ontology)* and Christos Yannaras (especially his *Person and Eros*). Loudovikos develops the concepts of dialogical reciprocity and becoming-in-communion that help to fill out my account of enactive participation. Yannaras offers a modern, and in some respects Heideggerean, reconstruction of patristic thought that thematizes the primacy of person and mode of existence (*tropos tes huparxis* [τρόπος της ηυπάρχης]), sometimes to the detriment of essence. This objection notwithstanding, his work offers crucial resources for redressing the imbalance between essence and existence so symptomatic of Western thought. Perl, especially in his most recent work's championing of intellectualism, is a good example of this privileging of essence to the detriment of existence (even if he never succumbs to ontotheology because of his firm grasp of the dialectic of transcendence and immanence).[70]

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[70] *Thinking Being.*

Loudovikos sometimes engages in apologetics, trying to unmoor Maximus from his Neoplatonic roots. He insists, for example, that the *logoi* have nothing in common with Platonic forms, and that their eschatological nature in no way resembles teleology. Again, I wish to nuance his position and show how such notions are both continuous with the Greek pagan tradition but also constitute genuine innovations on Maximus' part (another example of this continuity-and-innovation is apparent in the lineage connecting Proclean theurgy, Dionsyian hierugy-liturgy, and the Maximian cosmic liturgy). By contrast, Perl is sometimes criticized for presenting Maximus as too much of a Neoplatonist.[71] I walk a middle path in these regards.

Melchisedec Törönen's *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor* is unique among scholarship on the issue of Maximus' "pan-Chalcedonianism," in that he disagrees fundamentally with this characterization, arguing for a more basic sense of "union in distinction," of which the Chalcedonian definition is example, not exemplar (this in contrast to something like Tollefsen's *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*). I agree with Törönen insofar as the basic requirement of participation is the dialectic of transcendence and immanence, which is essentially a relation of union-in-distinction.

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[71] See, for example, Marius Portaru, "The Vocabulary of Participation in the Works of Saint Maximus the Confessor."

Paul Blowers has published the most recent and perhaps most comprehensive book on Maximus: *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*. His reading is very much in the theo-dramatic tradition of Hans Urs von Balthasar's seminal *Cosmic Liturgy*, and while it does not ruffle too many feathers in terms of the orthodoxy of its reading, he does enlist Marion to elucidate several points, such as the face of Christ at the Transfiguration considered as saturated phenomena. Interesting for our purposes too, he draws a critique from Andrew Louth for portraying the divine difference in terms of Marion's distance.[72]

However, beyond a few isolated instances, Marion does not play a major role in his text.

In addition to Balthasar's, I mention in passing several of the most foundational texts for Maximian studies. Polycarp Sherwood's *Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor* is crucial for understanding Maximus' metaphysical refutation of Origenism in its historical and literary context. Lars Thunberg's *Microcosm and Mediator* is a comprehensive tome on Maximus' anthropology, while his briefer *Man and the Cosmos* provides a good overview. Larchet's *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* is rigorously researched and presented, though in its endeavor to distance Maximus from Neoplatonism goes so far as to deny him a doctrine of participation.

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[72] As I argued above, the *diastema* is not *between* God and creature. Rather the *diastema* is a feature of created being generally. See Louth's critique and Blowers' response in Blowers et al., "Symposia: Maximus the Confessor."

Two more recent books published by Wipf and Stock merit mention: *Maximus as European Philosopher* and *A Saint for East and West.* As one can gather from their titles, these works aim to consider Maximus in a wider context. In the second book, the essay "Maximus the Confessor's View on Participation Reconsidered" by Vladimir Cvetkovic provides a good overview of previous scholarly approaches to participation in Maximus. I see my project very much in the thrust of the first collection, examining philosophical problems and solutions in Maximus and his lineage that are still pressing to the state of Western thought today.

To this end, I mention now the texts most central to my treatment of the theological turn in continental philosophy. For Richard Kearney, I look to his trilogy "Philosophy at the Limit," which includes *On Stories; Strangers, Gods, and Monsters;* and *The God Who May Be.* The essays and conversations in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (edited by Manoussakis) are crucial, featuring contributions from most of our interlocutors: Kearney, Treanor, Derrida, Caputo, Marion, Manoussakis, Keller, and Desmond. Brian Treanor's *Aspects of Alterity* makes the explicit case for a chiastic-hermeneutic model of relative otherness by comparing the work of Marcel and Levinas and their respective lineages through Ricoeur and Kearney on the one hand, and Derrida and Caputo on the other. For Levinas, I focus on *Totality and Infinity* as well as Jean-Marc Narbonne's reading of him and his forbearers in *Levinas and the Greek Heritage.* Derrida's later work concerns me most, such as "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" and *On the Name,* which examine religious themes, though his earlier essay on Levinas, "Violence

and Metaphysics" is also crucial. The essays and discussions collected in

God, the Gift, and Postmodernism (edited by Caputo and Scanlon) also

inform this study. Finally, *The Idol and Distance* (with a chapter on

Dionysius)*,* serves to connect Marion to much of my patristic material.

I situate my project within the approach initiated by Jorge Ferrer,

Jacob Sherman, and Sean Kelly among others, in the volume *The*

Participatory Turn. Rejecting the paradigm of representation and the

associated Kantian epistemological pessimism, Ferrer and Sherman write:

> Participatory knowing [is] essentially creative, transformative, and
> performative (versus objective and representationalist) [but] should
> not be confused with a rejection of realism or the endorsement of a
> mentalist or idealist worldview. . . .An enactive paradigm of
> cognition in the study of religion, however, frees us from the myth
> of the framework and other aporias of the Kantian two worlds
> doctrine by holding that human multidimensional cognition co-
> creatively participates in the emergence of a number of possible
> enactions of reality. Participatory enaction, in other words, is
> epistemologically constructivist and metaphysically realist.[73]

This study aims to provide a thick history of ideas leading up to such

participation, offering a nuanced account of the different forms it can take.

As will become clear, I believe that premodern ontology can lead us back

to metaphysics *after* the crises of modernity and postmodernity (in

Kearney's anatheistic sense of God *after* God), not in a naïve way, but like

Ricoeur's "second naiveté," a return to childlike wonder and affirmation

after the exigencies of the hermeneutics of suspicion.

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[73] "Introduction" in *The Participatory Turn*, 35. "Postmodern feminism
replaces a masculinized, discarnate, and supposedly universal and autonomous
Cartesian mental ego with a gendered, embodied, situated, and participatory
intersubjective self as the agent engaged in religious pursuits" (13).

Theoretical Perspectives, Methodology, and Scope

This dissertation is a critical reconstruction of the theory of participation of Maximus the Confessor. In order to engage with the past in a way that is meaningful for the present, I offer a robust creative retrieval brought into a twentieth and twenty-first century context. As such, I sometimes use language that Maximus does not, but that language's presence and purpose will be clearly marked. For example, the terms *embedded* and *enactive* participation help us to surmount conceptual ambiguities present in the historical literature, as ancient writers are not always clear about the type of participation in question. Furthermore, it allows for a fusion of horizons, helping to spell out how ancient forms of participation are still significant for us in our times.

The dissertation presents itself predominantly under two interdisciplinary approaches, as (1) a constructive metaphysical and theological argument, and (2) a history of philosophy and theology, that is, a genealogical project which traces participation up through Maximus and beyond—this latter also serving to develop a typology of participation. This is *not* genealogy in the sense of Nietzschean or Foucaldian analyses of power, but a more speculative examination of the various lineages and historical transformations of thought that contribute to Maximus' mature participatory theory. To this end, one omission worthy of note is the liturgical developments of second temple Judaism and early Christianity. The ecclesiological and mystagogical practices engaged in by bodies as well as their political and sociological contexts are

deeply legitimate and integral aspects of the admittedly more theoretical history I trace here. I do not pretend that my account is exhaustive, but it is important, and I would love to see it further complemented by research into these historical-material factors. I employ what Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown term a diachronic dialectic of ideas, examining how each successive thinker offers solutions to the inconsistencies in theory bequeathed by his or her predecessor(s).[74]

To understand the metaphysical problems of participation that Dionysius and Maximus inherit, it is essential to grasp them in their Neoplatonic context—but also essential is the Christian context that allows them to offer innovative solutions to these problems. My method is therefore a combination of textual commentary and philosophical explanation, interpretation, and argument. At times, especially in the latter sections, I occasion forays into hermeneutics, phenomenology, philology, and ecopoetics.

To understand these approaches to participation it is necessary to inhabit the Greek and Christian worldviews in which they develop. To that end, I try to think like a Greek and like a Christian. But when it comes to questions of Platonism versus Christianity, or of actually endorsing the Christian faith, I have no horse in these races. I think the ideas they develop have continuing relevance today, but I have no intent to engage

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[74] Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy,* 14–17. These authors use this method specifically to reconstruct certain aspects of Presocratic thought, since those texts have not come down to us intact. I use the method more broadly to frame the evolution of participatory thought.

in apologetics or adjudicate questions about pagan versus Christian influence. This dissertation is a study of a continuous Christian Neoplatonic tradition in conversation with contemporary issues.

It is primarily a work of philosophy and history of philosophy, and only secondarily a work of theology or historical theology. Aspects of these latter are mainly included according to their pertinence either directly to metaphysical questions, or to the history of philosophy that permitted the answers to those questions. That said, because Maximus' philosophy and theology are so closely knit—offering a comprehensive vision of reality—consideration of the latter is indispensable to understanding the former, and vice versa: Maximus' ontological ethics are inherently theological. The guiding threads throughout the dissertation are the relation of *energeia*, *ousia*, and person (*hupostasis* or *prosopon*) to participation—especially the problems and paradoxes of participation along with their solutions and implications, as they present themselves philosophically, historically, and theologically.

While it is beyond my scope to mobilize the entire modern and postmodern philosophical context of the theological turn in continental philosophy, I aim to show how contemporary thinkers are responding to problems similar to those of Maximus and Dionysius before him. To this end, close readings of their texts alongside Maximus' allow me to scrutinize the argument I have developed in a more current context. As immanent critique, this project examines historical approaches to participation from the inside, finding resources there to address contemporary concerns.

Historical Background

In the first section below, I give a rather detailed account of Greek natural philosophy so that we may better understand the philosophical problems to which Plato proposes the doctrine of participation as solution. This section also puts to work several of my methodological and conceptual tools, such as the diachronic dialectic of ideas and the fourfold senses of being. In an as-yet unpublished companion piece to this dissertation, I examine the entire history of participation from Plato to Dionysius with the same level of detail and attention, following the problems of the paradox of participation and the origins of otherness in their many iterations. The second section below serves as a summary of this companion piece, discussing only the crucial elements necessary in order to understand Maximus' crowning synthesis and solution to those problems.

A Presocratic Prelude

οὐσίας ὑπομενούσης τοῖς δὲ πάθεσι μεταβαλλούσης
The *ousia* persists though altered by its affections.

–Aristotle on the Ionians, *Metaphysics,* 1.983B

There are many reasons why Thales of Miletus (sixth century BCE) was able to pose the first philosophical question—*of what is the world composed*?[75] Chief among these reasons is the relatively swift adoption and

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[75] Of course, we can only infer the question from the answer he gave. See Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy,* 18–37, whose account I follow here.

expansion of alphabetic writing among the Greeks in the eighth century BCE.[76] The simplicity of the Greek alphabet (with only 24 letters) made it easier to learn than a language like Sanskrit (with twice as many letters) or a pictographic, nonalphabetic system, such as those of Egypt or China (with many, many more signs to learn). The Greek invention of democracy dovetailed with this innovation, contributing to broad cultural literacy beyond a restricted "craft-literate" social class of scribes and priests. This communications revolution allowed human language, once only available *sonically*, to be fully embodied *visibly* in the written word. Speech, story-telling, and the recitation of epic poetry are necessarily communal activities, spoken in the here and now and then passing away. However, reading can be performed alone, and at any given time, since the words written on a surface have relative permanence as compared to speech. As Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown conclude in *Greek Natural Philosophy*: "Literacy, thus, gives rise to a more individual than communal identity and to interiority and subjectivity, a consciousness of consciousness itself."[77] Additionally, the temporal transience of audible

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[76] This thesis is developed by Eric Havelock in *The Muses Learn to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*, which draws on Walter Ong's more general account of how human consciousness is transformed in the shift from an oral/aural culture of information transmission to one of writing/reading, in *Orality and Literacy: The Technology of the Word.* More recently David Abram has extended their work in *Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* and grounded it in a wider ecological earth history.

[77] *Greek Natural Philosophy*, 25.

speech is replaced by the spatial permanence of visible words on the page.

Finally, the advent of literacy makes a word available *either* through aural

sound or through written marks, suggesting that the word itself—its

meaning—is independent of its media (speech or writing). This

contributes to a spirit of abstraction, a sense that disembodied ideas can be

beheld by the "eye of the mind."[78] We can summarize these tendencies

under the following schematic binaries:

- Orality → Literacy

- Communal identity → Individual identity (interiority,
  subjectivity, self-consciousness)

- Sound → Vision

- Time → Space[79]

- Transience → Permanence

- Concreteness → Abstraction

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[78] Craft-literate cultures are poised between orality and literacy, with an illiterate majority aware of the seemingly magical power of reading/writing to turn marks into words. This lays the groundwork for religions of the Book (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) but also the Greek Magical Papyri, Hermetica, and other theurgical texts. See Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy*, 23.

[79] Concomitant with and just as sudden as the rise of philosophy was a novel interest in geometry among the Greeks, which they developed from its Egyptian origins as a practical science of earth-measurement (geo-metry) to a formal science of abstract space (Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy*, 26). We can connect this to our earlier mention of the philosopher-kings studying geometry as a means of turning away from becoming toward being.

There is a convergence of tendencies here that are all mutually reinforcing: The written word evokes and engages an abstract, permanent, inner, visual space.[80] Much of the history of philosophy is an attempt to come to terms with these shifts, at times trying to consolidate and finalize the transformations, at times crying for a return to what came before, and often trying to do justice to the whole range of human experience and capacity in between.

These changes were underscored by several distinctive environmental factors, not least of which is geographical location. Miletus, and Greece at large, was a cultural crossroads, both east-to-west between Asia and Europe, as well as north-to-south between Eurasia and North Africa (especially Egypt). An abundance of seaports additionally contributed to trade of all kinds, leading to a rise in economic wealth and ensuing leisure, as well as the cultural transmission of ideas and technologies. All of this was favorable for the invention of democracy and the reception of writing, contributing to the developing aptitudes for reflection.[81]

This brief setting of the stage provides the context in which Thales asked, *of what is the world composed*? Asking the question at all tacitly

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[80] Abstraction and permanence both tend toward univocity. They seem to be two of the basic conditions that give rise to this philosophic tendency.

[81] Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown also bring attention to the role of topography, climate, and landscape, the latter two which underline the importance of light, vision, and beauty in the Greek philosophical vision (*Greek Natural Philosophy*, 36f.).

implies that the world is not simply what I see in front of me—a stone, a daffodil, a dragonfly, a person—but rather made up of something else behind, beneath, or beyond these immediately given things. Only the capacity for abstraction, emerging from two centuries of literacy, permits such a thought as to what is beneath what is there. The question seems further spurred by the tendency to permanence. Spoken words expire and written pages can be burnt, but the idea and meaning of the word itself hovers untouched in the mind's eye. Analogously, stones crumble, daffodils grow, people die, but what floats unchanging behind them? Thales answers that all things are composed of *water*, and Aristotle conjectures that this is because the seeds of all things are moist and because water is the source of growth for moist things.[82] The first philosopher thereby sets the two characteristic standards of the Milesian school:

1. monism—that only one basic kind of stuff exists
2. hylozoism or animism—that this stuff is living or animated matter.

In this way, the Milesian school of Ionian monists seeks to explain the many different things in the natural world as transformations of a

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[82] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 983B–984A. The choice of water as the single principle (*arche*) is also resonant with many Mediterranean myths that Thales would have encountered at the crossroads of Miletus, such as the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, the Hebrew *Genesis*, or a variety of Egyptian myths about Nu, the divine waters of chaos, plus similar portrayals in his native *Iliad* and *Theogony*. See Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy*, 76.

single underlying *ousia*.[83] This is an early version of the problem of the one and the many. Something unfamiliar can be understood as a transformation of something familiar. Something different is in fact the same. If we already know what water is, then we can understand the plant-stuff that grows out of the moist seed as a metamorphosis of the underlying water. Ideally, such a case can be extrapolated to all of reality. But Anaximander, Thales' junior associate, sees a shortcoming in this account, for if everything were water, then everything would be wet. The account, under the pressure of self-coherence from the will to univocity, finally issues in contradiction with the reality it was meant to explain, that is, issues in equivocity. But there is another fundamental issue with Thales' account.

The problem with proposing something like water as the explanatory principle is that if everything is water, then water ceases to have any meaning as a term that marks off a certain substance from everything else.[84] If everything is water, then no thing is water in the way we meant it initially (i.e., water, as opposed to fire or earth). Water thus loses its meaning as a differentiator. Furthermore, since water is one of the many things to be explained, we would need recourse to a yet higher

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[83] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature,* 30.

[84] Perl, *Thinking Being,* 11f.

principle to explain water plus everything else.[85] The problems with choosing one thing from among the many to act as the explanatory principle is that such a thing both ceases to designate itself and cannot explain itself. By replacing water with "the indefinite" (*apeiron* [ἄπειρον]), Anaximander assures that the principle of explanation is not one of the things for which an account is needed. Because of the "water-would-make-all-things-wet" objection, Anaximander reasons that no definite *ousia* can be the first principle (*arche*), rather only the indefinite *apeiron.*

Thales abstracted from given things to propose that a single substance underlies them all. Anaximander accepts the general thrust of monism but critiques the specific proposal of water. He substitutes a *theoretical* entity (*apeiron*) which is said to be *necessary* to explain what comes into being and passes away, but which itself can only be grasped by abstract thought and not directly experienced (though it is still physical).[86]

Anaximander has doubled down on Thales' initial abstraction, furthering the tendencies mentioned above. He has also initiated the diachronic dialectic of ideas, embracing Thales' inquiry and approach but critically emending his key proposal on the grounds of logical weakness in order to offer a better, more comprehensive explanation.

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[85] Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 31.

[86] Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy,* 80.

Thales is clearly exercising the univocal sense of being, as discussed in the introduction. He invokes water to explain how the diversity of many things is in fact one. But when this initial intuition is followed through and made into a theory, the univocity dissolves itself under Anaximander's objections (water cannot explain itself). So, Anaximander, seeking a more robust univocity, has recourse to a principle outside the things to be explained. But by doing so, he reintroduces an equivocity between *apeiron* and the world. There is no true monism if *apeiron* is not joined to the world it explains. How does the indefinite become definite? Anaximander answers: through separation and motion the *apeiron* becomes the four contraries (hot, cold, wet, dry), from which all else is formed.[87]

But Anaximenes, Anaximander's junior associate, again turns a critical eye to his senior. If the *apeiron* is singular to begin with, how does it become fourfold? Either something is added from the outside by separation and motion, in which case there was no monism to begin with, or else the four were somehow present in *apeiron* from the start, in which case too there was no monism to begin with.[88] This is the problem of the origins of otherness, the problem of producing a many from a one. Eager

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[87] Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy,* 83.

[88] Anaxagoras tries to finesse this obvious difficulty by first describing the contraries as qualities of *apeiron,* which are later hypostasized into substances—a problematic chain of reasoning.

to guard the monistic thesis, Anaximenes takes what appears to be a step

backward, but is actually a subtler, dialectical defense of monism. He

proposes *air* as the basic *ousia,* arguing that it transforms into fire when it

is thinned, and progressively into wind, cloud, water, earth, and stone

when it is condensed.[89] By reducing the *qualitative* differences of

Anaximander's contraries to *quantitative* differences—more or less of the

one substance in a given volume—Anaximenes can again affirm

monism.[90] He may have been guided by empirical observations, such as

phase changes, or experiments such as blowing on one's hands through

pursed lips or with an open mouth—the air is cool when condensed in the

first case, but warm when thinned in the second.

However, Heraclitus, while accepting Anaximenes general account

of quantitative transformation, pushes back that air is but one phase-state

of the single substance, not the fundamental stuff itself. In fact, he insists

that the whole Milesian quest is misguided because the true *arche* both *is*

and *is not* water, *is* and *is not* air, and yet neither is it *apeiron,* since it

always appears as something definite, be it water, air, or otherwise. The

arche is one but also many, a one-many from the start. The world is

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[89] Simplicius, *Physics,* 149.28–29, in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, vol. 58.

[90] This reduction of quality to quantity anticipates similar moves in modern physics and in the philosophy of Deleuze. Not until Melissus will a natural philosopher notice that Anaximenes' account presupposes volume, or empty space, thereby vitiating its monism. See Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy,* 159–63.

composed of no one definite or indefinite thing, yet of one thing nonetheless that constantly changes and transforms itself into definite things. The world is in flux, but it is a beautiful, well-ordered flux—a *kosmos* (κόσμος) governed by divine law. The correct question is not, of what stuff is the world composed, but rather, what is the law that governs the cosmos in its dynamism? Heraclitus' answer: the *logos*. Again, Heraclitus has doubled down on the abstractions of his forebears, asserting that the *arche* is not a definite thing like water or air, nor an indefinite thing like *apeiron,* but a law, a pattern, a *rational* principle. Thus, the world is logical, an implicit assumption at work in philosophy from the beginning but only now made explicit. This assumption allows each successive philosopher to think critically about the ideas of his predecessor and improve upon his logical inconsistencies, both in terms of *self-coherence* and in terms of *fidelity to the other*.[91] But Heraclitus has a flair for paradox and for crazy wisdom, as his logic leads him to assert the self-contradictory nature of the world: "changing it rests."[92] While such paradoxes risk devolving into mere anarchism should they too much fray the rhyme and reason of *logos*, Heraclitus at his best keeps things open in

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[91] This too is a feature of literate cultures. Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown remark, "Because they are utterances from on high, while subject to interpretation, myths are beyond rational criticism in a condition of orality. In a condition of cultural literacy, personal expression of individual philosophical opinion invites critical engagement and sets up the all-important process of a diachronic dialectic of ideas" (*Greek Natural Philosophy*, 27).

[92] Heraclitus fragment B84A, my translation.

an almost metaxological way. His paradoxes can seem more sympathetic to the paradoxes of life. But the "open beyond" of the metaxological may always appear threateningly equivocal to the univocal mind. While Heraclitean utterances have a certain fidelity to the other, and certainly a deeper meaning as *muthos* (μῦθος), they undermine the self-coherence of philosophical *logos,* and are thus of limited use for those seeking rational explanations. In its poetic and performative aspects, Heraclitus' text perhaps *resembles* the world more than it does *explain* it. Flux and the Heraclitean *logos* appear to fall short of the full account aimed at by the *arche.* It is left to Parmenides to follow the insight that the world is logical to its painfully logical conclusions. By fully taking in the import of Heraclitus' "discovery" that the world is logical, Parmenides is able to ask anew the Milesian question, but on the level of the logical and metaphysical rather than the physical, on the level of *logos* rather than *phusis.*

<center>*   *   *</center>

> Helplessness guides the wandering thought in their hearts;
> they are carried along deaf and blind alike, amazed, beasts without
> judgment, convinced that to be and not to be are the same and not
> the same, and that the road of all things turns back on itself. . . .
> For things that are not can never be forced to be.

> –Parmenides, *On Nature*[93]

Water and air, as things we already know, were hopeful candidates to explain the rest of the world through metamorphosis. But they run

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[93] 6.5–9, 7.1, translated in Leonardo Taran, *Parmenides*.

aground by being one of the things that needs explaining. *Apeiron* is certainly not one of the many things, yet by its very abstraction, it too ceases to have much explanatory power—especially because of its negative, alpha-privative construction. To say that the indefinite is the *arche* of all definite things does not get much philosophical or scientific work done.[94] Additionally, Anaximenes elucidates the difficulty of

moving from one abstract principle to the multiplicity of the everyday. Explanation of reality as a whole demands recourse to something outside of reality—but if this principle is to do any explaining, it must be intelligible in relation to the things explained. Parmenides hits upon an elegant and simple solution that takes a middle road between these two positions: the one principle that explains and unites the many particulars is Being. Being is not one of the many things, but rather is common and intimate to them all. At the same time, it is neither a negative concept, nor so abstract as to challenge comprehension.

What are these different things of the world? What does it mean to be a thing? It must mean to be *some*thing, for a thing to be itself, for it to be *what* it is, the same as itself, self-identical. What's true of all the many things is that they *are,* that they are themselves, that they exist and have being. These axioms bear witness to what Perl calls *the law of intelligibility*:

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[94] However, later we will see how such a formation is not far from essence being inherently beyond essence, which could be considered in light of the Hegelian notion of productive self-negation.

"to be is to be intelligible."[95] Any attempt to explain the world with the

mind tacitly accepts such an assumption, and Parmenides is its first

witness: "The same thing exists for thinking and for being."[96] This is of

course closely related to Heraclitus' insight that the world is *logos*-

governed, but Parmenides will put it to very different use. He asserts that

what is common to all different things is that they are themselves (self-

identical objects of thought), or just that they *are*; what is the same in all

possible objects of thought and what is common to all different things is

Being.[97] The alternative, that that which is *is not,* must not be thought. It

must not be thought, because it *cannot* be thought. Anything that we think

is necessarily *some thing,* some being. Non-being is unthinkable, and thus

non-existent.

Being underlies and unites all the apparent difference, transience,

motion, and change of the world of becoming, and must therefore, in

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[95] Perl, "Methexis," 13ff.

[96] Fragment B3: τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἔστιν τε καὶ εἶναι. Translated by G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 269.

[97] E. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 6. Plato argues at *Theaetetus* 170A–171C and 183B that if entities do not exhibit self-identity, i.e., fixed natures or properties by which the mind can grasp and identify them, then affirming or denying anything whatsoever about reality becomes impossible; in short, thought itself becomes impossible, including the thought that reality is unintelligible. Likewise, Aristotle asserts at *Metaphysics* 4.1006A that if the law of non-contradiction, as the first law of intelligibility, is not true of reality, then thought is not possible, including the thought that the law of non-contradiction is false. The same critique applies to contemporary instances in which theorists argue for the meaninglessness of reality and thus engage in performative contradiction.

contradistinction, be absolutely one, homogenous, eternal, immobile, and immutable. Being is what truly is, and as the unique explanatory principle of all things, admits the reality of no other. The apparent differences of the world are relegated to what Parmenides calls the "Way of Seeming," to mere illusion, falsity, and non-being—all of which conceal the "Way of Truth" that leads to Being. From the material monism of the Ionians, we arrive at the ideal or conceptual monism of Parmenides. Heraclitus' positing of the *arche* as the rational *logos* aided this transition of increased abstraction. What is at play here is a radical univocity of being, for clearly Parmenides does not think we can apply the term "being" to Being and beings in the same way.[98] If one *is*, then the other *is not*—to say otherwise is to equivocate. Given this choice, faithful to logic, Parmenides affirms the true reality of Being and relegates "The Way of Seeming" to non-being. But even if he had chosen to affirm the reality of all beings instead, we would be back where we started, with the many different things, and no longer able to consider them as a differentiated multiplicity under the shared concept of Being.[99] If the point was to explain the various differences in the world, it seems Parmenides has instead explained them away.

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[98] In modern terminology, the difference between Being and beings is known as the "ontological difference."

[99] Perl, "Methexis," 15.

Parmenides faces the same difficulty as his predecessors: if the principle of all things is eternal, unchanging, and homogenous Being, then from whence the variety of beings that we sought to explain in the first place? This is the problem of the origins of otherness. Even if Being is the only *true* reality, what do we make of the illusion of appearance? Even if appearance is *maya,* it still seems to be something, for it does not disappear, no matter how fiercely we embrace Parmenides' argument. In fact, according to Parmenides' dictum, because we can think it, it *must* be something. The difference and change of the many things must not in fact be pure non-being.[100]

Parmenides' monism undermines the law of intelligibility ("to be is to be intelligible") because it no longer explains the world. Under monism you can have the world or you can have the explanatory principle, but you cannot have your cake and eat it too. It turns out that at least two levels are necessary in order to give the unifying explanation in question.[101] In fact, insofar as Parmenides' theory does seem to explain something about the world, it is only because it possesses a covert second level, "The Way of Seeming," which can be the only source of the world's otherness and difference. But as pure non-being, Seeming can have no commerce with true Being—and so absolute monism leads to absolute

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[100] Perl, *Thinking Being,* 17.

[101] Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 13ff.

dualism, univocity to equivocity. Both Truth and Seeming *are,* but in equivocal senses. Neither monism nor dualism is able to give a coherent account: Pure being without otherness undermines intelligibility, causing monism to fail; but non-being wholly divorced from being also undermines intelligibility, causing dualism to fail.

What the different things in the world have in common is Being. To be is to be intelligible. But intelligibility requires determination and limit, which the one Being does not possess. Rather, determination and limit are characteristics of the different things. A way must be found to accommodate both the principle and the world, unity and multiplicity, the one and the many, Being and becoming, without rejecting either, and without conceiving them on the same ontological footing, that is, as both *being* in the same univocal sense. This is the problem that Parmenides bequeaths to Plato, and to which Plato—wanting to have his cake and eat it too—proposes the theory of participation as a solution.[102]

But before we turn to Plato, we consider one last thinker, the qualitative pluralist Anaxagoras, who attempts to "save the appearances," that is, to reconcile logic with the contrary evidence of sensory

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[102] Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 64.

experience.[103] While accepting several attributes of Parmenidean Being,

Anaxagoras denies that it is homogenous, positing the existence of more

than one kind of Being (thus qualitative pluralism). This innovation will

be decisive for Plato's theory of forms. More important for us immediately

however is his vindication of motion or *kinesis* (κῑ́νησῐς) against the

Parmenidean immobility of Being. Xeno had famously developed his

paradoxes refuting the possibility of movement, in support of the Eleatic

school. Because the arrow must cross half the distance toward the target

ad infinitum, motion is an illusion. Philosophy reaches a critical juncture,

for in more than one way it must contend with Parmenides' banished

statement: *what is is not.* Motion is not really motion. On the one hand,

Parmenides denies the reality of the empirical, sensory evidence for

movement. On the other, Heraclitus denies the empirical evidence for

constancy and permanence. Stability is not really stability but eternal flux.

How did philosophy arrive at such a place, with two sides arguing for

self-contradictory statements that are diametrically opposed? Answer:

abstraction. This is a moment where the tendencies mentioned at the

outset recoil back toward the evidence of the concrete and everyday:

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[103] I consider Anaxagoras here—but pass over Empedocles and Democritus who are ontological pluralists in their own ways—because Plato explicitly connects his project to the Anaxagorean one in a way that resonates with Maximus' approach (becoming is motion toward the Good). While the *Timaeus,* for example, shows affinities to Empedocles and Democritus (where the world's basic elemental constituents are conceived as Platonic solids made from recomposed triangle-atoms), these are less pertinent to the Maximian worldview toward which we are building.

surely there must be a way to affirm that motion and stability are what they seem to be.

Contra Parmenides, Anaxagoras argues for the reality of *kinesis*, and contra Heraclitus, he argues for *kinesis* with a definite beginning, end, and directionality. He addresses the first by observing that *thinking moves.* Parmenides identified thinking and being in the course of his argument for the immobility of Being. But this very argumentation belies its conclusion, for Parmenides denies *kinesis* by *moving* from one statement to another, from premise to conclusion—thus thinking moves. And it moves not only as discursive reason (*dianoia* [διάνοια]) but also as *nous* (νοῦς), the universal force that moves the world from chaos to *kosmos*—its best, ordered, and beautiful end. Why is there something at all? Because it is best, both for itself and for the best's sake. How does something become what is best for it? By being moved. But the best, as reason and cause of the world, cannot have been the *original* state of affairs, but only the *final* state, toward which the world's motion is tending. This is not Heraclitus' eternal flux, but purposeful directedness, a natural aetiology that is a teleology, what Aristotle will call final cause and *entelecheia* (εντελέχεια). Interestingly enough, Anaxagoras calls this movement *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις), a term which will occupy us in later discussions, and indeed his philosophy anticipates elements of Maximus' eschatology.[104]

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[104] J. Manoussakis, "Being Moved: St. Maximus between Anaxagoras and Kierkegaard," 37–44.

This vindication of *kinesis* stresses the horizontal time axis mentioned in the introduction. Directional movement through time from a beginning to a definite end permits Anaxagoras to dialecticize the absolute stasis of Parmenides and the absolute flux of Heraclitus. While Parmenides' sheer univocity ends up falling into an unresolved dualism, Heraclitus' sheer equivocity tends back toward an undifferentiated whole, because without any fixed points of solid ground, everything is in motion and so nothing is in motion. But for Anaxagoras, movement and change are not an illusion, nor a fall from some static, perfect, original state, nor yet an eternal process driven by strife (*polemos* [πόλεμος]) which renders change and rest the same.

In the *Phaedo*, Plato inscribes his project within the Anaxagorean one. As a qualitative plurality, the forms are meant to redress the same issues inherent in Parmenides' singular Being critiqued by Anaxagoras. But unlike the latter, Plato's forms are noetic rather than physical. The less remarked upon is Anaxagoras' sense of *kinesis,* which Plato also adapts to the theory of forms. When the kinetics of Plato's theory are lost and the forms are thought statically, a dual-level Platonism easily emerges. But the dynamism of relationship between participant and participated is what actually explains participation—what else could it mean? Thus, Socrates declares "the beautiful becomes beautiful by the beautiful."[105] The eternal forms appear as the moving image that is time. It is an unfolding between

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[105] *Phaedo,* 100D.

two poles of trans-formation that truly constitutes participation as a dynamic process, that truly joins Being and becoming.[106] The space between Being and becoming is the *metaxu*. This valorization of time and motion will be crucial to the Christian Neoplatonic doctrine of eschatological participation synthesized by Maximus.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

We have traced how cultural literacy and geography contributed to the emergence of philosophy in Greece. Increased capacity for abstraction turned toward the natural world led the Ionian monists to seek an ecological univocity, and they deserve the appellation proto-ecologists.[107] Indeed, their physics was their metaphysics, amidst the invention of metaphysics. At the end of this study, we will engage several contemporary ecological questions, which have a deep affinity with this inaugural natural philosophy and its goal of understanding what unites and connects all things.

A diachronic dialectic of ideas propels philosophy forward via critique and correction of one's predecessors. We have seen increasing degrees of abstraction from thinker to thinker, not least in the shift from a material monism to an ideal monism. But even abstraction and

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[106] But this is forgotten, overlooked, or obscured, perhaps even as early as Aristotle, who sees something of a static two-tiered world in Plato, which he corrects with his own kineticized univocity. I believe the fact that Plato was kinetic to begin with underscores the success of the dialectical synthesis of Plato and Aristotle wrought by the Neoplatonists.

[107] Callicott, Van Buren, and Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy*, 39.

permanence are subject to the rebound of dialectical revision, as evidenced in Anaxagoras' vindication of *kinesis* contra Parmenides. This vindication is an example of how the pendulum swings back, how despite the tendencies inaugurated by literacy, the raw, concrete, transient, and temporal stuff of the everyday pulls the mind back down to the ordinary ground of being.

There is a fundamental tension here between a will to univocity exercised in the practice of philosophy and an equivocal recalcitrance or excessiveness exhibited by the world that philosophy is trying to explain. Each thinker's failure to achieve a consistent monism spurs subtler dialectical attempts to wrap the residual equivocities into a deeper unity. But the failure of several generations to achieve the desired goal must make us wonder what kind of process is underway in the diachronic dialectic of ideas. Is it one that would ever permit of an end, of an adequate formulation of univocity or dialectical wholeness that encompasses and explains the entire world? Or is thought always arriving too late, always outfoxed by an excess of being? Literacy as a communications technology seems to have put the mind into directed motion as indicated by the tendencies outlined at the beginning of this section (toward abstraction, permanence, etc.). This movement of mind is epitomized by philosophy, but philosophy forgets its inmost kinetic nature each time it literally believes it has achieved consummation— fascinated by totality, it forgets the infinity of being before it. In the face of such an impossibility of closure, philosophers have at least four choices:

1. To throw their hands up in the air and abandon the task (this includes mystical or nondual approaches, such as certain moments in Heraclitus where logic and rational explanations are abandoned).

2. To forget, disbelieve, cover over, or disprove the impossibility.

3. To accept the impossibility with despair, like some existentialists.[108]

4. To accept the impossibility without despair, to achieve what can be achieved in between, but to finally resist the temptation for full closure in univocity or dialectical wholeness.

This fourth choice is what it means to think metaxologically and its shining exponent is Plato. We must read Plato under at least two headings: First, as genuinely engaging in the diachronic dialectic of ideas, critically improving upon his predecessors, and attempting to give his own full account of reality; but second, as simultaneously realizing the limits and impossibility of such a project, and inscribing this impossibility in his account. Under the second heading, Plato retains the inaugural motion of mind that lifted the winged feet of philosophy. *Thinking moves* and Plato will keep it in motion, beyond the edges of his text, drawing the spirit of his reader into a striving participation with the endless updraft of *philo-sophia*.

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[108] Sam Mickey has pointed out this possibility to me, what he calls "dark participation" (personal communication, November, 2019).

From Plato to Dionysius the Areopagite

The only way for the one *arche* to unite the many things—without becoming inexplicably divided from them, nor losing its explanatory power by becoming identified with any one of them—is to be *both* different from and the same as them. In order to describe such a paradoxical state of affairs, Plato proposes the theory of participation, tracing a middle path between the extremes of Truth and Seeming. The many appearances are not merely illusion, but partake of true reality insofar as they participate in Being. However, for Plato the realm of Being is not a single homogenous whole but contains multiple forms (*eidoi* [εἴδοι]), which allows it to account for difference. These forms correspond to the different intelligible "looks," or "whatnesses" that the many things present. What is identifiable and identical over the many different horses that I see is the unchanging form of horse (as opposed to all the horses' particularities). Insofar as they are unchanging, we can also say that the forms are eternal, but this simply means that the category of time does not apply to them as intelligible. It would be a mistake to imagine the forms existing in some far off realm for all of eternity. Rather they are the inherent and enduring reality of things beneath their changing appearances—which reality presents itself to our sight and mind when we recognize the form of horse across all its many instances. Recalling Parmenides' dictum, the part that I can *think* of a horse separate from all its particular instantiations, that is, its form, is its *being*. While horses come and go, and come in many shapes and sizes, the idea of horse remains and

remains the same. And so the particular colt—who for a time is a horse, but then grows old, dies, and is one no longer—must participate in that which is always a horse, that is, the form or idea of horse. That which is eternal lends its being to that which changes and decays. The particular horse *has* in an imperfect way what the form of horse *is* perfectly, and in this way is an admixture of non-being and being. Thus Plato goes beyond Parmenides by finding a way to say that *that which is not* in some way *is.* The participant is both *a part of* and *apart from* the participated, generating endless confusion throughout the ages. Drawing on Anaxagoras, Plato imagines this deficiency of participation (*apart from*) as part of a kinetic process ("the beautiful becomes beautiful by the beautiful," *Phaedo,* 100D). This is embedded-ontological participation in the forms. These same forms can be consciously known through contemplation or *theoria,* as a form of enactive-epistemological participation in the *eidoi* of being.

While Aristotle too saw *theoria* as a way of knowing the forms, he saw no need for a theory of participation connecting appearance and being, as he identified all the many things as inherently composites of matter and form.[109] In response to Parmenides' assertion that only eternal Being is real and the world of changing appearances mere illusion, Aristotle develops his theory of potentiality (*dunamis*) and actuality (*energeia*). The relation of matter to form is a relation of potentiality to

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[109] *Metaphysics*, 1.991A: "To say that the forms are patterns, and that other things participate in them, is to use empty phrases and poetical metaphors."

actuality, and thus answers the ontological problem of how the two can be fused in a single substance (*ousia*).[110] Aristotle's teleological approach explains how the same thing moves from a potential state to an actual state, as beams of wood can potentially become an actual house. While matter is only *ousia* potentially (beams of wood), form is *ousia* actually (the house). The true reality of the thing is the final state toward which it tends, as an acorn is destined to become an oak. Instead of the 'vertical' relationship of participation, Aristotle elaborates a 'horizontal' unfolding, according to the *telos* (τέλος) established by form. In the course of thinking through such a theory of change, Aristotle coins the word *energeia*, whose polysemy ("act," "activity," "actuality," and eventually "energy") is important both to Aristotle's usage as well as its evolution therefrom.

While the multiplicity of being (the forms) allows Plato to explain the diverse qualities of things in the world, it simply shifts up one level the problem of identifying a single principle that unifies that multiplicity. In the *Republic,* Plato invokes a Good beyond being (*agathou epekeina tes ousias* [ἀγαθοῦ. . .επέκεινα της ουσίας])[111] to explain and unify the being of the many forms in much the same way that Parmenides invokes the one

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[110] Aristotle develops another distinction between first and second *ousia* (particular and general substance), which in the Christian tradition will eventually become the distinction between *hupostasis* and *ousia* respectively, the former of which will be closely related to *prosopon*.

[111] *Republic,* 509B.

Being to explain and unify the many different things in the world. As noted above, the principle which explains must not be one of the things explained, thus the Good must be "beyond being" in order to explain being. Plotinus explicitly identifies this Good with the One, outlining three metaphysical levels or *hupostaseis*:[112] (1) the One (*to hen* [το ἑν]), (2) the being of the forms or Intellect (*nous* [νοῦς]), (3) the becoming of appearances or Soul (*psyche* [ψυχη]). The many appearances have their limited being by participation in the many forms which are present to them, and the many forms have their being by participation in the One beyond being. But here the problem of participation emerges: How is the One present to the many forms it grounds while remaining One? And in fact, how is a form present to the many instantiations that it animates without being divided among them?[113]

In attempting to answer this question, Plotinus combines Plato's doctrine of participation with Aristotle's notion of activity (*energeia*) to formulate his theory of double-activity or what we call in retrospect

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[112] This use of *hupostasis*, though related, should not be confused with the later Christian use of the same term to designate Aristotle's first *ousia;* see supra fn.110.

[113] While commentators have noted that metaphysically speaking this is a pseudo-problem that turns on a spatial construal of entities that properly transcend the categories of space, historically speaking it was a real problem that Plato at least appears to have entertained in some of his dialogues (notably the *Parmenides*), and that the Neoplatonists take up in earnest. For the former view, see Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature,* 64. For a serious consideration of the historic view, see O'Meara, "The Problem of Omnipresence in Plotinus *Ennead* VI 4–5: A Reply."

emanation.[114] Just as fire has an internal activity of burning that naturally

and effortlessly produces an external activity of heat, so does each

metaphysical level cause the one below it due to its double *energeia*. Here

Plotinus trades on two senses of *energeia* to indicate both what a thing is

(actuality) and what a thing does (activity). The internal activity (*energeia*

tes ousias [ενέργεια της ουσίας]) reflects Aristotle's notion that the

substance (*ousia*) of a thing in the sense of form is *energeia* (actual *ousia,* as

opposed to matter which is *ousia* existing potentially). While Aristotle

means this primarily in the sense of actuality, Plotinus employs the double

sense of *energeia* to emphasize an intrinsically productive activity, one

which effortlessly leads to an external activity (*energeia ek tes ousias*

[ενέργεια εκ της ουσίας]). The internal activity of the One produces an

external activity which *is* Intellect, whose own internal activity of

contemplation of the One produces Soul as its external activity, which in

turn contemplates Intellect and produces Nature.

This scheme serves as a kind of interpretation of Plato's unstated

views on causality, since the external activity is to the internal activity as

image is to archetype. In this way, it is no different than the theory of

participation except that description proceeds from the viewpoint of the

participated cause rather than the participant-particular. What from the

perspective of the subordinate is called participation or imitation may be

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[114] Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect,* 24ff.; Bradshaw, *Aristotle,* 73–96.

explained in terms of activity and emanation from the perspective of the superior.

This emphasis on causality prompts Plotinus and the Neoplatonists to begin to tentatively differentiate embedded-ontological participation from embedded-existential participation—distinguishing that the forms are both cause of quiddity (*whatness*) and cause of being (*thatness*). While the precise ontological status of the Good beyond being was somewhat ambiguous in the Platonic text, the *epekeina* is fully embraced by Plotinus and augmented by the innovation of a positive infinity. In this regard, he may have been influenced by conceptions of infinity stemming from Semitic and mystery religions of the East present in Alexandria.[115]

Thinking trembles in light of such a breakthrough, and even Plotinus himself is sometimes uncertain how to characterize the emergent sense of non-contrastive transcendence. The Milesians attributed divinity univocally as a category within this world, and such an outlook is still very much alive in Plato and Aristotle: the innermost reality of a thing, its share in divinity, is its form. But simultaneously, and as early as Parmenides if not before, a nascent contrastive sense starts to conceive a

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[115] Generally speaking, infinity was an unsettling idea for the Greeks, who saw in its sprawling lack of form something negative rather than divine. If the forms constitute the realm of true being, that which does not admit of definition or form may seem the opposite of divine—unlimited chaos. By contrast, the Semitic and mystery religions espoused a positive conception of infinity. See Sherman, "Genealogy of Participation": "Plotinus thus effected a revolution by integrating the Platonic concept of participation with the spiritual intuitions of a positive infinity, and the result was his fully articulate doctrine of emanation" (89). See also Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person*, 76–79.

transcendence that opposes the world of immanence (e.g., unchanging being versus changing becoming). But when transcendence becomes the opposite of immanence, the former is no longer able to act as the latter's grounding principle (e.g., the indefinite *apeiron* cannot ground the many definite things). And conversely, neither can transcendence ground immanence when it is attributed univocally (e.g., water cannot be the *arche* because it is one of the many things to be explained). Only the non-contrastive sense provides a solution, since only it abides by the paralogic of the paradox of participation (e.g., transcendent absence = omnipresence); the immanent is both *a part of* and *apart from* the transcendent. This is the dialectic of transcendence and immanence. The Plotinian One is both pervasively present as the productive principle and final end of all things, and yet simultaneously withdrawn, impassible, unknowable, unspeakable.

Faced with such an aporia, Porphyry and Iamblichus develop Plotinus' thought in opposite directions, the former emphasizing the coinciding of being with its beyond, while the latter more rigorously demarcates the two into participated and unparticipated terms. Porphyry's innovation prompts generations of commentators to accuse him of betraying the father and succumbing to pantheism by 'telescoping the hypostases.' While Porphyry did, in a way, go against Plotinus and identify the One with *einai* (εἶναι; the infinitive of "being"), he did not identify it with *ousia*, which is sometimes obscured in English translation. Porphyry is attempting to address the origin of otherness and the paradox

of participation. How does the One generate anything if it is completely impassive? How does anything emerge from it if it is always completely withdrawn? Porphyry's solution is to consider the One under two aspects: (1) as totally transcendent first principle; (2) as active, creative wholeness and generator of the cosmos insofar as it is taken as object of intellection by the second principle.[116] The classic objection to Porphyry's dual aspects is that they introduce duality into the One, but I find his instinct to be sound. The One needs to have some commerce with what follows from it if anything is going to follow from it at all. This leads Porphyry to conceive of the *hupostaseis* as interpenetrating, and this interpenetration is what appears to tend toward monism. Just as the One is "everywhere and nowhere" according to the non-contrastive sense, Porphyry describes Intellect and Soul in these same terms. He emphasizes their unity and sometimes risks effacing their difference from one another.[117] But this interpenetration is inherent in participation itself and simply emphasizes one side of the attendant paradox (emphasizing *a part of* rather than *apart from*). While Porphyry accentuates the *a part of* side of the paradox, Iamblichus emphasizes the *apart from* side.

What was a hierarchy-in-unity in Plotinus becomes increasingly stratified in Iamblichus. While Porphyry seems to diminish the

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116 Klitenic Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius*, 34, 43–48; Dillon, "Porphyry's Doctrine."

117 *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*, XXXI.

transcendence of the One by its rapprochement to being, Iamblichus

sharpens his sense of what is beyond being. Or put another way: While

Porphyry stresses the ubiquity of the divine by denying the reality of the

sensible world, Iamblichus introduces *unparticipated* terms (or

imparticipables) to accent the divine transcendence.[118] Each of the

hupostaseis exist first as unparticipated (like a whole *prior* to its parts), then

in its participated form (a whole *of* parts), which is partaken of by a

participant (a whole *in* its parts)—forming the triad, *unparticipated,*

participated, participant. Grades of reality interlock by each level's highest

part participating with a form of the level above it. For example, the

material world is the participant in participated Soul, above which exists

unparticipated Soul on the level of the participant Intellect, which would

begin the series again. What was implicit in Plotinus' understanding of the

One as everywhere (immanent, participated) and nowhere (transcendent,

unparticipated) has been made explicit and formalized. What was

dynamic in Plotinus' theory of double-activity has been made more static

and reified. At the top of the series, Iamblichus places an ineffable One

before the unparticipated One.[119] So to what was the transcendent aspect

of an already transcendent principle, a further transcendence has been

added! While the unparticipated terms resist the monistic tendency and its

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[118] Lloyd, "Later Neoplatonists," 298.

[119] Damascius, *Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles,* 43, 44, 51.

attendant effacement of transcendence, this last point also shows the regress that emerges from the naming and formalization of the unnameable.

The imputation above that *grades of reality interlock* should give us pause, because this sounds a lot like interpenetrating *hupostaseis*. In fact, Iamblichus is wrestling with the same paradox of participation as Porphyry, casting its two contradicting logical statements as ontological entities. The unparticipated is that side of the paradox in which the participant is *apart from* its cause, while the participated term is the side in which it is *a part of* its cause. But Iamblichus' resolution also entails placing the unparticipated and participated terms on different levels of reality, which does not address the relation between the two and obscures the fact of participation itself. As the Neoplatonic system develops, this relation will be addressed by further mediation; but without facing the paradox of participation head-on, only an infinite regress will result. The cause must be participated and unparticipated at the same time and on the same level of reality. Participation as such always implies this state of affairs insofar as the participant becomes like the participated without becoming identical to it. Directly, or more likely via the Cappadocians, Porphyry's solution may have been relayed to Dionysius.[120]

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[120] Klitenic Wear and Dillon suggest that Dionysius most likely encountered Porphyry's thought via the Cappadocians, in *Dionysius,* 10, 15–50.

Following Iamblichus, Proclus states that the One is definitively unparticipated, but that it produces a series of henads (*henas* [ἑνάς]) or unities, which are its participated terms. This clarifies an ambiguity in Plotinus, who sometimes says the One is participated (V.3.15, V.5.10), but at other times denies that it is a genus (VI.2.9–10) and even asserts that the "ones" predicated of the forms are not the One itself (VI.2.11).[121] This last claim provides the basis for Proclus' doctrine of henads, which are a bridge between the One and the forms. Like Iamblichus' division between unparticipated and participated, the split between the unparticipated One and the participated henads reflects the two contradictory moments of the paradox of participation (*apart from & a part of*). Put otherwise, it reflects the dialectic of transcendence and immanence: the principle's transcendence is the condition of its ubiquitous immanence in the particulars it grounds, but here the two moments have been explicated or reified. The unparticipated One is transcendent condition while the participated henads are immanent universals. In this light, we need not understand the henadic doctrine as a hopeless attempt at mediation, as it is often construed.[122] Rather it is an attempt to articulate the non-contrastive transcendence of the One, which entails the paradox of participation. However, this is in tension with the contrastive

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[121] See supra, fn.113.

[122] See, for example, Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 12ff.; Perl, "Methexis," 36–42; for a contrasting view see Milbank, "Sophiology and Theurgy," 75–78.

transcendence implied by the sequential *hupostaseis,* which pulls the henads in the direction of mediating terms. When the henads are conceived as mediators, the paradox is annulled, but so is participation itself, which leads to an infinite regress. I submit that scholarly readings of late Neoplatonism which emphasize mediation, and thus contrastive transcendence, are simplifying the way these philosophers are in fact authentically grappling with the paradox of participation that ensues from non-contrastive transcendence. But at the end of the day, *the elaborate metaphysical systems of Late Neoplatonism do no more to explain the origins of difference than Parmenides did.*

However, on the front of enactive participation, interesting developments take place with regard to *energeia,* beginning in the magical and hermetic traditions that inform the *theourgia* (θεουργια) so important to Iamblichus and Proclus. For Aristotle, *energeia* can mean act, activity, and actuality. Though he employs the term primarily in relation to terrestrial things, he also applies the term in special ways to the heavenly spheres and Prime Mover. Plotinus expands these metaphysical applications in his theory of double-activity. But in the pagan religious traditions of the first to fourth centuries, the term begins to take on the sense of "active power," "cosmic force," and eventually "energy," among religious writers. The divine "energy" is understood as a reservoir of cosmic power with a certain fluidity that allows it to be shared or participated. This popular usage then joins the philosophic stream through Iamblichus' incorporation of theurgy. Though contemplation

(*theoria*) is still considered a means of enactive-epistemological

participation, it is subordinated to this new form (enactive-synergic

participation). It is no longer just the mind that allows the philosopher to

achieve oneness (*henosis* [ἕνωσις]) with the divine principle, but the whole

person who through ritual enactment becomes a conduit for the

divinization of the cosmos at large.[123] This has radical consequences for

the practice and goals of philosophy in general and also serves as a bridge

to the rituals of Christianity.

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Meanwhile, Philo lays the groundwork of a Jewish-Platonic

synthesis, adapting personal and apophatic themes of revelation to the

Greek *logos* cosmology. His *ousia-dunameis* distinction delineates the

boundaries of human knowledge with regard to the divine, while a

theology of creation contributes to the emerging sense of existential

participation. Philo develops the Platonic notion of enactive-

epistemological *theoria* by transferring it to contemplation of Scripture and

elaborating a tradition of allegorical interpretation. He gives central

importance to the *Logos* (Λόγος) as the principal power of God, which can

be seen at work both in the natural world and in sacred text. The later

identification of the *Logos* with Christ, by thinkers like Justin Martyr,

Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, continues the ongoing synthesis.

Logos as the incarnational principle common to Christ, the cosmos, and

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[123] Bradshaw, *Aristotle,* 119–152.

holy Scripture, will be central to Maximus' understanding of both embedded and enactive participation.

Less concerned with metaphysics or systematic theology, Paul, in step with pagan religious traditions, espouses a form of enactive-synergic participation in which the creature becomes a co-worker with God. We can join our human energy stream to that of the divine, making the world the body of which God is the soul.

In a moment we will examine some of the heresies addressed at the Council of Nicaea. In order to better understand their import, let us first consider how Christian creation theology enhances the non-contrastive sense of transcendence. Robert Sokolowski writes:

> Christian theology is differentiated from pagan religious and philosophical reflection primarily by the introduction of a new distinction, the distinction between the world understood as possibly not having existed and God understood as possibly being all that there is, with no diminution of goodness or greatness. . . .No distinction made within the horizon of the world is like this, and therefore the act of creation cannot be understood in terms of any action or any relationship that exists in the world. . .if "being" is the term that philosophers use to name that which is articulated in the sameness and otherness that reason can register, if "being" is used for the world as last horizon, it is appropriate that another term, like "*esse*," be introduced for use in the "whole" made up of God and the world, as a name for what is articulated in the identities and differences occurring in this new context.[124]

The non-contrastive relation between transcendence and immanence is accented and clarified by the idea that it is a relation that did not have to

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[124] Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason,* 23, 33f. Sokolowski coins the term "the Christian distinction" to describe this sense of non-contrastive transcendence. David Burrell expands it to the "Jewish-Christian-Muslim distinction" in *Faith and Freedom*, 220.

exist. The dependence relation between the two both stresses the non-commensurability of their levels while also indicating their non-separability. The two did not inhabit a common space within which they then became related; rather the space of immanence itself is contingently created by that which remains its condition of possibility, thereby always exceeding the breadth of the possibility itself—but also creating and sustaining that breadth and thereby traversing it. The creature is always preceded, exceeded, and accompanied by its creator (no less than thinking is always preceded, exceeded, and accompanied by being). The ever-present threat to this delicate balance is always over-emphasizing the first two (preceded-exceeded) to the detriment of the third (accompanied), or vice versa. If pagans stereotypically risk a univocal pantheism by holding their gods too close, the *creatio ex nihilo* risks an equivocal dissociation of divine and human. The divine difference is unlike any other difference because it marks off being from its beyond. Yet that beyond must not be thought in spatial, temporal, or any other terms originating in created being—that is, by no terms or concepts whatsoever. But we inevitably do so if we focus on the negation and end up placing the divine "not here." Thus, we come full circle to God's omnipresence, but must again resist the risk of pantheism. In this way pan*en*theism expresses the dialectic of transcendence and immanence. The situation articulates the paradox of participation: the world is *a part of* its source, but is not identical to it (≠univocal pantheism); the world is *apart from* its source, but not in spatial-temporal terms (≠equivocal dissociation). Rather the two are in dialectical-

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analogical relation, but not such that the source's preceding and exceeding could ever be annulled, neutralized, or overcome—and are thus metaxologically held open. While the pagans were already beginning to think non-contrastive transcendence, creation theology certainly helps to sharpen the idea.

With the full articulation of *creatio ex nihilo*, the human is created out of nothing by God, upon whom it depends wholly for its existence. Creature and creator are not related by kinship or continuity, but divided by an ontological rift, a fundamental disparity of being.[125] One must then ask how to situate entities such as the Christ-*logos* and the Holy Spirit in relation to this rift. As intermediate deities, they tend too much toward the great chain of being, while their full identification with the Godhead threatens to subsume their particular role and identity. Christianity, in its universalism, attempts to embrace both its Judaic-monotheistic heritage while also incorporating Greek influences, as in the Christ-*logos*. The doctrine of the Trinity emerges to address such issues.

At the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), ongoing debates about creation and the Trinity come to a head, prompting the Christian faith to stake out their metaphysical positions with regard to embedded participation:

1. The world is created from nothing;
2. while the Word (*Logos*) is generated from God.

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[125] Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 75ff.

The first clause underlines the *creatio ex nihilo* doctrine against both the Greek emanationist view that the world is generated *ex deo*, as well as any lingering notions of *ex materia* creation, Jewish, Christian, or pagan. The second clause rebuts the heretical Arian view that the Christ-*Logos* was created from nothing and is thus a creature. Against Arius, Athanasius proclaims that to be a creature is to exist by participation, but that Father and Son are coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial (*homoousios* [ὁμοούσιον]), meaning they share the same *ousia*. Athanasius argues that whatever activity Scripture attributes to one member of the Trinity, it also attributes to the others: "the activity [*energeia*] of the Trinity is one."[126]

From this unity of *energeia*, Athanasius infers the members' equal divinity or identity of essence (*ousia*). This inference from *energeia* to *ousia* is also present in Philo, and like him, Athanasius does not claim to thereby know God's *ousia*. Rather the distinction becomes a metaphysical tool for navigating what can and cannot be known and said about God, and for distinguishing what God does from what God is.

The Cappadocian fathers develop a related distinction between essence (*ousia*) and person (*hupostasis*) to distinguish and refer clearly to

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[126] *Ad Serapionem* I.31 (PG 26.600C; throughout the present study "PG" refers to *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*), translated by Shapland in *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*.

God's oneness and threeness.[127] God is one *ousia* but three *hupostaseis* or

persons.[128] When the distinction is applied to terrestrial phenomena, we

say, for example, that the *hupostasis* is the particular person Socrates, while

his *ousia* is the general essence human. The *hupostasis* expresses the

energeia of the *ousia.*

These metaphysical distinctions allow Gregory of Nyssa to

conceive the ungraspable divine infinity alongside the tradition of the

knowable divine names by applying the *ousia-energeia* distinction to

separate them. While the *ousia* is unknowable, the *energeia* can be known

and experienced. Though accepting the Plotinian notion of intrinsic

activity, the Cappadocians conceive it as definitively other-directed in the

act of creating and sustaining the cosmos. They can no longer equate

God's *energeia* with his *ousia*, as Plotinus had. Instead they safeguard the

unknowability of God by dropping this identification. The *energeia* do not

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[127] Before the Cappadocians, in Origen for example, *ousia* and *hupostasis* are sometimes used interchangeably. In Neoplatonism, of course, *hupostasis* is employed in a quite different manner altogether. *Prosopon* is often used interchangeably with *hupostasis,* although a close look at the patristic literature reveals nuances between the two, especially with regard to human versus non-human beings; see G. Kapriev, "The Conceptual Apparatus of Maximus," 176f.

[128] Basil of Caesarea, for example, states: "The distinction between *ousia* and *hupostasis* is the same as that between the general and the particular; as, for instance, between the animal and the particular man. Wherefore, in the case of the Godhead, we confess one essence or substance so as not to give variant definition of existence, but we confess a particular *hupostasis*, in order that our conception of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may be without confusion and clear" in *Letters* 236.6 (PG 32.884), translated by González in *A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*, 307.

constitute but only manifest the *ousia*, making it present in an active and dynamic way via the *hupostasis* of the Christ-*Logos*.

The divine names as *energeiai* become distinct uncreated realities, rather than simply operations or activities. Since God is unnamable in his *ousia*, if he is to be "goodness," "wisdom," or even "God," then the *energeiai* must be real namable aspects of God, not simply his actions. God's acts of self-manifestation are not interventions separate from himself, but the same God appearing under a certain form.[129] The divine *energeiai* are not identical to the divine *ousia*, and yet are still God himself. Otherwise, the Athanasian inference from unity of *energeia* to unity of *ousia* would be invalid, because the Father could act through the Son without being the same in essence as him. Indeed, this is just what the Neo-Arians declare.[130]

The Neo-Arians assert that because God is simple, his unbegottenness is not a part of him but his very essence.[131] Furthermore, some names are not merely conventional but have a special status,

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[129] One example of this is the light that appeared to Moses at the burning bush: "This truth, which was then manifested by the ineffable and mysterious illumination which came to Moses, is God. . .For if truth is God and truth is light—the Gospel testifies by these sublime and divine names to the God who made Himself visible to us in the flesh—such guidance of virtue leads us to know that light which has reached down even to human nature" (*Life of Moses*, II.19–20, translated by A. Malherbe and E. Ferguson, 59).

[130] Bradshaw, *Aristotle*, 164ff.

[131] Bradshaw, *Aristotle*, 156–60.

bringing out the very nature of a thing (*kata phusis* [κατά φύσις]).[132] This

is what prompts the Cappadocian rebuttal that only the *energeiai* are

denoted by the divine names. But the Neo-Arian, Eunomius, holds that

the intellect can know the *ousia* of the Father as "unbegotten" or

"ungenerate" (*agennetos* [αγέννητος]), not merely through privation, but

as positive knowledge.[133] Such an unbegotten essence cannot be shared

with the begotten Christ, who is thus not God. Eunomius proclaims that

the *energeia* of the unbegotten Father includes his begetting of the only-

begotten Son, and thus reasons that because the *energeia* is not shared,

neither is the *ousia.* At stake here is the original Arian issue of the

subordination of the Son, and the more general question of the proximity

of God.

 The controversy is sometimes presented with the Neo-Arians cast

as kataphatic theologians claiming knowledge of the divine essence.[134] But

what is a bit puzzling, and often noted, is that both parties are arguing for

the transcendence of God. For knowing the divine essence as unbegotten

delivers hardly any kataphatic content whatsoever, all but leaving the

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[132] Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence II*, 147f.

[133] Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 235.

[134] See for example Carabine, *Unknown God*, 235, and William Franke, *On What Cannot Be Said*, 141.

divine transcendence intact.[135] In fact, the Neo-Arians are not overly

kataphatic but staunchly apophatic, and furthermore, anti-mystical for the

same reasons. Their God is completely inaccessible, with no possibility of

relationship or communion, not even of a paradoxical variety.

Gregory insists that such transcendental exile would limit the

omnipotent God, whose nature is to be in relation with his creation. It is

precisely because he is unlimited and without boundary that God

pervades all things, omnipresent. Rather than insisting on the

unknowability of God in opposition to the Neo-Arians' kataphasis,

Gregory's position can be understood as an attempt not to be outflanked

by their radical apophasis. This underscores a dialectic in which that

which is the most transcendent is the most immanent.[136] Gregory wants

both distance and immediacy. He holds this dialectic in tension rather

than submitting to a flat apophaticism that merely negates.[137]

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[135] Charles Stang writes "Knowledge *of* the unbegotten God amounts to knowledge *that* the unbegotten God is unapproachably remote, incomparably other" in "Negative Theology from Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the Areopagite," 169.

[136] Stang, "Negative Theology," 167ff.

[137] See for example, *Contra Eunomium*, II.138 (Karfíková), translated in Stang, "Negative Theology," 170 [II.264]:

> Whatever be the nature of God, he is not to be apprehended by sense, and he transcends reason, though human thought, busying itself with curious inquiry, with such help of reason as it can command, stretches out its hand and just touches his unapproachable and sublime nature, being neither keen-sighted enough to see clearly what is invisible, nor yet so far withheld from approach as to be unable to catch some faint glimpse of what it seeks to know.

Gregory's victory in this debate shows how a rigorously non-contrastive sense leads to greater intimacy of relation with the divine (transcendence in fact equals omnipresence). If univocal attribution of divinity and the contrastive sense were the only games in town, a religion of the Book would have to opt for the latter to avoid idolatry. But in fact, while the former is an idolatry of substance, the latter represents an idolatry of concept, applying spatial and physical categories to a metaphysical deity.

Examples such as this one bring out what is at stake in the contemporary debate over absolute versus relative alterity. If alterity is as radical as thinkers like Levinas, Derrida, and Caputo make it out to be, then the other becomes completely inaccessible, with no possibility of relationship or communion, just like the God of the Neo-Arians. Gregory offers us a metaphysically rigorous defense of how distance and intimacy can be in a non-competitive relationship in the context of the dialectic of transcendence and immanence—a defense that can be applied not just to one's relation with God, but with every other. A radically transcendent One led the Neoplatonists into aporia and hyperbolic regress no less than absolute alterity does in our day. How can an absolutely separate principle be participated? How can a wholly other even enter my field of experience?

To say a few more words about his approach, Gregory elaborates the Athanasian identification of creaturehood and existing by embedded participation in the context of his theory of metaphysical motion and

diastema (διάστημα). To be created is to participate is to be in motion through the metaphysical interval (*diastema*) that is creation. Gregory then connects this embedded framework to new articulations of enactive participation, in part by joining Athanasius' Trinitarian usage of *energeia* to the Pauline enactive usage. *Epektasis* (ἐπέκτασις) is a term for Gregory's idea of perpetual growth in goodness. As we develop in virtue, we participate more and more deeply in the divine, moving toward it through the *diastema* of creation. But because the uncreated God transcends the metaphysical interval of creation, we only approach God through a kind of infinite motion, that "is both a standing still and a moving."[138] In this way Gregory's dialectic of transcendence and immanence articulates a simultaneous distance and intimacy with God. The imparticipable essence of God safeguarded, the creature is free to become more and more like God through enactive participation in God's *energeia.* These notions underscore the foundational eastern concept of deification (*theosis* [θέωσις]) or deific participation. The distinctions developed by Gregory and his fellows will have far-reaching consequences for Maximus' vision and especially his contributions to the Neo-Chalcedonian Christological debates. In all these ways, the Cappadocians construct for Christianity a metaphysical edifice comparable to the Greeks', paving the way for the innovations and solutions of Dionysius and Maximus.

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[138] *Life of Moses*, II.243, translated in Malherbe and Ferguson, 117.

While we have had occasion to note some aspects of the Greek-Christian synthesis, it is with Dionysius that it reaches unprecedented depth and elegance of expression. Here I restrict myself to addressing the solution Dionysius offers to the problem of participation, as well as the ways he draws together modes of embedded and enactive participation. Dionysius writes:

> [God] is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love [*agape* (ἀγάπη)], and by yearning [*eros* (ἔρως)], and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself.[139]

> "He is all things in all things and he is no thing among things. He is known to all from all things and he is known to no one from anything."[140]

> "The Being of all things is the divinity beyond Being."[141]

These passages demonstrate unequivocally Dionysius' understanding of the necessity of the dialectic of immanence and transcendence, which is the only coherent response to the paradox of participation. The first principle, God, is both everywhere and nowhere, both participated and imparticipable, both being and beyond-being. Historically this is the culmination of the *Parmenides* commentary tradition, with Dionysius applying both the first and second hypotheses to the first principle. He

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[139] *Divine Names*, 712B, translated by Luibheid, 82.

[140] *Divine Names,* 872A, translated by Luibheid, 109.

[141] *Celestial Hierarchy*, 177D, translated by Luibheid, 156.

may have been prompted to do so by similar Porphyrian propositions mediated to him by the Cappadocians. Metaphysically speaking however, this was from the beginning the only possible solution to the problems arising from the Ionian and Parmenidean attempts to assert a doctrine of the unity of being. If all the many things in the world have a first principle which unites, explains, and grounds them, then that principle must be wholly present to each thing, which can only be accomplished by it wholly transcending all things. Only this solution can shore up participation, maintaining the communion between its two necessary levels by maintaining their distinction. The alternatives are a pantheistic monism that collapses the levels or an outright dualism that explains nothing. Dionysius' solution, as an unconfused union of world and source, anticipates Maximus' application of such union-in-distinction to myriad levels of reality (what is sometimes called his "pan-Chalcedonianism" in light of the union-in-distinction of Jesus Christ's two natures through the one *hupostasis*, the *Logos*).

Dionysius' treatment of the divine names can be understood as a familiar version of embedded-ontological participation. God is the very being, life, and wisdom in which we participate. This is God's immanent side. But God is also called source of being, source of life, and source of wisdom, insofar as God simultaneously transcends all things and cannot be identified with any of the being things. Dionysian hierarchy, meaning "sacred order," presents the great chain of being as grounded in the graded perfections of the divine names, as an image from its archetype. This hierarchy not only provides us with our very being, in an embedded

fashion familiar from the Greeks, but is also a means of enactive illumination.[142] By going more deeply into the hierarchy, which means fully assuming our place in it, we become conduits of the divine *eros* that originates, animates, and returns all things to God. In this way, Dionysius shows how embedded and enactive participation are two sides of a coin. By tuning in to the divine gift of being, we harmonize ourselves as part of the great symphonic theophany of the cosmos. This anticipates Maximus' ontological ethics by connecting *how* we are in the world to *what* we are— or more precisely what we *may* be. Our ontological being is bestowed as part of the sacred order, and it is only by acting according to that order that we live fully in harmony with God's invitations for our being.

Dionysius thematizes two further modes of enactive participation: Hierugic participation applies the principles of theurgy to the Christian liturgy, while *agnosia* (ἀγνωσία) indicates a kind of transepistemological enactive participation in the unknown God (not dissimilar from *henosis,* in fact). While Dionysius multiplies the modes of union with the source, he does not address the long-standing problem of the origins of difference. To resolve that problem, we now turn to Maximus.

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[142] I argue this against Christian apologists like Andrew Louth who deny that our being is sourced by the hierarchy, in an effort to distance Dionysius from his Neoplatonic sources. Louth and others claim that *only* illumination is provided by the hierarchy (e.g. *Denys the Areopagite*, 85ff.), but this is both metaphysically unsound and textually unjustified as argued by others such as Timothy Knepper (*Negating Negation*, 19) and Eric Perl ("Methexis"), who emphasize a Neoplatonic reading. Application of the embedded-enactive distinction shows how both readings can coexist and actually complement one another.

Part 1: Maximus the Confessor and the Cosmotheandric Liturgy of

Incarnation

We arrive now at Maximus the Confessor, who integrates much of the participatory thought we have encountered and responds to the insistent problem of the origins of otherness. In Maximus we find a thinker who brings coherence to the long history of Platonism and Neoplatonism in light of pressing Christian concerns, especially those concerning Christ. While his theological philosophy owes much to Dionysius, Maximus' Christology is his distinctive signature, bringing a balancing affirmation to Dionysian negation and apophasis. But what is more, his thought is still relevant to contemporary concerns, as we will explore in Part 2. As a preview, let us note how Christology, rather than being the purview of a single, arbitrary religion, can be understood more broadly as answering the basic question of how an effect can be both continuous and discontinuous with its cause (the paradox of participation). Christ is both the same as God, but also the same as the creature and thus wholly different from the creator. In this sense, Christology is like analogy, insofar as both address how something can simultaneously be the same as and different from something else, *a part of* and *apart from* it. In Part 2 we will pivot from the question of our similitude and difference from God to the question of our similitude and difference from one another—a question deeply relevant to the structure and nature of interpersonal ethics.

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"If the poles are denied, there is no longer anything in the middle."

"For it is not by denial of opposition, as some think, that a mediating position is affirmed."

". . .each rather confirming the other by means of each other."

–Maximus the Confessor[143]

1.1: Introduction

Maximus the Confessor is a metaxological thinker. Not since Plato has the in-between been so clearly articulated and so central to the philosophy in question. All levels of Maximus' worldview bear the stamp of a coinherence of opposites, of a union-in-distinction that robustly preserves the difference of the principles in question while thoroughly uniting them to one another. Rather than any mixture, fusion, or average, this is a mutual interpenetration of discrete poles whose demarcation creates a space of joined relation between them. Maximus is fond of two images which help to convey this concept: air permeated by light, and iron penetrated by fire.[144] When air is permeated by light, the two become united such that it is not possible to localize one of them without the other

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[143] *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, PG 91.348A; *Ambiguum* 5.1056D; 5.1056A, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 238, 256. All references to the *Ambigua* indicate the number of the specific *Ambiguum,* followed by a period, then the section number in PG 91 (*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*). Other references to Maximus' primary texts include the PG section number in parentheses.

[144] For example, see *Ambiguum* 7.1073D–76A. All references to Maximus' *Ambigua* refer to *On the Difficulties of the Church Fathers,* translated by N. Constas, except where noted.

being present in the same place. Yet they maintain their distinct identities, not becoming an amalgam or blend. Similarly, iron in a forge takes on the whole nature of fire into its whole self, becoming hot and glowing red throughout its full volume, while still maintaining its distinct shape and contour. The iron does not take on only some of the fire's qualities, but all of them, and all through its entire substance. Neither does the iron somehow copy the fire, or become like the fire of its own accord, but rather it receives the whole fire into its whole being. Yet both remain unconfused and discrete: they do not create some new third entity. Rather, they are one thing, unmixed. Hans Urs von Balthasar writes: "In a single thrust with a red-hot sword, I can still distinguish in the wound what is the effect of cutting and what of burning."[145] Maximus also refers to the joining of soul and body in a single person to illustrate this notion of reciprocal containment. It is impossible to mark off where my body ends and my soul begins. Rather, Travis is equally both of them. We see such complementarity in a similar Aristotelian point: Travis, or any given thing, is matter and form—both together inseparably but discretely. We never encounter prime matter or disembodied forms, only actual singular things with discernable aspects.[146] We will examine this broad sense of

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[145] *Cosmic Liturgy,* 261.

[146] Aristotle ambiguously uses *ousia* to refer both to the form alone as the true reality of a thing, but also to the whole matter-form composite, i.e., the actual singular thing as reality, which, as we will see, Maximus would definitely call *hupostasis* in contrast to *ousia* as shared kind, e.g., human.

union-in-distinction with regard to a number of concept-pairs in the
Maximian oeuvre:

- *Ousia* and *energeia*

- *Ousia* and *hupostasis/prosopon*

- Principle of nature (*logos tes ousios*) and mode of existence
  (*tropos tes huparxis*)

- Divine and human natures (*ousiai*) of Jesus Christ (united by the
  hupostasis of the second divine Person)

- Creature and God

- Universal and particular

- Intelligible and sensible

- Cosmos and God[147]

The purpose of the oppositions emerges at a higher level: the apparent
contrast ultimately reveals more deeply their communion.[148] Difference is
necessary for relationship. As will become clear in this section, each pair is
a reflection or echo of the union-in-distinction of the paradox of
participation, the dialectic of immanence and transcendence, the
Dionysian God who is both being and beyond being, the non-contrastive

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[147] Cf. *Centuries of Various Texts,* 2.64 (PG 90.1244C): "and also between
intellect and sense, heaven and earth, things sensible and things intelligible,
nature and *logos*—between these too there is a spiritual principle of relationship
giving them a unity with each other" (translated in Loudovikos, *Eucharistic
Ontology,* 124).

[148] Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology*, 124.

sense. While the pairs are not reducible to these, they are all structurally analogous or isomorphic as instances of unconfused union.

Balthasar alludes to Dionysius when he writes: "Dialectical movement does not grasp God. It must simply limit itself to the statement of opposites: in one and the same moment, God 'goes forth out of himself and remains within himself.'"[149] This limits knowledge of the divine to the kataphatic and apophatic theologies, to the aporia of participation's paradox. God is known in all things and yet God is none of them, finally remaining unknown. The dialectic is never overcome or absolutized but metaxologically held open. Yet as with the theurgists, what we cannot know, we can nevertheless perform or enact. In this vein, Nikolaos Loudovikos writes: "Apophaticism, for Orthodox theology, is a spiritual situation, a position we are in, a state of dialogical participation in divine actuality and not a sterile gnosiological abstinence."[150] This epistemic limit actually prompts a lived and worldly enactive participation of the whole person. While thinking is always outflanked by both being and the divine, Maximus' ontological ethics of becoming describe and prescribe how we are and may be in harmony with both.[151]

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[149] *Cosmic Liturgy*, 90, referring to *Divine Names*, 712B.

[150] *Eucharistic Ontology*, 235.

[151] This limiting of epistemology in favor of an ontological understanding makes Maximus pertinent to contemporary returns to ontology in the wake of the disappointing outcomes of modern epistemic dominance.

Balthasar asserts that Maximus "corrects Neoplatonic mysticism, confirms the Aristotelian metaphysics, and prevents the Origenist-monastic strain from becoming simple escapism."[152] While these are helpful generalizations, we must qualify and push back against the first two. Maximus can only be said to correct the overly intellectual, up-and-out mysticism sometimes attributed to Plotinus, and not the cosmic theurgy of Iamblichus. Though this is not a completely fair characterization of Plotinus, his doctrine of the undescended soul can potentially lead to world-denying and escapist tendencies, as evidenced in moments by Porphyry. For Iamblichus and Maximus, by contrast, the cosmos is suffused with divinity and the embodied soul participates in the circulation of universal divine *eros.* What Iamblichus corrects in Porphyry, Maximus corrects in Origen, each embracing a world-affirming, synergic co-working of divine and human wills.

The second point Balthasar makes refers to Aristotle's championing of motion and change, which are also positively reevaluated by Maximus in light of their depreciation by Origen. Balthasar elaborates elsewhere:

> As soon as motion (*kinesis*) is no longer simply seen (in Platonic fashion) as a sinful falling away but is seen (in Aristotelian fashion) as the good ontological activity of a developing nature, the highest ideal [for existence] can also be transformed from a Gnosis that conquers the world by seeing through its reality into a loving, inclusive affirmation even of finite things.[153]

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[152] *Cosmic Liturgy,* 73.

[153] *Cosmic Liturgy,* 135.

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Again, this description is helpful overall, but is an unfair characterization of Plato, who we saw inscribes his project within the Anaxagorean vindication of *kinesis.* All things *are* because it is best for them, and all things become what is best for them through participatory motion toward the Good. We will see how this statement applies to Maximus no less than to Anaxagoras and Plato. But Maximus goes further than Plato and Aristotle in his elaboration of a volitional subject who willingly chooses (or not) to move eschatologically toward the Good.

This is Maximus' ontological ethics, which also fulfills the Platonic quest to give virtue a firm metaphysical foundation. Confronted by the moral decline and sophistic relativism of his age, Plato sought to equate knowledge and virtue. If only we could know the Good, we would possess the proper standard by which to act ethically. But sometimes we do things we know to be wrong, and even manage to convince ourselves that those things are right. The marriage of ethics and epistemology leaves something to be desired, and in our day, we see Kantian approaches to axiology being abandoned in favor of a return to virtue ethics. Genuine wisdom is in fact only gained in humble service, and in asserting this, Maximus mentions the Platonic *exaiphnes,* the sudden moment of truth.[154]

At bottom, virtue is a question of *what* we are and *how* we are, and only secondarily of what we *know*. Our epistemic limits indicate that we cannot fully understand other creatures or even ourselves, but stretched in the

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[154] *Centuries on Knowledge* I.15–29 (PG 90.1088D–1093C).

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metaxu, we can enact and *become* the goodness that is our birthright.[155] In this regard, Maximus' moral ontology may have something to offer contemporary conversations on ethics, which Part 2 will revisit in light of radical and relative alterity.

1.2: Logos tes ousios and tropos tes huparxis I

We intimated above how *ousia*, *hupostasis*, and *energeia* are interpenetrating notions, separable in the abstract but not in concrete fact. *Hupostasis* refers to a particular case of an entity defined by an *ousia*—a particular horse, for example. *Hupostasis* is what allows us to distinguish Bucephalus from Mr. Ed, but of course the particularities of Bucephalus cannot *actually* be separated from the form of horse. *Ousia* and *hupostasis* are two aspects of a single entity and thus do not come together to make some third whole that is different from them. The *hupostasis* expresses the *energeia* of the *ousia*. Being a horse comes with certain powers (*dunameis*), such as galloping. It is Buchephalus (*hupostasis*) who expresses the activity (*energeia*) of galloping, which power is rooted in horseness (*ousia*).

In the case of an object, the *hupostasis* still expresses the *energeia* of the *ousia*. For example, a rock has the *dunameis* to fall off a table, hurt your foot, stop a door, be hard. But even just as the rock sits in place it *appears*, and even when no one is looking it *persists*. As a *hupostasis,* the rock is a unique singularity comprised of a one-of-a-kind set of relationships to all the other many *hupostaseis* around it (table, foot, door). This idiosyncrasy

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[155] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 56 (PG 90.584AB).

marks it off in its otherness as itself. As an *ousia* it shares common qualities with other rocks.

The specialized use of these terms began in a Trinitarian context, first with Athanasius inferring the Trinity's unity of *ousia* from the unity of *energeia* attributed to the Persons in Scripture. The Cappadocians then distinguish the single divine *ousia* from the three divine *hupostaseis* (the Persons), and are the first to use the terms *logos tes ousios* (λόγος της ουσίας [principle of being/essence/nature]) and *tropos tes huparxis* (τρόπος της ηυπάρχης [mode/manner of existing]) with regard to the former and the latter, respectively.[156] The three Persons have a single *logos tes ousios* but they each have their own *tropos tes huparxis*, their particular or distinguishing "how-being." Thus, though not identical, the pair *logos-tropos* is correlate to the pair *ousia-hupostasis.* Father, Son, and Spirit name *hupostaseis*, while their manner of relating (e.g., Father begets Son), would fall under *tropos tes huparxis.* Like *ousia* and *hupostasis, logos tes ousios* and *tropos tes huparxis* are separable in the abstract but not in concrete fact, since at bottom they are just different aspects of the same singular entity.

This is perhaps easier to understand in a terrestrial context, where *logos tes ousios* refers to nature as created by God, while *tropos tes huparxis* refers to the way a being chooses to live. Bucephalus is a horse because

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[156] A. Louth, "St. Maximos' Distinction between λόγος and τρόπος and the Ontology of the Person," 158; B. Daley, "Nature and Mode of Union"; Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua,* 155–66; Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought,* 245–49.

God made him so (*logos*), but Bucephalus can, for example, decide
whether or not to gallop and in what direction (*tropos*). As mentioned
above, the *ability* to gallop belong to *logos,* while the *choice to exercise* that
ability belongs to *tropos.* The existential weight of such decisions becomes
increasingly complex in self-reflexive beings. I am endowed with many
capacities by nature (*logos*) but the story of my life has to do with the way
I direct those capacities through choices (*tropos*). While biological
taxonomy is more concerned with the former, novels are more concerned
with the latter.

Just as beings cannot be thought apart from their essential defining
ousia, so too is it literally impossible to think them without concrete
embodiment in mode of existence.[157] While these terms and notions were
used by the Cappadocians, it is Maximus who rigorously develops them
and systematically pairs them. Juan-Miguel Garrigues even says that "the
distinction between *logos* and *tropos* [is] the very axis of [Maximus']
theological thought."[158] Maximus describes the Trinity in these terms in
his *Mystagogia:*

> One God, one *ousia,* three *hupostaseis*. . .possessing union
> uncomposed and unconfused, and distinction undivided and
> inseparable. . . .The triad of *hupostaseis* is the monad unconfused in
> *ousia* and the same by a single *logos,* while the holy monad is a triad
> in its *hupostaseis* and by the *tropos tes huparxis*—we are to think in

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[157] Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 93f. Loudovikos briefly traces the
history of *tropos tes huparxis* from the Cappadocians to Maximus with a few
examples.

[158] "Le dessein d'adoption du Créateur dans son rapport au Fils d'après
St. Maxime le Confesseur," 185.

both ways according to one and the other account. . .as one ray of threefold light in a single form.[159]

In addition to *logos-tropos*, Maximus also introduces here the language of Chalcedon to describe the Trinity (unconfused, undivided, inseparable). But in the first place, it was the *logos-tropos* distinction, transplanted from Trinitarian doctrine to Christology, that was decisive for Maximus' Neo-Chalcedonian defense. Only afterward would the Chalcedonian adverbs make their way into descriptions of the Trinity. We will return to *logos tes ousios* and *tropos tes huparxis* below, but having briefly explicated their difference, let us now consider Chalcedon and Maximus' Christology to see how the broad concept of union-in-distinction appears there as a privileged case, even the cornerstone of his thought.[160]

1.3: Christ and Chalcedon

Though Dionysius wrote in the midst of Christological debates that post-date the Council of Chalcedon, I have delayed discussing it and its attendant controversies since they find their most complete resolution in the Neo-Chalcedonian vindication for which Maximus ultimately gives his life. Let us briefly trace the historical and especially the philosophical

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[159] *Mystagogia*, 23.840–63, translated in Louth, "λόγος and τρόπος," 159.

[160] Balthasar says that the hypostatic union of Christ's natures serves as the model of all cosmological and anthropological synthesis (*Cosmic Liturgy*, 256f.). The Christological synthesis is God's first and ultimate idea, meaning it is both the *alpha* and *omega* of creation, *arche* and *eschaton* (*Eucharistic Ontology*, 73). In this sense, a *non-contingent* incarnation is the foundation of Maximus' eschatology, meaning that Fall or no Fall, it was still God's intent to incarnate (see *Eucharistic Ontology*, 138).

positions involved in the chief disputes over Christ's divinity and humanity. Christ's full divinity is questioned in the Arian heresies condemned at Nicaea in 325, while his full humanity is questioned by the Apollinarian denial of his human soul or mind (*nous*) condemned at Constantinople in 381. In retrospect, this latter position will be called Monophysite, meaning that it attributes only one *ousia* to Christ, in this case a human one with a divine *hupostasis* (though Apollinaris does not use these terms).[161]

The debate culminates in the great clash between Alexandria and Antioch, which continues the efforts to reconcile Christ's humanity and divinity. The Alexandrian tradition—rooted in the teachings of Athanasius and finding its fullest expression in Cyril—begins from the divinity of Christ, which through the incarnation is joined fully to his humanity and thereby redeems our fallen state. The Antiochean tradition—represented by Nestorius among others—though not denying Christ's full divinity, emphasizes his full humanity, which alone truly allows him to be the bridge to our redemption. The Antiocheans worry that the Alexandrian Christ is not human enough to effect our salvation, while the Alexandrians worry that the Antiochean Christ is too divided, his unity sundered by the difference of his natures (*ousiai*), whose manner of union is not sufficiently explained. This threatens to create two Sons, thereby adding a fourth Person to the Trinity. Cyril and Nestorius face off

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[161] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 210–16.

at the Council of Epheseus in 431 where Nestorius is condemned. Though perhaps not a fair portrayal of Nestorius' views, what comes to be called Nestorianism holds that Christ has two *ousia* and two *hupostaseis,* divine and human. By contrast, Cyril's views lead eventually to the orthodox Chalcedonian decree that Christ has two *ousiai,* divine and human, which are joined in *hypostatic union* by a single divine *hupostasis*.[162]

As noted above, an *ousia* cannot subsist on its own (e.g., human nature in general) but only as made determinate by an actual *hupostasis*, or person (an *ousia* with qualities, such as Peter or Paul). In the case of Christ, this *hupostasis* is simply the second Person of the Trinity, the divine *Logos,* which joins Christ's divine and human *ousiai* through hypostatic union. Christ has no human *hupostasis*. The containing of an *ousia* by a *hupostasis* is called Maximus' doctrine of enhypostasization.[163] Through enhypostasization the *hupostasis* acquires the ability to actualize the natural *energeia*, that is, each *hupostasis* may radiate the *energeia* which is inherent in the enhypostasized *ousia.* The *ousia* is enhypostasized (*enhupostaton)* to the same degree that the *hupostasis* in en-essentialized (*enousion*). These technical terms stress from either side how *ousia* and *hupostasis* are two thoroughly mutually-containing aspects of a single

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[162] Bradshaw, *Aristotle,* 188; Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason,* 34f.

[163] Leontius of Byzantium introduces the term *enhupostaton*. On Leonitus' contribution see P. Blowers, *Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World,* 152; Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 161. On enhypostasization see Maximus, *Epistle* 15 (PG 91.557D–560A); Kapriev, "The Conceptual Apparatus of Maximus," 174f.

entity and only separable conceptually. The relationship between the two *ousiai* in the hypostatic union is regulated by the four Chalcedonian adverbs: without confusion (ασυγχύτως), without change (ατρέπτως), without division (αδιαιρέτως), without separation (αχωρίστως).[164] The two *ousiai* do not become confused with one another or change to become a third thing (a blend or amalgam), and yet they remain neither separated from one another nor divided in their union.[165] It may be helpful here to recall the images of light permeating air and fire penetrating iron.

While Nestorianism risks an overly riven Christ, Euthyches espouses a new Monophysite heresy which threatens to overly unify Christ's *ousiai* by blending them together. He asserts that after the incarnation, Christ's divine and human *ousiai* merge to form a new, third *ousia* that is neither fully human nor fully divine. This makes Christ consubstantial with neither the Father nor humanity, raising obvious problems. Euthyches is condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but resistance to the hypostatic union endures, with many feeling that it smacks too much of Nestorianism.[166] We will return to this resistance in a

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[164] H. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 487f. The four adverbs were drawn from Cyril who in turn drew them from the terminology of the late Platonists such as Proclus, who was using them, fittingly, in grappling with the paradox of participation (see Louth, *Denys,* 11).

[165] Louth, "λόγος and τρόπος," 159–61.

[166] Louth, *Denys,* 2–7;

moment, but first let us more broadly illuminate the Chalcedonian

position and inquire into what is at stake here.

For Maximus, the integrity of the two *ousiai* is the model for human

redemption and divinization.[167] Christ's human nature is divinized

through deific participation in his divine nature, which is permitted by the

hypostatic union.[168] In this way, human nature is understood as

definitively worthy rather than fallen, obviating the need for worldly

escape or dissolution in God.[169] Maximus writes:

> "Precisely because Christ was the mediator between God and man,
> he had to preserve completely his natural kinship with the two
> poles he brings together by being them both himself."[170]

> ". . .completely of the same substance with things above and
> below."[171]

The unconfused union of Christ's two natures vouchsafes the

promise that the pure in heart will see God, becoming identified with the

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[167] Burrell, *Faith and Freedom,* 238.

[168] *Ambiguum* 3.1040C: "The flesh was blended with God and became
one, the stronger side predominating, precisely because it was assumed by the
Word, who deified it by identifying it with His own *hupostasis*" (translated in
Constas, *On Difficulties*, 19, modified).

[169] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 208.

[170] *Epistle* 11 (PG 91.468C), translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 256.

[171] *Opuscula* 209C, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 257.

divine in all but essence, *having* all that God *is* (deific participation).[172]

Maximus employs the relation between soul and body to illustrate the hypostatic union in distinction. Soul and body are two in *ousia* but one in *hupostasis* in each actual person. Because an *ousia* cannot subsist on its own (soul in general or body in general), but only as defined by an actual *hupostasis* or person (Peter or Paul), the single *hupostasis* is determinative of both soul and body (e.g., Peter or Paul's particular soul-body composite). That which marks off one body from another, and one soul from another, come together in union as a *hupostasis*, which marks itself off from all other *hupostaseis*—but these particular qualities do not mark off Peter's soul from his own body. "For both body and soul are the same with each other on account of the one *hupostasis* completed from them by union. . . .But there is difference of *ousia*, on account of their natural otherness from each other."[173] Paul's soul and body are the same *hupostasis* because those qualities which differentiate him as Paul, marking him off from the rest of humanity, belong to both soul and body—and yet soul and body remain two different sorts of things.

So too with Christ: Eric Perl writes, "although the two natures of Christ are made determinate and hence existent by the same hypostatic properties, they continue to be, not two different *things* (for only a

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[172] See Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

[173] *Epistle* 15 (PG 91.552D), translated in Perl, "Methexis," 192.

hupostasis is a real thing), but two different *kinds*."[174] In Christ, perfect

identity of *hupostasis* and perfect difference of *ousia* are joined.

Enhypostasized by the *Logos*, Christ's human *ousia* is emblazoned with the

divine qualities of the Son, and thereby deified. The human *ousia* becomes

identical to the Son in having these qualities but different from him in

receiving them from the outside, that is, by deific participation. This is

theosis as identity with God in all but *ousia*, which is the template for

human divinization in general. The "all but *ousia*" corresponds to the

ontological difference between created and uncreated, which are united

without confusion in Christ's deification and in our own. "[The unity of

God and human] is achieved through the preservation [of differences],

guaranteed by guaranteeing *them*. For the unification of the two poles

comes to full realization to the exact degree that their natural difference

remains intact."[175]

It is the ontological distinction between *hupostasis* and *ousia*, drawn

from Trinitarian theology, that allows this simultaneous identity and

difference—which is thus rooted in the concurrent oneness and threeness

of God. The term *perichoresis* originally describes the mutual

interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity, but Maximus is the first to

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[174] Perl, "Methexis," 193.

[175] *Opuscula* 96D–97A, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 257.

extend its use to describe the coinherence of *ousiai* in Christ.[176] But since

this coinherence is the model of human divinization, I will have occasion

to use *perichoresis* in anthropologic contexts as well. Consider Maximus'

own anthropologic extension of the term: "Only God acts (*energei*), so as

there exists only one *energeia,* that of God and of those worthy of God, or

better, only God, as the whole of him, according to His goodness, has

made a *perchoresis* of those worthy of Him in their existential

wholeness."[177] Because "those worthy" of God will eventually extend to

all of creation, we are also justified in using *perichoresis* in cosmic contexts

to discuss any moment of union-in-distinction that bears the distinctive

stamp of full reciprocal containment.

The subtlety of the hypostatic union may have been lost on some,

and the aforementioned resistance to Chalcedon leads to the compromise

positions known as Monoenergism (one activity) and Monotheletism (one

will). Fearing for Christ's unity (and the common-sense notions of his

acting and willing in a unified way), these positions accept the two *ousia*

and one *hupostasis,* but wish to further specify a single divine *energeia* or

thelema (will). Otherwise, some worry that Christ may be at odds with

himself (two wills) or liable to sin (human will). The first definitive

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[176] J. D. Wood, in Blowers "Symposia." On *perichoresis,* see Perl, "Methexis," 131–35; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 23–27; Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 253–60.

[177] *Ambiguum* 7.1076C, translated in Loudovikos, "Theurgic Attunement as Eucharistic Gnosiology," 209f.

historical citation of Dionysius' writings occurs in this context in 528 at the hand of Severus of Antioch.[178] According to the manuscripts we possess, Dionysius writes about Christ's "*new* theandric *energeia*" in his fourth letter. However, in the Neo-Chalcedonian debates, Severus of Antioch quotes this letter in support of Monoenergism as saying "*one* theandric *energeia*." While it is possible that this is a deliberate misquotation, all of our manuscripts trace back to John of Scythopolis who was anxious to present Dionysius as an orthodox Cyrilline Chalcedonian. Thus, the possibility of an alternate manuscript cannot be ruled out. Whatever the case, it seems that Dionysius may have deliberately employed ambiguous language in an effort to quell the debates by providing apostolic authority which would accommodate both sides.[179]

Maximus discusses Dionysius' fourth letter in *Ambiguum* 5, explaining that Christ, as a coinherence of divine and human *ousiai,* does human things divinely and divine things humanly, thereby manifesting a "*new* theandric *energeia.*" However, this newness in no way encroaches upon the *logoi* of the *ousiai,* but rather concerns the *tropos tes huparxis:*

> The coming together of these two natures constitutes the great mystery "of the nature of Jesus, which is beyond nature," and shows that both the difference of the *energeiai* and their union are preserved intact, the former understood to be "without division" in the natural *logos* of what has been united, while the latter are

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[178] R. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius,* 35. It is possible that Severus quoted Dionysius as early as 510 in his third letter to John Higumenus.

[179] Louth, *Maximus,* 52ff.

"known without confusion" in the unified *tropos* of the Lord's activities.[180]

In opposition to Monoenergism, Maximus makes clear that Christ has a double *energeia*, not an intermediate one or a solely divine one. Christ's hypostatic union is an ineffable "mode of coming together" (*tropos tes sumphuias*). Furthermore, against Monotheletism, Maximus asserts that Christ has a divine and a human will. *Energeia* and *thelema* admit of a certain ambiguity: they can refer to *processes* (acting, willing) or they can refer to those processes' finished *result* (act done, deed willed). Maximus elucidates how both Monoenergism and Monotheletism exploit the ambiguity to infer a single *energeia* or *thelema* from the unity of the act done or deed willed (recall rather that "in a single thrust with a red-hot sword, I can still distinguish in the wound what is the effect of cutting and what of burning"[181]). By employing the *logos-tropos* distinction, Maximus counters that as general processes *energeia* and *thelema* belong to *logos tes ousios*, expressing powers of the *ousia*, but as specific results they belong to *tropos tes huparxis*, expressing the particular, unique way the power of *ousia* is exercised by the *hupostasis*.[182] So while there is a single result emerging from the one *hupostasis*, Christ has both a human and divine

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[180] *Ambiguum* 5.1052B, translated in Louth, *Maximus*, 54. The first quotation marks indicate a phrase taken from Dionysius' letter, while the latter ones indicate Chalcedonian terminology.

[181] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 261.

[182] Louth, *Maximus*, 54ff.

will, as evidenced by his agony in the garden of olives (Gethsemane). There we see at once his human fear of death and his determined obedience to the Father. He displays his human will and then hands it over to the divine will.[183] The episode demonstrates the duality of will and duality nature, but affirms the unity of *hupostasis*, as Christ exhibits no indecision or double-mindedness. Were this not the case, Monotheletism threatens to turn Christ into the passive subject of a divine *tour de force*.[184]

This is important because Christ is the model for human participation in the divine. Were his human *energeia* and *thelema* swallowed by the divine activity and will, it would undermine both Christ's full humanity, and general human freedom throughout the process of deification. As we will explore further in a moment, *choice* is crucial to Maximus' vision.

Whereas we have used *hupostasis* and *prosopon* interchangeably until this point, we are now in a position to make a nuanced distinction between them. Because the technical use of these terms originated in the context of the Trinity, were transferred to Christology, and then applied to anthropology, all of which treat rational subjects, their interchange did not prove problematic. However, the situation changes when they are applied to animals, plants, and things. While *hupostasis* is associated with all things that have an *ousia* with unique properties, only rational beings have

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[183] See Blowers, *Transfiguration*, 161ff. for a discussion and an extensive table detailing the stages of deliberation elaborated by Maximus.

[184] Blowers, *Transfiguration*, 159; Louth, *Maximus*, 58f.

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a *prosopon. Hupostaseis* spontaneously radiate the *energeia* of their enhypostasized *ousia,* meaning that any self-subsisting being—stone, daffodil, dragonfly—is in a continuous state of self-expression as active relational exchange with other *hupostaseis* around it. By contrast, *prosopa,* as rational beings possessing a will (*thelema*), may enter un-spontaneously into relation and communion in love, *but do not always do so.* There is *choice* as to how the *energeiai* are directed and whether loving coexistence with others is sought out or not. This makes the *prosopon* properly dialogical, capable of regulating and controlling its own relations, able to modulate, redirect, concentrate, or disperse the personally radiated *energeiai.*[185]

While all things diffuse the *energeia* of their *ousia,* only the *prosopon* possesses a *thelema* that can consciously guide that *energeia.*

Though in the end Maximus' position would win the day, and he would be recognized as its chief architect, in the meantime his position fell into political disfavor. Maximus, stalwart to the end and refusing to recant, had his writing hand cut off, his tongue cut out, and was left to die in exile, accompanied by only a few disciples. This atrocity earned him the title Confessor of the faith. While this is extreme to the say the least, I hope this section will demonstrate the implications of rescinding Chalcedon. At stake were not simply theological quibbles over Christ's constitution, but the very possibility of deification and salvation for the cosmos as a whole.

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[185] G. Kapriev, "The Conceptual Apparatus of Maximus," 176f.

The incarnation of Christ is perfect theophany. God makes himself other by becoming a creature: "For he, who was the only one to possess real *Being,* received from his supreme power the possibility of *Becoming* what he was not, without change or confusion, and of remaining both of them: what he was and what he became."[186] In this way, the uncreated is joined to the created, but in the manner of *perichoresis,* with each maintaining its distinct identity while fully interpenetrating with the other, what Balthasar calls a "preservative synthesis."[187] Because Christ is a special instance of God's self-impartation, the way in which his human and divine *ousiai* are united and distinguished offers special information about union and distinction in general between creature and creator. Christology and ontology reflect the same fundamental structure. Balthasar says that "the Christological formula expands, for Maximus, into a fundamental law of metaphysics."[188] Just as the Incarnation is the visible, revealed, material presence of the divine *Logos*, so too is all the

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186 *Epistle* 16 (PG 91.577B), translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 252. This striking statement can be read in a distinctly Platonic register.

187 Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 232.

188 Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 70. M. Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of Maximus the Confessor,* 1–5. Törönen argues against what he calls a "pan-Chalcedonianism" in Balthasar and others' readings of Maximus, seeing it as an example of mistaking the phenomena for the source, the example for the exemplar. Though I agree with Törönen ultimately, the Chalcedonian definition, while describing the phenomena, provides the best view one can get of the source. Thus, I think Balthasar and others, myself included, are justified in giving it a special place in Maximus' vision, though one should bear in mind that Chalcedon is a description of the instance *par excellence* of a broader incarnation.

cosmos a manifestation of its own transcendent principle or formative

ground—which is just that same *Logos*. The divinization of Christ's human

ousia in the hypostatic union is the basis and structure not only of

humanity's deific participation, but that of the cosmos as a whole.[189]

What from the creature's point of view is participation is

equivalently, from God's point of view, an activity (*energeia*) of self-

impartation.[190] This self-impartation corresponds to Maximus' broad

understanding of the incarnation of the *Logos*, which is not just the Christ-

event, but creatures, virtuous acts, Scripture, and the cosmos as a

whole.[191] All of these are ways in which the Word becomes flesh, in which

the spiritual and intelligible become sensible, in which God makes himself

other by imparting himself to the world that participates him.[192] Maximus

calls them "thickenings" of the Word.[193] Thus, Christological doctrine

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[189] L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor,* 457ff.

[190] Perl, "Methexis," 112–17.

[191] Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought,* 120ff. Origen had developed a three-fold incarnation of Christ, the *logoi* of the world, and Scripture. Maximus speaks of a "triple incarnation" along the same lines, but effectively broadens this notion.

[192] Bradshaw, "Maximus the Confessor," 813.

[193] *Ambiguum* 10.1129A. See also Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology*, 73ff.; Blowers, *Transfiguration,* 139ff.; Kapriev, "Conceptual Apparatus," 187; E. Theokritoff, "The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor," 226.

provides a window to a broader incarnation, opening onto the whole process of creation, motion, and deification.[194] While we have already discussed Christ, let us turn now to the creature for most of the remainder of Part 1, ending with a consideration of Scripture and the cosmos.

1.4: Creature: logoi and prosopon | nature-choice-grace | becoming-in-communion

Maximus adopts the Cappadocian *ousia-energeiai* pair (another example of union-in-distinction), but divides the latter activity into three: "the things around God," *logoi,* and *energeiai.*[195] The "things around God" are the divine perfections, comparable to the Dionysian divine names or Neoplatonic processions (*proodoi*) in their pre-contained, unified state in God. The differentiated *energeiai* are what creatures actually participate in, according to their *logoi.* We can call this the "three-term model" (perfections, *logoi, energeiai*). It is a basic tenet for Maximus that the *logoi* are multiple in creatures but unified in the one *Logos.* More specifically,

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[194] Tollefsen, *Activity*, 147–50. One can almost hear a distant echo of the Milesian hylozoism in the pan-incarnationalism of Maximus, with distinct Anaxagorean tones, but *after* a deep dive into transcendence and God.

[195] "The Four Hundred Chapters on Love," 1.100 (PG 90.981D–984A), translated by Berthold in *Maximus Confessor*: "Once it [the purified mind] is in God, it is inflamed with desire and seeks first of all the principles of His being (*ousia*) but finds no satisfaction in what is proper to Him, for that is impossible and forbidden to every created nature alike. But it does receive encouragement from the things about Him (*ton peri auton*), that is, from what concerns His eternity, infinity, and immensity, as well as from the goodness, wisdom, and power by which He creates, governs, and judges beings." Cf. Bradshaw, *Aristotle*, 189ff., 206f.

the *logoi* are the "how" of the ideas and wills of God—through which he creates all things and through which all things participate in God. In Maximus as well as his commentators, the finer distinctions of the three-term model are sometimes disregarded and the term *logoi* may stretch to contain both poles, as transcendently preexistent in God (one *Logos*) and as immanently participated in creation (many *logoi*).[196] We can call this the "one-term model," since here *logoi* also encompasses the perfections and *energeiai.* In fact, both models, as well as the oscillation between them, reflect the paradox of participation.

The three-term model attempts to resolve the paradox by reifying the unparticipated and participated moments (divine perfections vs. immanent *energeiai),* and connects the two moments with the *logoi.* As we saw in Proclus, such a model tends to create a spectrum between participated immanent *energeia,* mediating *logoi,* and unparticipated perfections, which if taken in overly realist terms both implies a contrastive sense of transcendence and leads to an infinite regress. Thus the urgency to stress the dynamic "how" of the *logoi,* to assure that they do not appear as subsistent intermediaries, and to neutralize the contrastive sense. Indeed, this inclination to avoid mediation and a further desire to affirm the identity of what is participated with the divine itself

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[196] Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos,* 138: "Are the *logoi* transcendent or immanent. . .? The answer must be a double one. On the one hand Maximus affirms that the *logoi* are preexistent in God. On the other hand, he also says that God brought them to their realization in concrete creation, according to the general law of the continual presence of God and of the *Logos.* In a certain way they are, thus, both transcendent and immanent."

(e.g., God is life-itself which is participated) prompts thought to rebound toward the one-term model, in which the *logoi* are transcendently unified in God and immanently participated in creation. But this leads to the seeming contradiction that the *logoi* are both transcendent and immanent, unparticipated and participated, again prompting thought to rebound toward the three-term model in order to resolve the contradiction by separating and reifying its moments.

This oscillation between the two models can be seen as another echo of the doubling involved in the paradox. When thought tries to engage the resistant paradox, the oscillation of the paradox itself is projected into thought-structures that attempt to model it. The univocal sense is at work in the one-term model but leads to equivocal contradiction. The higher level univocity of the dialectical sense tries to abolish this contradiction through mediation in the three-term model. But when that model becomes overly realist it leads to an equivocal infinite regress, prompting an elimination of mediation and a return to the one-term model, in a continuing cycle. Between contradiction on the one hand and an infinite regress on the other, thought-as-formal-logic will never become adequate to the paradox of participation (only a paraconsistent logic will). Thus, it is no surprise that confusion arises here in the literature, as the paradox is a genuine one and does not allow reduction to a single term or mediation by a third term, causing the two models to oscillate in a manner similar to the oscillation of the paradox itself. As early as Plotinus we see an analogous wavering between models in the

opposed directives of an impassive One (unparticipated) and an ecstatic-emanative One (participated).

What is needed is a second level that accounts for the identity of the poles while their difference remains intact on the first level. When the three-term model is transformed in this way, the third-term is no longer a mediator but rather unites and encompasses the poles without annulling their difference. Difference, rather than being dialectically overcome, is constitutive of dialectical relation in the open *metaxu.* This is what we have referred to above as reciprocal containment, mutual interpenetration, unconfused union, and *perichoresis.*

While this addresses the paradox of participation, the problem of the origins of otherness remains. Maximus' initial account of the latter resembles Dionysius', with God and creature differentiating one another, so to speak, in the moment of creation (God is not differentiated in himself but merely in relation to diverse creatures). While from the point of view of the creature, the *logoi* are the principle of differentiation, from the point of view of God it is almost as if the creature differentiates itself, since the many *logoi* are united as the one *Logos* in God. For Dionysius, this makes the origin of otherness neither intrinsic to God (which would threaten divine unity) nor exterior to him (which would suggest dualism).[197] But in the end, this does not truly address the question of how the one *Logos*

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[197] See *Divine Names*, 644B: "The seal is not in all the impressions whole and the same. But the cause of this is not the seal (for that gives itself, whole and the same, to each); but the difference of the participants makes the figures of the one, whole, and same archetype unlike" (translated in Luibheid, 63, modified).

becomes many *logoi*. Later in this section, Maximus will offer such an account.

The *logoi* are fully present on both sides of the divine difference, unified in God as the one *Logos* but differentiated in creatures, providing each with the essential *ousia* by which it exists and is what it is, as well as the divine proposal for its development, to which humans, as rational *prosopa*, must respond.[198] John Milbank notes that the relation between *Logos* and *logoi* is "profoundly close" to that between *ousia* and *energeia*, with the former laying firmly on the side of the divine, while in the latter the divine reaches out to be participated.[199] *Logoi* are not reified intermediaries but rather an explanatory account (another meaning of *logos*) of the unique way in which the divine creative activity manifests in this particular creature, or equivalently the unique way in which the creature embeddedly-participates in the divine *energeia*. While the divine perfections are universal (e.g., being, life, wisdom), the *logoi* are specific, down to the particulars of creatures.[200] Thus, there are universal and particular *logoi*. The *logoi* are ways or modes of participating in the divine

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[198] I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 497f. As we saw above, only rational creatures really have the ability to dialogically respond to this proposal.

[199] Milbank, "Christianity and Platonism in East and West," 162.

[200] Perl notes that this seemingly un-Platonic idea is the natural result of the Platonic urge to explain everything in terms of intelligible form, allowing no positive role to unintelligibility or matter ("Methexis," 148).

perfections, just as being-a-horse is one way of participating in life. But it is important, too, to keep in mind the organic, Aristotelian sense of a horse's developmental trajectory. As the "how" of God's wills, the *logoi* are more like dynamic scripts than static essences (and in the case of *prosopa* they are scripts that are being co-written). A creature's *logos* describes its particular way of participating in each perfection of God, so that the *logos* of each creature is God-for-it, the unique design by which God as divine activity is wholly present to that creature in a sustained manner, causing it to exist and making it what it is.[201] This, briefly, is Maximus' approach to embedded-existential and embedded-ontological participation. Let us amplify a bit further.

Loudovikos describes the *logoi* as "the specific rational actions of God—responsible for essence, nature, form, shape, composition, and power of things, for their activity and what they undergo, as well as for their differentiation as individuals in terms of quantity, quality, relationship, place, time, position, movement, and habitual state."[202] They are also responsible for the beginning, middle, and end of things, for creation, economy, and providence. Polycarp Sherwood notes that the "*logoi* are not inert models, but the very creative power of God, realizing

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[201] Tollefsen, *Activity*, 126–131.

[202] Loudovikos, *Eucharisitic Ontology*, 57.

itself in the creature."[203] The multiplicity of the *logoi* constantly evoke the

one *Logos* from which they radiate.[204] This creates a two-way street

between the One and the many, the many and the personal One, adding a

distinctive Christian note that elaborates the Neoplatonic framework.

Because the *logoi* are divine wills, they are not ideal forms with their own

driving power but "specific volitional manifestations of divine Love," as

Loudovikos puts it.[205] The epitome of *logos* is participation in God or

fellowship between Word and creation. Elizabeth Theokritoff writes that

we can see "the *logoi* as something like spiritual DNA: the code of 'letters'

(note the coincidence of metaphors) that enables the creature to actualize

itself. . . .The 'word' that expresses our deepest being is not simply a

blueprint, but represents a personal labor of divine love."[206]

As rational *prosopa,* we have the power to respond to what we are,

to direct the *energeia* of our bestowed *ousia* in conscious ways in

relationship to God and to all the other *hupostaseis* of creation. We choose

our manner of existing, our *tropos tes huparxis.* If the *logos tes ousios*

corresponds to the vertical-ontological-synchronic axis we mentioned in

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[203] Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua,* 176.

[204] *Ambiguum* 7.1077C–1080A, translated in Loudovikos, *Eucharisitic Ontology,* 58.

[205] Loudovikos, *Eucharisitc Ontology,* 60.

[206] Theokritoff, "The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor," 227.

the introduction, *tropos tes huparxis* corresponds to the horizontal-existential-diachronic axis of decision making, consequences, and accumulated experience. It is on this latter axis that we converse with the *Logos,* in a dia-logos that turns the *energeia* of our *ousia,* which is dictated by our *logos,* back in harmony toward its source. This enactive-synergic participation is achieved through specific practices which I discuss in the second half of this section.

In this sense, the *logoi* are, potentially, "existential accomplishments of the rational being's free choice, not mere ontological givens: the freedom of the Creator has been given also to the creature."[207] Thus, it is not just that the *logoi are,* rather they are also *performed.* Loudovikos call this an "internalization of ontology," which locates the reality of the *logoi* in the existential realm as volitional acts of virtue. This is finally an internal dialogue between the divine will and human free will. Thus for Maximus, ethics is applied ontology, or ontology put into practice. Being is not only given but discussed in the *tropos tes huparxis*. The essence of things lays not in their *origin* but fundamentally in their *end*. All things *will be* as they actually are in the eschatological-ontological consummation of the existential dialogue.[208]

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[207] Loudovikos, *Eucharisitc Ontology,* 85.

[208] Loudovikos, *Eucharisitc Ontology,* 4.

Maximus unites embedded and enactive participation by conceiving the *logoi* within an Anaxagorean framework. As the "how" of God's wills and plans, the *logoi* are future-oriented and only find their fulfillment in motion toward the *eschaton,* which is the Good, or the God-*Logos* of which they are an expression. The volitional person can choose to align their *thelema* with this vector and by grace achieve perfect participation, which is deification, the fulfillment of their calling in their source. Quoting Maximus, Balthasar likens the creature to a boat rowing downstream, which may assimilate itself to the ontological current of its own being, "increasing the intensity of its movement."[209]

The creature embeddedly participates in God by *nature*, but must enactively participate in God by *choice* in order to deifically participate in God by *grace.* Thus, the triad nature-choice-grace, which Maximus indexes to being, well-being, and eternal-well-being.[210] This is one of the primary ways that Maximus offers a solution to the problem of the origins of otherness. Maximus distinguishes being from well-being, the latter which is chosen (or not) by the freely willing *prosopon*. In Neoplatonic terms, this

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[209] *Ambiguum* 7.1073C, translated by Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 145, modified.

[210] *Ambiguum* 65.1392A: "the total principle of the whole coming into being of rational substances [*theoretai logos*] is seen to have the mode of being [*einai*], of well-being, and eternal-being; and that of being is first given to beings by *ousia*; that of well-being is granted to them second, by their power to choose, inasmuch as they are self-moved [*autokinetois*]; and that of eternal-being is lavished on them third, by grace" (translated in Constas, *On Difficulties*, 277). Dionysius mentions being and well-being at *Divine Names,* 821D; see also Y. de Andia "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor," 136.

provides the difference between the initial *mone* in which the effect is identical with its cause (in our being we are just participants of God's perfections) and the *prodos* in which the effect is differentiated from its cause (it is *we*, not God, who direct the *energeia* of our *ousia* according to our *tropos tes huparxis* to achieve well-being or ill-being, freely accepting or rejecting God and others). Finally, the effect yearns to revert (*epistrophe*) to its constitutive cause in deific participation, becoming again identical to it in all but essence and achieving eternal-well-being (or more simply, eternal-being). In other words, God gives us to be what we are by *nature* (through embedded participation in the divine *energeiai*) and God makes us divine by *grace* (through deific participation in the divine *energeiai*), but it is crucially *choice* (as enactive participation) that provides the necessary difference that separates nature from grace, allowing the creation to truly exist in real otherness from Godself. Figure 1 summarizes the parallel triads:

Nature	→	**Choice**	→	**Grace**
Being	→	**Well-Being**	→	**Eternal-(Well)-Being**
Embedded	→	**Enactive**	→	**Deific**
Image	→	**Likeness**	→	**Image**

Figure 1. Maximus the Confessor's parallel triads. Adapted from Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Euchartistic Ontology*, 80.[211]

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[211] Loudovikos resumes eleven different parallel triads in his table at *Eucharistic Ontology,* 80. Worth mentioning are: becoming, movement, rest or genesis, kinesis, stasis, which we will treat when we discuss Maximus' relation to Origen; nature, gnomic will, fulfillment; potentiality, activity, rest; practical philosophy, natural contemplation, theological mystagogy; goodness, love, providence.

Maximus makes a distinction between the "image" and "likeness" of God. The former corresponds to being and eternal-being, nature and grace, while the latter corresponds to well-being and choice. The human is made in the "image" of God by nature, but that image has been tarnished by the Fall. By exercising virtue and wisdom in choice, the human can attain to the "likeness" of God, thereby restoring the likeness to its accord with the divine image in grace. Choice is what allows the creature to exist in its otherness from God, meaning that in some sense, *to be is to be free*. The creature's free choice is what constitutes the otherness required by creation.[212] In Neoplatonic terms, the effect in its reversion (*epistrophe*) is able to differentiate itself from the cause from which it proceeds (*prodos*), and with which it is identical in the initial remaining (*mone*). The Neoplatonic procession and return occur, but only in virtue of the creature's choice to move toward God, thereby making its end or goal the same as its beginning or source. Procession and return are not automatically identical, but rather the creature must elect to make them so, thus completing the cycle and receiving deific participation. It is the *prosopon-hupostasis* whose *thelema* exercises free choice in its *tropos tes huparxis* as an expression of the *energeia* of the *ousia.* Lacking the *ousia-*

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[212] Of course, only rational creatures have free choice, so we must wonder what secures the otherness of daffodils and stones, for example. As we will see, Maximus offers a couple alternate avenues to account for difference that would include the latter. However, we should note Maximus' belief that the human is the privileged mediator of all creation, and thus all of creation turns upon the anthropic lynchpin. We will return to this question when we discuss deep incarnation below.

hupostasis distinction in its Cappadocian form, the Neoplatonists had a harder time expressing the locus of this freedom and the way in which the effect was both defined by (*ousia*) and yet could differ from (*hupostasis*) its cause—which is actually just the dialectic of immanence and transcendence that is necessary for a coherent theory of participation—the ever-present paradox of participation.

The stage of *choice*, where well-being is achieved through enactive participation that transforms the likeness into the image, is a conversation between human and divine freedoms. Loudovikos refers to this living discussion between creature and creator as *dialogical reciprocity*.[213] In this way, the *logoi* concern not only *ousia,* in the Greek sense of form or general repeatable universals, but also concern *hupostasis*, not just because they define the creature down to its particulars (unlike Greek forms), but also because they describe the manner of interaction between God's will and the creature's will. Because free choice allows the rational creature to exist in true otherness from God, it creates the possibility of sin and the Fall, though not their inevitability. To be a rational *prosopon* is to be free to respond to the divine call of the *logoi*. The creature's free affirmation of

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[213] Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology,* especially 195–210. Loudovikos also introduces the language of: "inter-hypostatic syn-energy" to refer to analogical ecstasy between beings as mutual hypostatic activation of natural energies; "intra-inter-co-being" to refer to analogical ecstasy as an internal event (depth psychological); and "will to consubstantiality" to refer to the drive of all things to coinhere with one another and with the divine. The term "analogical ecstasy" is discussed below.

God's plan in the *logoi* leads to deification or deific participation, the

reuniting of the creatures' *logoi* with their source in God the *Logos.*

> God will be wholly participated by whole human beings, so that
> He will be to the soul, as it were, what the soul is to the body. . . .In
> this way, man as a whole will be divinized, being made God by the
> grace of God who became man. Man will remain wholly man in
> soul and body, owing to his nature, but will become wholly God in
> soul and body owing to grace.[214]

At this point I would like to speculatively extend Maximus in a

direction I find consonant with his teachings. Deification coincides with

incarnation: The Word becoming flesh (*enousion*) and the divinization of

Christ's human *ousia* (*enhuposton*) are two sides of the same event. So too

with the broader sense of the incarnation: Christ is incarnated as virtuous

acts and the creature is enhypostasized in the Word through deific

participation. Just as Christ's human *ousia* was enhypostasized in the

Logos, so too must creatures and the whole world become the cosmic body

of Christ—an amplification of Paul's teaching. But notice that they *must*

become it and are not so already. For if the world was perfectly made the

body of Christ in the same instant it was created—that is, as instantly as

Christ's human *ousia* was deified in the moment of Jesus' immaculate

conception—then there would not be any world at all. The world would

become God in the moment of its creation. This is the familiar problem of

the origin of difference, for if the procession *is* the return—a Neoplatonic

maxim—then all effects are identical with the First Cause. We must

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[214] *Ambiguum* 7.1088C, translated in Constas, *On Difficulties,* 113.

account for the fact that the whole world is *not yet* the body of Christ, and this is only accounted for by the enactive free choice given to the creature.

Contemporary scholarship on deep incarnation underlines the importance of distinguishing between the immanence of the *Logos* in creation, and the incarnation of the *Logos*.[215] While Maximus sometimes seems to indicate a triple-incarnation of the *Logos* as the ordering structure of cosmos, Scripture, and Christ—for our purposes it is helpful to distinguish the former two from the latter. The *Logos* is *immanent* in cosmos and Scripture, but actually *incarnating* as Jesus and as virtuous acts. Maximus believes that the incarnation was the eternal intention of God and not just a remedy for sin. Further, the incarnation was not limited to the person of Jesus Christ, but was inaugurated by him as a process that will eventually redeem all humanity through synergy culminating in deific participation. Through humanity's freely willed mediation, the whole universe will become the cosmic body of the Christ-*Logos.* So in this sense, I think of incarnation as *second creation*, as the *theosis* of first creation predicated on the free choice of rational actors at the center of that creation (humanity). The *Logos* is immanent in the cosmos from the start, but it is becoming incarnate there through the continued ministry of Christ in virtuous beings.

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[215] See for example Niels Gregersen "The Extended Body of Christ: Three Dimensions of Deep Incarnation" and "Deep Incarnation: Opportunities and Challenges" in *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology*, 2, 364.

I continue to extend Maximus: The Creator (cause) is able to incarnate, just insofar as the creature (effect) acts in harmony with its *logoi* (*kata phusis*): incarnation-as-second-creation is from God's point of view what deification is from the creature's point of view, two sides of a coin, simultaneous moments of procession and free-willed reversion. While first creation required nothing from the creature, incarnation-as-second-creation hinges on the creature's choice. This means that God cannot fully incarnate without the consent of the creature, the ability to consent being what makes the creature truly other, thereby allowing God to make Godself other in ecstasy, and then to return to Godself. The complement of God's free decision to create *ex nihilo* is our free choice to participate by moving in step with God's *logoi*. Deification is perfect participation, perfect harmony of the created and divine wills, in which ontology coincides with ethics as ever-well-being, infinite motion toward the Good. According to Maximus, what we are, our *logoi,* also indicate *how* we should be. As mentioned above, such a solution to the problem of the origins of otherness fulfills the Platonic quest to ground ethics in metaphysics.

But Maximus goes further, uniting *ex nihilo* and *ex deo* creation and addressing the problems of evil and suffering: "It is granted that out of God (*ek theou* [εκ θεού]), who is forever, all things come to be out of non-

being (*ek tou me ontos* [εκ του το με όντως]).”[216] A straightforward *ex deo*

view of creation risks twin pitfalls: on the one hand is an overly optimistic

view that because we come from a good and generous God, we must live

in the best of all possible worlds, while on the other hand is an overly

pessimistic view that because evil and suffering exist, we live in a fallen

world from which we must escape. Maximus' aim, against detractors

outside of but also within Christianity, is to preserve both the goodness of

God and the sanctity of the world, while acknowledging evil and

suffering. His solution hinges on the creature's free choice to act in

concord with God's divine proposition in the *logoi* (*kata phusis*) or to act

contrary to or with no regard for this proposition (*para phusis* [παρα

φυσης]) and thus to fall into non-being, the privation of God's goodness,

which is evil and suffering. This construal of evil as a privation of the

Good or simply something out of place (*anatrope* [ανατροπή]) reflects the

Platonic heritage, but the new focus on will is unique to Maximus. Like

Plotinus, Maximus is optimistic that what exists, insofar as it exists, is

good. Both thinkers offer a theodicy that equates goodness and being,

inversely suggesting that evil is non-being. While Plotinus associates this

non-being with matter, Maximus will equate it with faulty or misdirected

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[216] *Ambigua* 10.1188BC, my translation; on the equation of *ex nihilo* and *ex deo,* see Blowers, *Transfiguration,* 129; for Gregory of Nyssa's equation of the same, see H. A. Wolfson, "Identification of Ex Nihilo with Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa." Much scholarship has overplayed the contrast between *ex deo* (or emanation) and *ex nihilo* creation (see for example Turner, *Darkness of God*). The traditional differences between the two, ascribed on the basis of will and (dis)continuity, turn out to be less definitive than they appear at first blush.

desire.[217] There is nothing inherently evil in things, but it is our use of

them that can make it so.[218] Thus, as mentioned above, the *possibility* of the

Fall is necessary, but not the Fall itself, which is only a result of the

creature's free willing of its own ill-being. Maximus writes:

> "Failure and weakness open the door to evil, bringing about what is contrary to nature [*para phusis*] by the privation of what is in accordance with nature [*kata phusis*]."

> Dionysus calls sin a failure or a falling away by someone, a privation and a missing of the mark, a shooting wide of the target rather than hitting it, to use a metaphor from archery. When we fail to attain movement which belongs to the good and is in accordance with nature [*kata phusis*], or order, we are borne towards that which is contrary to nature [*para phusis*] and irrational and entirely without essence or existence.[219]

By allowing, out of love, the emergence of the true other-

intentionality that is the *prosopon*, God risks the real possibility of a radical

denial of God's presence. God yearns for God's love to be responded to in

kind, that is, with a yearning love for God's goodness, which is both love

of God and love of all the creaturely world as expressions of God through

the *logoi.* Thus, the great obstacle to realizing a communal mode of

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[217] D. Skliris, "'Eschatological Teleology,' 'Free Dialectic,' 'Metaphysics of Resurrection': The Three Antinomies That Make Maximus an Alternative European Philosopher," 6f.; R. Williams, "Nature, Passion, and Desire: Saint Maximus' Ontology of Excess," 148.

[218] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 305. Cf. Hamlet's famous line: "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (*Act II, scene 2* in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* edited by Evans and Tobin). Thinking here would be connected to the rational *prosopon* who chooses.

[219] *Scholia on the Divine Names,* PG 4.348C, PG 4.305B, translated in C. Yannaras, *Person and Eros,* 290.

existence through love is *self-love*, the cardinal sin.[220] When instead of

entering into dialogue and relation with God and the world, the creature

engages in self-centered monologue, it falls away from true being into the

privative nothingness of evil. The *logoi* of creatures make them part of the

community of all beings united in the *Logos.* Virtue is acting according to

our God-given vocation in the web of creation. Sin is ethically immoral

self-enhancement that goes against the community of being, which is

literally going against our own ontological nature. Selfish behavior hurts

itself through its blindness to our true being as part of the mesh of all

things (a timely ecological thought).

Recalling Dionysius' ecstatic God, I suggest with Loudovikos that

the *logoi* describe the manner in which God ecstatically and uniquely calls

out to each creature, yearning for an analogical ecstatic response.[221] It is

only by receiving this response as enactive-synergic participation that

incarnation-as-second-creation can fully happen—God's ecstatic self-

emptying and self-othering, in which the Son assumes the universe as the

cosmic body of the *Logos*. It is only the free-willed reversion of the creature

that allows the creative procession. It is as if the first two posts of a teepee

are being raised toward one another and will only stay erect if they meet

simultaneously in the middle, forming an arch supported by their

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[220] Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 70ff., 140–43, 237.

[221] The term "analogical ecstasy" is borrowed from Loudovikos, "Analogical Ecstasis: Maximus the Confessor, Plotinus, Heidegger, and Lacan."

reciprocal weight. Or perhaps more fittingly, it is like love (*eros*), that is only truly fulfilled in being requited. But notice that this is only with regard to *second creation.* First creation, nature, embedded being, is freely given in *agape,* asking nothing in return. But second creation, choice, well-being is only achieved with the enactive cooperation of the creature.

Creation is a loving call to engagement. God personally crafts a love-letter for each of us in which God yearns to be yearned for in analogical ecstasy. These love-*logoi* are our manner of embedded-ontological participation in the divine *energeia* conceived as a dynamic, future-oriented activity. This makes us what we are, gives us our "what-being." Yet we are free to choose our "how-being" toward this divine invitation. Thus, the choosing of our how-being, our existential plight, constitutes our personal response to the loving gift of being. This gift is understood as proposal, because it unfolds through time with our enactive input. We are invited into reciprocal dialogue concerning the proposal, which in a process of co-creation is enacted historically by the interaction of the *tropos tes huparxis* as enactive-synergic participation with the fact of embedded-ontological participation in the *logos tes ousios*. There is a possibility of deviation or misalignment between the ontological vector which is the call of God from the *eschaton*, and the creature's will, if the latter chooses to direct its *energeia* in selfish ways. But when the creature's will acts in concert with God's will, re-giving the gift to its giver, this constitutes our analogical ecstasy toward the divine generosity. The interpenetration of these two ecstasies appears as deification from the side of the human and incarnation from the side of God, two sides of a

coin, of which "love makes the little thickness," to borrow a line from E. E.
Cummings: reciprocity of human and divine *energeia* in synergy.[222] *Agape*
and *eros* are the engines of the entire process, the motion generators of
creation—generous love and impassioned longing toward the source of
that love. The *agape* of first creation is the ontological scaffolding upon
which the existential-erotic edifice of second creation is built—the stage
upon which the choreography of incarnation may be danced.

But how do we re-give the gift, what does enactive-synergic
participation really look like, and why is it ethical? The many *logoi* are
differentiated in the creatures but unified as the one Christ-*Logos*. The
Logos serves as a kind of strange attractor in the *eschaton* toward which all
logoi tend. Each individual's *logoi* are what they are by virtue of their
relation to all the *logoi* around them, that is, they are defined differentially.
Maximus writes: "For all created things are defined in their essence and in
their way of developing, by their own *logoi* and by the *logoi* of the beings
that provide their external context; through these *logoi* they find their
defining limits."[223] The basic characteristic of all things is their

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[222] "hate blows a bubble of despair," in *100 Selected Poems*, 83.

[223] *Ambiguum* 7.1081AB, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 117.

relatedness, that they are formed *for* each other.[224] Because the *logoi* are not self-contained but make up a differential network, dialogical reciprocity applies not only to the creature-creator relationship, but to all the creatures' relationships with one another. The entire network of reality is intended and constructed as an exchange of love through unconfused communion and union-in-distinction with the other—who is every other, both creature and God. This becoming-in-communion is not automatic but presented in a personal-existential field of choice, responsibility, and ethical decision making alongside others within a historical arena. The world becomes "intelligible" due to the togetherness of its *logoi.* The *Logos* is a dynamic reality that translates the *energeia* of created things to one another, corresponding to the entire energetic structure of the divine economy. Thus, all created things are part of a "logical" network that emerges out of the interactions of their multiple *logoi.*[225]

Self-love is anathema to communion, meaning that one can love oneself only *with* the others and not without them. Only as a gift to the others can we love ourselves, just as we love the others as a gift to us.[226]

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[224] *Centuries on Charity,* 1.7 (PG 91.1085B); *Ambiguum* 10.1153B. Elizabeth Theokritoff notes how this cosmic relatedness "resonates both with the dynamic and relational universe disclosed by modern physics and with the evermore complex web of interactions discovered in ecology" ("The Vision of Saint Maximus the Confessor," 228).

[225] S. Tanev, "Man as Co-creator," 263.

[226] Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 140–43.

All beings are groping toward mutuality, toward the richest possible reciprocal sustaining of one another through the gift of oneself. This is an aligning of the *eros* of all beings in disinterested desire that the other be itself. Rowan Williams notes that there can be no Levinasian sense here, since the being-for-the-other cannot be abstracted from mutual life-giving.[227] To love our *logos* is to love what we already are and to love the unknown future into which our *eros* pulls us—to love the "excess" or the "remainder" of our being. Our finite being is always lured erotically toward the Good as the best position of mutual relatedness with others. The project of being is a process of reciprocal shaping toward life-enhancing eschatological mutuality, a growing together without mingling that respects the otherness of the other but is not thereby barred from communion with them. Loudovikos calls it becoming-in-communion in Christ and life as gift sharing, or eschatology as the ontological realization of the incarnation of Christ as virtue.[228] Thus, the *logoi* as dia-logical-participational explain not only the vertical relationship between the One (God) and the Many (creatures), but also the horizontal relationship between the many and the many (creatures among themselves).[229]

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[227] "Nature, Passion, and Desire," 144–47.

[228] *Eucharistic Ontology*, 1.

[229] Tanev, "Man as Co-creator," 261f.

Ultimately this communion-in-distinction is a reflection of the reciprocal inter-giveness of the Trinity, which is Maximus' second solution to the problem of the origins of otherness. Each consubstantial Person of the divine Trinity is the divine *ousia* in its wholeness, which is the basis for their absolutely free dynamic communion with one another as *hupostaseis*. Since each *hupostasis* holds the whole divine being in itself, it is in communion with the others exclusively out of love. Since creation is an ecstatic external expression of this internal love, it need reflect the same free exchange amongst diverse *hupostaseis,* a perpetual circulation of gifts. The difference between the divine and the created consubstantiality is that the former exists eternally and timelessly, while the latter represents the Christ-*Logos'* proposal to us, which must be achieved through time in ecclesial community. This is the *homoousion* as a dynamic existential concept which must be accomplished. Our sameness with all the others is realized, not through an identity of *ousia,* but by *perichoresis* with them in true relation as enhypostasized by the Christ-*Logos*.[230] Like Christ's human nature, creatures will be united to one another and deified by hypostatic union in the *Logos—having* all that God *is,* the enduring difference becoming only the fact of participation itself.

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[230] Loudovikos, "Possession or Wholeness? Person, Nature, and Will," 267; see also *Eucharistic Ontology,* 28f.

1.5: Metaphysical Motion and Origen

The creature's fate is not decided in advance but is worked out in dialogical reciprocity between God's divine will as the *logoi* and the creature's free-willed response. In this way, the *logoi* are not fixed essences in the Platonist sense (notice I do not say Plato's sense), because they are always future-oriented, only finding their fulfillment in the *eschaton*. Nor are they really teleological in the Aristotelian sense, as their purpose is not pre-established, but decided dialogically through history.[231] It is here that Maximus takes up Gregory of Nyssa's theory of creation as metaphysical motion in the *diastema.* Apart from God's internal motion (the interpenetration of the divine *hupostaseis;* internal *energeia*), God's creative *energeia* is his continuous and ongoing external motion to the world (external *energeia*). Being and being-in-motion are one in the same, as the cause of being is also the cause of motion.[232] To be created means to participate, which necessarily involves change or movement because the creature may possess or lose the perfections in which it participates. For Maximus, this movement is precisely the choice whether or not to participate in God according to one's *logos* through virtue and wisdom. To do so leads to the infinite movement of *epektasis,* the free choice to make one's end coincide with one's beginning. To not do so is what constitutes

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[231] Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 195–210.

[232] S. Mitralexis, "Maximus' Theory of Motion: Motion κατα φύσιν, Returning Motion, Motion παρα φυσιν," 85.

sin and the Fall. Adam chose to move away from God, rather than completing the cycle by moving around him.[233] In circling around God, the infinite movement of *epektasis* likens itself to the eternal orbits of the heavens.[234] Metaphysical motion, Maximus says, is not different from time itself. Time is the moving image of eternity, which latter Maximus calls the *aeon* (αἰών), the realm of the divine perfections, the "things around God," comparable to the Platonic forms but distinguished from the *logoi*. I mention here William Desmond's idea that the eternity which time images is in fact a dynamic reality (not a static one), which is why a *moving* image is called for.[235] The Trinity itself is certainly such a dynamic reality, even if motion can only be ascribed to it by analogy. The ecstatic love that brings forth creation is a comparable dynamic reality. This ecstasy is a third, related explanation of the origins of otherness: the internal love of the Trinity issues forth in an ecstatic externalization which is a diverse moving image of its already multiple, free communion-in-distinction through love.[236] Creation reflects the life of the Trinity both in its *logoi tes*

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[233] Louth, *Maximus*, 64f.

[234] Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Neoplatonist Tradition," 502.

[235] Desmond, *Being and the Between,* 214. Cf. Boethius' classical definition of eternity as "the complete, simultaneous, and perfect possession of everlasting life [*interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*]" (*The Consolation of Philosophy* V.6).

[236] There is a fourth component that some commentators mention in addressing the origins of otherness: the hypostatic union itself. Christ's identity *is*

ousios and in its *tropoi tes hyparxeos*. By their natural *logoi* creatures maintain their identity as differentiated processions, while through their *tropoi* they enter into union with other differentiated processions (other creatures).[237]

To be created is to be in motion and in time, as this is the field in which our free choice is exercised, marking the enactive otherness of the creature from the divine perfections-*energeiai* in which it participates embeddedly. In contrast to Gregory, however, for Maximus God is not the

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difference, for Christ is first and foremost a *hupostasis,* a concrete entity, who happens to have dipolar *ousiai:* Christ's identity (*hupostasis*) is difference (dipolar *ousiai*) and thus incarnation is a generator of difference. I am not sure this really addresses the problem, however, since the hypostatic union already presupposes the existence of human nature, which is the otherness that is trying to be explained (in contrast to God). See J. S. Coyle, "Creation Anticipated: Maximian Reverberations in Bonaventure's Exemplarism," 287f. and J. D. Wood, in Blowers, "Symposia." Coyle also attributes this view to Perl and Thunberg, though in my opinion Perl rather emphasizes the role of creaturely choice in this regard. Wood cites *Ambiguum* 5.1053BC in support, which in its full context states that the hypostatic union makes "known His power that is beyond infinity, recognized through the generation of opposites." While the opposites referred to here are certainly Christ's two natures, God's hyperbolic power to create opposites seems more general, more related to God's ecstatic power to go outside Godself (creation) while nonetheless remaining transcendent God. However, if we broaden the sense of the incarnation to include creation itself, which Wood argues for, these amount to the same: Creation itself is the primary generation of opposites since it institutes the divine difference. Wood astutely points out that there are two kinds of union in the historical incarnation: the participatory union between natures (deification of Christ's humanity), *and* the hypostatic identity which permits this *perichoresis* of natures. Wood wants to argue that creation as incarnation exhibits not only the first but the second type of union with the divine as well. But this strikes me as suggesting that the world is *already* the cosmic body of Christ, *already* assumed by the second *hupostasis* of the Trinity. Rather, I would say that first creation exhibits the first type of union, i.e., embedded participation between natures: our created nature *has* what the divine nature *is*. But only through freely enacted second creation do we exchange human *hupostasis* for divine *hupostasis,* becoming wholly circumscribed by the beloved and making the cosmos, so to speak, body to God's soul.

[237] Vladimir Cvetkovic, "The Oneness of God as Unity of Persons in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor," 310.

receding point of the soul's eternal motion. Rather God is both accessible and inaccessible to the same degree, since God is both constitutive of and other than the order of being. When the divine is conceived in a thoroughly non-contrastive way, there can be no ladder to God, who is both omnipresent within the temple of creation and yet always beyond it in excess, always with remainder.[238] Despite his clash with Eunomius,

Gregory perhaps too much emphasizes the divide between creator and creature, relying extensively on spatial imagery in his "mysticism of the gap." It is this interval that leads to *epektasis* or perpetual movement toward God, but what is less pronounced is a means of finally bridging the gap. God is perhaps overly identified with Gregory's innovative notion of a positive infinity and lacking the robust sense of divine immanence provided by Maximus' Christology.[239] Whereas for Gregory,

God sometimes seems to lie at an infinite distance, Maximus is more explicit about God being beyond the category of spatial distance: "For God is the truth toward which the mind moves continuously and enduringly, and it can never cease its motion: since *it cannot find any distance there*, no cessation of motion can take place."[240] However, this

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[238] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 170ff.

[239] M. Constas, "'A Greater and More Hidden Word': Maximos the Confessor and the Nature of Language," 96ff., 74ff.

[240] *Mystagogia* 5.100–102, translated in Mitralexis, "Maximus' Theory of Motion," 84 (emphasis added).

comes down to a question of emphasis really, since Maximus' thought is deeply resonant with and influenced by Gregory—who says of eternal movement: "This is the most marvelous thing of all: how the same thing is both a standing still (*stasis*) and a moving (*kinesis*)."[241] Since God exceeds near and far, Maximus speaks of "ever-moving repose and steadfast movement at the same time," not rhetorically or apophatically, but in an attempt to most accurately describe the dynamics of divinization.[242]

For both Maximus and Gregory, space and time are pure limitation, expressions of finitude itself, not fundamentally physical or even astronomical, but ontological. All things are ontologically related (*skesis* [σκεσις]) as expressions of the *Logos* stretched between the poles of this distance (*diastasis* [διάστάσις]) or extension (*diastema*).[243] As such, distance is an aspect of our unity with God rather than its opposite.[244] Movement as yearning, as desire stretched toward its goal, is both an indication of perfection and the means by which that perfection is achieved. Similar to

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[241] *Life of Moses,* II.243, translated in Ferguson and Malherbe, 117.

[242] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 65 (PG 90.700A), translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 351f.; *Mystagogia* 5 (PG 91.677A), 19 (PG 91.696BC), translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 351f. See also Mitralexis, *Ever-Moving Repose,* for a book length treatment of Maximus' theory of time and motion.

[243] *Centuries on Knowledge,* 1.5 (PG 91.1085A), 1.7 (PG 91.1085B); *Ambiguum* 67.1397B; *Cosmic Liturgy,* 166.

[244] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 96.

Anaxagoras, motion and becoming are positively reevaluated as instruments of eschatological perfection, salvation, and deification. Created being entails the gift of motion, in which we may choose voluntarily to move toward well-being in God and thus connect our beginning (being) with our end (eternal-well-being). *Kinesis* is the middle term that permits beings to relate to one another and to God, joining their creation out of non-being to their eschatological restoration. Thus, motion is a natural feature of creation, a means for it to achieve full participation in divinity.[245]

The ontological vindication of *kinesis* is a refutation of Origen by Maximus, which can be summed up in their respective triads: *stasis-kinesis-genesis* becomes *genesis-kinesis-stasis*.[246] Origen introduces a speculative cosmic myth in which creation itself is due to a Fall from a primordial state, wherein preexistent spiritual beings dwelt in connatural unity with God. That union was ruptured when, through satiety (*koros* [κόρος]) and over-indulgence in the good they enjoyed, they fell through neglect and were placed in bodies by the creator as penance. The original primordial rest (*stasis*) is followed by the deviant motion (*kinesis*) of the Fall, leading to material creation (*genesis*). By contrast, Maximus believes

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[245] Manoussakis, "Being Moved," 51f., 70; Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 25ff., 165–68.

[246] Manoussakis, "Being Moved," 35f.; Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 106f.; Coyle, "Creation Anticipated," 286–92.

creation and the incarnation were always part of God's plan. Becoming precedes motion, and motion is a "passion" (i.e., passive). Creatures are necessarily subject to motion by their very nature and only therein exercise choice, *not* before. Because of this free choice, the Fall is always a possibility but never a necessity. The Fall did in fact happen, causing a deviation that was corrected by the incarnation, but this was not the only purpose of the incarnation, as we have discussed.[247] Creatures do not begin in a state of rest but rather move gradually toward an *unprecedented* stability in God—which Maximus bases in Scripture.[248] Thus, Maximus reverses Origen's triad: "movement (*kinesis*) is naturally preceded by becoming (*genesis*) and prior to fixity (*stasis*)."[249] Nothing but God exists before creation (*genesis*), at which point the creature necessarily undergoes metaphysical motion (*kinesis*). By choosing *epektasis,* or growth in goodness, as movement toward God, the creature can be deified and achieve final rest (*stasis*). Balthasar notes that in spite of its seductive mysticism, Origenist thought is fundamentally tragic. Gregory first surpasses it by eliminating satiety and embracing a perpetual movement that always longs for more. For Maximus movement itself is good, and

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[247] Louth, *Maximus*, 64f.

[248] Blowers, *Transfiguration*, 110. Deuteronomy 12:9, Psalms 16:15, Philippians 3:11, Hebrews 4:10, Matthew 11:28.

[249] *Ambiguum* 15.1217D, translated in Constas, 369f., modified; see also Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena,* 219f.

freedom is something that is firmly rooted in nature, whose natural direction freedom must comprehend and realize for itself. In this regard, Balthasar states that "movement, for Maximus, is even less a matter of restless yearning than it is for Gregory of Nyssa; rather, it consists in allowing oneself to be carried by another in the depths of one's being and to be borne toward the ocean of God's rest."[250] Creation is not due to deviance or satiety, but rather due to God's love, which engenders in the creature the potential for a reciprocal love—*the ecstatic love of the divine* (in both senses of the double genitive).

In the ever-moving repose which is full deific participation, a divinized and transfigured "becoming" persists from the point of view of the creature. This becoming assures that the communion of creature and God remains alive, actual, and intimate. This in contrast to Origen's satiety, which is precisely the absence of ongoing relationship and personal becoming-in-communion between uncreated and created. Eschatological communion is the lure that arouses enactive participation, prompting creatures to penetrate ever deeper into infinite modes of divine plenitude. Becoming is a sacred rite in which "God will become one flesh and one spirit with the Church, the soul, and the soul with God."[251]

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[250] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 129f.

[251] *Mystagogia* 5 (PG 91.680D–681A), translated in Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology*, 181; See also *Eucharistic Ontology*, 176–80.

1.6: Logos tes ousios and tropos tes huparxis II

Having discussed Christ and Chalcedon, the *logoi* of beings, free choice, evil and the Fall, eschatological becoming-in-communion, and metaphysical motion, we return now to the distinction between *logos tes ousios* (principle of nature) and *tropos tes huparxis* (mode of existence)—the former which pertains to embedded participation and the latter to enactive participation. Let us elaborate further in light of what we have covered and then consider a contemporary debate in Maximian scholarship. With the *logos-tropos* distinction, Balthasar writes, Maximus represents an "intermediate stage between a pagan philosophy of identity and the later, scholastic 'real distinction,' which attempts to separate the poles in an overly facile way."[252] We discussed earlier how the concept of existence is not fully distinguished from that of essence for the earlier Greeks. The Neoplatonists ascribe both quiddity and cause of being to *ousia* (and Balthasar sees indications of this in Aristotle as well).[253] But with Maximus, we have come some way toward their distinction, and yet they remain mutually implicated. On the one hand, "the structural relatedness of essence and its concrete bearer opens up one's view of the nonidentity of the order of being and the order of existence." Because Maximus thematizes the unique particularities of *hupostasis*, giving them

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[252] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 226.

[253] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 216. See also Kahn, "Why Existence Does Not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy."

equal weight as compared to the generalities of *ousia,* one cannot help but notice their difference. Yet on the other hand, "it is impossible, in the end, to carry through a clean distinction between individualizing characteristics in the order of essence and those in the order of person, because such a clean distinction simply cannot be drawn between the 'order of being' and the 'order of existing.'"[254] For example, the particular shape of my nose is an individualizing characteristic of *ousia*, while my getting kissed is an individualizing characteristic of *huparxis*, yet there is always only one actual person who is the subject of these characteristics. Furthermore, the shape of my nose may play a role in my getting kissed (or not). Balthasar continues:

> For a long time "image and likeness" had been the shorthand labels for the abstract outline, the "projected" nature of the creature, on the one hand, and the concrete, free self-realization and appropriation of this nature, on the other. But plan and life—the great poles of all created being—never let themselves be conceived as "parts" of this being, in the sense of metaphysical "composition." For every plan is, of its very nature, the plan of a life, and all life is the vitality of a plan. "A *hupostasis* without nature is not even conceivable" [*Opscula,* 264A]. The dimension that opened up through this fundamental tension is, rather, expressed in the command, "Become what you *are*"; for that reason, it can only consist in a progressive realization of the one in and through the other. The "image," freely brought to completion and appropriated, is as such the "likeness," yet the two cannot be identified. For such a growth to be possible, a reciprocal in-dwelling is required.[255]

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[254] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 225, 248f.

[255] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 226.

This mutual containment is no defect but links the orders of *logos* and *tropos,* of embedded and enactive participation, which when split too far, turn "what is actually a living tension into a fossilized parallelism."[256]

As with the Christological path between Nestorianism and Monophysitism, and with the Scylla and Charybdis of equivocity and univocity, a living dialectic held open metaxologically most accurately describes the phenomena. *Maximus' great insight is that the ontological order and the moral order are aspects of the same order.*

Although we are accustomed to first thinking in abstractions, such as designating *ousiai*, and then imagining the variations which would constitute their concrete embodiments, we never actually encounter an *ousia* as such. But these abstractions are all we have, for neither can we understand the absolute singularity of the particular: "to comprehend accurately even the least of creatures is beyond the power of our reason."[257] We cognize general qualities, but never the truly unique existent that lives behind these qualities. We distinguish *ousia* from the *energeia* that manifests personal otherness, but our only way of knowing *ousia* is through the manifested *energeia* which gives expression to *ousia* without being identical to it. In practice, it is impossible to separate *ousia* from *energeia*, to contemplate one without the other, and yet it is equally

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[256] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 216.

[257] *Ambiguum* 17.1224D–1229A.

impossible to identify them. For example, the *thelema* is an *energeia* of the *ousia*, but is only accessible through the *prosopon*. We can refer to the *what* of the *thelema* only because we know the *how* of its personal expression. The *what* of the *thelema* makes known the *ousia* which has the *dunamis* of willing, while the *how* of the *thelema* reveals the personal otherness of its bearer. *Thelema* itself, however, can be identified neither with *ousia*, which has the *dunamis* of willing, nor even with the *prosopon*, who always wills in a unique and unrepeatable fashion. Thus, in the *thelema* we recognize an *energeia* of the *ousia* that is ontologically distinct from both *ousia* and *prosopon*. The *tropos tes huparxis* is dictated by the free-willed direction of the *energeia* of the *ousia* by the *prosopon*—all as a single unified entity.[258] At the end of the day, the connection of *hupostasis* to *ousia* is so strong that Maximus even says that "*hupostasis* is in any case a nature."[259]

I have spelled this out at length to better illustrate the mistake of dividing too starkly or uniting too closely *tropos tes huparxis* and *logos tes ousias*. There is a current debate among Maximian scholars as to whether the ecstasy of the creature in deific participation is ecstasy *from* nature or ecstasy *of* nature. Christian existentialists such as John Zizioulas belong to the former camp (*from* nature), flat out opposing, in an even antagonistic

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[258] Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, 54–58.

[259] *Opuscula* 23 (PG 91.264A), my translation.

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manner, *tropos tes huparxis* and *logos tes ousias*.[260] They see the personal

freedom of *propson* as an escape from the biological determinism of *ousia.*

If such a thing were possible, the person would finally be the confluence

of all their relations, rather than a substance in itself. This flies in the face

of everything we have said about *ousia* being a gift from God that is

shaped by *tropos* into a reciprocal gift to God and to other creatures. Paul

Blowers by contrast argues for the latter (*of* nature) in his recent book.[261]

We have seen how the *dunameis* of *energeia* and *thelema* are rooted in *ousia,*

with only the "how" finally being determined by the *hupostasis-prosopon.*

But I respond that such ecstasy must be both *of* and *from* nature, precisely

insofar as *hupostasis* is united to *and* distinct from *ousia*.[262] The *hupostasis*

enacts the *energeia* of the *ousia,* and could neither exist nor act without it

(thus *of* nature); but so too is the *prosopon*, agent of the will, an

unrepeatable singularity that transcends in every moment all the more

general universals in which it participates (thus *from* nature). For what is

ecstasy if not some form of self-transcendence? Yet the *dunamis* for such

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260 Even Andrew Louth has recently backpedaled on his earlier portrayal of their division, though to be fair he seems to have done this to distance himself from overly existentialist readings ("λόγος and τρόπος," 157–65).

261 Blowers, *Transfiguration,* 155, 205f., 316ff. Loudovikos also argues vociferously against Zizioulas: *Eucharistic Ontology,* 48, 154, 183; "Possession or Wholeness?" especially 256ff., 275, 285.

262 J. D. Wood makes this same suggestion in "Symposia: Maximus the Confessor."

ecstasy is clearly rooted in the *ousia*. This is the only way to take seriously

the unconfused union of *hupostasis* and *ousia* that is ultimately an echo of

the paradox of participation. In this way, the dialectic of transcendence

and immanence that applies to God shows up in the analogical ecstasy of

the human. Just as God both transcends creation in *ousia,* but is immanent

to creation as the divine *energeia-logoi,* so does the creature transcend and

remain immanent to its own *ousia* in deific participation. This underlines

the sanctity of the body and the cosmos, neither of which will be left

behind in some final up-and-out rapture, but will rather be assumed as

the cosmic body of the Christ-*Logos.*

A related issue is how the concepts of particular and universal

interpenetrate and depend upon one another. Maximus believes that if

particulars are removed, so are universals:

> For if the universals subsist in the particulars, and do not in any
> way possess their *logos* of being and existence by themselves, then
> it is quite clear that, if the particulars were to disappear, the
> corresponding universals would cease to exist. For the parts exist
> and subsist in the wholes, and the wholes in the parts, and no
> argument can refute this.[263]

Conceiving universals depends on perceiving particulars, so that the latter

is not finally a degradation of the former. Indeed, neither will the

particular be rapt up into some final unity in the end times but will be

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[263] *Ambiguum,* 10.1189CD, translated in Tollefsen, "A Metaphysics of Holomerism," 27f.

taken up into eternity in all its uniqueness.[264] Maximus sees the

fundamental structure of the cosmos as a dynamic tension between

universal and particular, which ultimately reflects the status of creation as

stretched in the *diastema*.[265]

> The whole structure of existent things, which are not God, is dipolar (*duas*). So all material being is constructed in a dipolar way, in that it consists in matter and form, and so too all intellectual being, which is composed of a general essence and an additional essential element that forms it specifically. For no created thing is, in the proper sense, simple; for it is not "just this" or "just that," but possesses at the same time, in a single subject, both an *ousia* and a specifying, limiting difference that gives it concrete existence, forming it as a self and clearly distinguishing it from every other thing.[266]

All things present themselves as a coinherence of various universals and

particulars, which is a way of describing their *logos,* the unique way God

is wholly present *for them.* While of a different sort, we must hear this

perichoresis as an echo of its constitutive cause: the *perichoresis* of the

Christ-*Logos* (hypostatic union), the *perichoresis* of the Trinity (as

trihypostatic), and even the *ousia-energeia* distinction of the creator. And

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[264] Tollefsen, "Saint Maximus the Confessor on Creation and Incarnation" in *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology,* 104.

[265] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 116.

[266] *Ambiguum,* 67.1400C, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 156 (modified). Balthasar renders *duas* as "polar," which connotes spectrum, but the word *duas* is clearly closer to "dyadic" in the sense of discrete twoness. However, because the word dyadic lacks a convenient substantive (dyadicity?), I choose to translate *duas* as "dipolar" recalling the complementary positive and negative charges of certain organic compounds. This is perhaps the best translation since it carries the sense of tension along a spectrum between poles but retains the meaning of "twoness."

finally, the creator and deified-creation pair will reflect the Christic

hypostatic union itself: God and creature are united without confusion in

an embrace of mutual love, made one in the assumption of the world by

the *hupostasis* of the second Person, God becoming soul to the divinized

cosmic body. God is both present and beyond at once and undividedly, no

less than Christ is both human and divine—and we ourselves will be

made divine, while staying human. Like the *Logos* at the incarnation, we

become what we are not, without change or confusion, and remain both of

them: what we are and what we become.[267] This is the logic of the paradox

of participation, which is reflected in the dipolar structure of being, both

sensible and intelligible. This is the natural way of finite being since it only

has what God *is*, inscribing it within a doublet, inscribing it *in-between*

nature and grace within the *diastema*.

> If all godly *energeia* reveals God, whole and undivided, as present
> in a particular way in every existing creature, however constructed,
> who of us could possibly imagine and express how the whole God
> exists in all things, indivisible and beyond our sharing, universally
> but also particularly in every individual? He is neither divided into
> many, along with the endless variety of different beings in which
> he dwells as being itself, nor is he drawn into individuality by the
> distinct existence of the particular thing, nor does he draw together
> essential differences of things into the unitary totality of the all; but
> he is truly all in all things, without ever abandoning his
> unapproachable simplicity.[268]

The dipolarity of being as unconfused union is an image of the

dipolarity between creature and God. The dipolarities exist for the

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[267] See *Epistle* 16 (PG 91.577B).

[268] *Ambiguum* 22.1257AB, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 156.

purpose of revealing their more profound unity and relationship on a second level—the contrast heightens the communion. So too with the dipolarity between sensible and intelligible:

> Intellectual beings are the soul of sensible things, while sensible things are the body of intellectual beings. And just as the soul dwells in the body, so the intellectual world lives within that of material things; the intellectual is equipped with the sensible as the soul is equipped with a body, and from the two together a single complete world is formed—just as man is formed from soul and body, and neither of the two destroys or lets go of the other, because they have grown together in their unity.[269]

Maximus neutralizes the traditional hierarchy of intelligible and sensible. This is crucial because such a hierarchy retains the trace of contrastive transcendence, as if our sight, rising from phenomenal things toward the intelligible things seen with the eye of the mind, may continue upward to a vision of God. In a similar fashion, Maximus neutralizes a tension in Dionysius between a hierarchy of being and the assumption of a structural analogy between God and the world. Dionysius' triply triadic choirs of angels and ecclesiastical hierarchies seem to draw their structure from the Trinity, and yet their vertical arrangement could suggest subordination in a descending sequence. As Balthasar beautifully describes it:

> Rather than gazing upward along the straight ladder of being at choirs of increasingly heavenly spirits, to search for the Divine Reality above the highest movements of the dance, Maximus' eyes look for God in both realms of the world, in sense and intellect, earth and heaven, and meet their limit in both. Only the closure of the two, the growing reciprocity that forms the world as a whole, becomes for him the place where the Transcendent appears, visible

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[269] *Mystagogia,* 7 (PG 91.685A), translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 173.

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precisely in this burgeoning immanence as the One who is wholly other.[270]

And yet, it is Dionysius' mirroring of the heavenly and ecclesial hierarchies, on the intelligible and phenomenal levels respectively, that prepares this equivalence for Maximus.[271] Again we see the diachronic dialectic of ideas, with Maximus taking in the Dionysian insight and correcting its hidden inconsistency (the tendency to subordination). Thus, the dipolar structure of the world in fact reveals God in God's difference from the world. The union-in-distinction of sensible and intelligible, particular and universal, *hupostasis* and *ousia, tropos* and *logos,* all reflect the communion with God for which reality yearns. It is the way that finite things have of approaching the simplicity of God without simply being God, for as participants, they only have what God is, and are thus always in relation.

Made in the image of God, we receive our created being by nature through embedded participation in the divine perfections-*energeiai*; by choosing to live wisely and virtuously in harmony with our *logoi*, we attain to our well-being, striving for likeness to God through enactive participation; thus, the divine image is restored by grace through deific participation. Let us take a closer look at what constitutes enactive and deific participation for Maximus.

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[270] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 84.

[271] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 172.

1.7: Enactive + Deific Participation and the Holoarchy

Like the instances of *perichoresis* we have examined, enactive and deific participation can be distinguished, but only as two sides of the same event. To the degree that one chooses to grow in goodness, one is divinized. The deification of the human and the incarnation of God as virtue are two sides of the same event, as I suggested in section 1.4. In this case, enactive participation, deific participation, and incarnation all coincide: Every virtuous act is the deification of the human and the incarnation of God (i.e., second creation), which is simultaneously the result of human freewill and divine grace. While it is helpful here to conceptually distinguish the enactive and deific varieties of participation—especially in relation to the triad nature-choice-grace and the corresponding modes of being—in concrete act they are identical. "Enaction" emphasizes what the creature does, "deification" emphasizes what is done to the creature, and "incarnation" emphasizes what God does to Godself with the cooperation of the creature. Equivalently, what from God's point of view is incarnation or *energeia* exercised, is from the creature's point of view participation. While enactive participation emphasizes a not-yet-complete striving toward the transcendent divine from the point of view of the participant, deific participation stresses that act as all-but-completed from the point of view of the divine; and incarnation accentuates the irruption of the divine toward the immanent participant from the participant's point of view.

In the incarnational process, the will (*thelema*) of the creature, while maintaining its autonomy and integrity, is fully united to the will of the creator.[272] In theorizing this, both for creatures in general and for Christ in particular, Maximus virtually invents the idea of the will as we know it.[273] Self-determination is a distinctive attribute of human beings, which is what reflects God's image: "for making every soul in his own image, God, as good, brings it into being self-moved."[274] The will expresses the life of an *ousia* and its movement toward fullness of life. Maximus draws a distinction between the natural will and the gnomic will, which correspond roughly to nature and choice, or *logos* and *tropos*.[275] The first is like the faculty of speech, which belongs to *ousia*, while the second is the choice to actually speak, which pertains to *hupostasis-prosopon* (this is a bit like Aristotelian first and second *energeia*). Natural will is the capacity to act, while gnomic will decides to execute a given act made possible by that

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[272] *Ambiguum* 6.1068A; Louth, *Maximus*, 28–31; Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Neoplatonist Tradition," 504.

[273] Louth, *Maximus*, 58f.

[274] *Capita theologica et oeconomica* I.11 (PG 91.1088A), translated in Perl, "Methexis," 271.

[275] Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 185f. On the development of the gnomic will in Maximus, see Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life,* 55–63.

capacity.[276] We are given freewill as a reflection of the creator's freedom,

but what we choose to do with it is up to us. The human situation is that

we desire, and that we have the capacity to reach out for what we desire,

but have not the capacity to master the existential arena to the point that

our desire's fulfillment is ever a foregone conclusion. In a given situation,

general desire as a faculty becomes directed desire through a particular

act of the will, turning to ways and means to become a considered plan or

choice (*bouleusis* [βουλευσις]). The immediate ground from which the free

decision of the will springs is the *gnome*, which Maximus defines as the

"innate appetitive desire for the things in our power, our basis for

choice."[277] As Balthasar puts it:

> The decision-making process in the human consciousness rests on a double situation of naturally having to will, on the one hand, and of not being able to see all the possibilities, on the other. Freedom of choice is not a pure perfection: it is limited by the double bind of being forced by one's created condition to make a choice, in order to realize one's being, and yet of having to choose something whose implications one does not fully understand.[278]

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[276] Bradshaw, "St Maximus the Confessor on the Will," 146, 152. Maximus' theory of will has an impact in medieval discussions of the issue. One of the difficulties in question is how reason can be *operative* in choice without *determining* choice. How does one guard freewill but still keep choice from being arbitrary and unintelligible? For if we are not acting according to reasons, are we really free after all? Maximus is interesting because he places choice *after* deliberation and judgment, making choice informed by but not determined by them. Choice is like a "vote" in relation to the results of judgment, and thus can be partially but not fully explained by the deliberations that preceded it. This seems to strike a balance between the demands of reason and spontaneity.

[277] *Opuscula* 17C, translated in Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology*, 169.

[278] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 264f.

The gnomic will uses the *energeia* of the natural will, as a personal movement of *ousia* toward the fullness of life. The natural will is shaped, as a movement of the particular person, through the *gnome,* which gives rise to choice, after the acts of willing, deliberation, and judgement have occurred. Only the gnomic will can freely realize the natural will's "desire for whatever is naturally constitutive" as a "self-chosen impetus and movement."[279] Such movement is only possible by virtue of both the natural will, which gives its *energeia*, and the *tropos* of movement, the manner in which movement is enacted in a free and personal way through the *gnome.* This enaction can only be personal, requiring the *dunamis* of motion of the *ousia* and a *tropos* of movement—a natural and gnomic will. By aligning the choice of our *hupostasis* or personhood with the divine *hupostasis*, we coordinate our movement with our *logos* and are permeated by God in deific participation. Movement *kata phusis* exhibits a concord of divine and human wills, in which free will remains intact, but voluntarily assents to the divine directive of the inner *logos*. Another way of saying this is that we find our true self in God ("become who you are"). Maximus also calls it the "cession of *gnome,"* a yielding of our will to God, just as Christ and Paul did.[280]

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[279] *On the Two Wills,* 192AB, translated in Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 169.

[280] Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology,* 169.

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By choosing wisdom and virtue, we illuminate our knowledge and

purify our actions. In regard to the former, we convey ourselves toward a

Dionysian unknowing (*agnosia*).[281] Maximus excludes conceptual knowing

from the final union with God, but there is less of an accent on negation

than one finds in Dionysius. For Maximus, knowledge by participation

surpasses concepts by becoming direct experience and perception of the

divine *energeiai*.[282] This continues a trend in Dionysius which privileges

action and the theurgic over *theoria* alone*:*

> The scriptural Word knows of two kinds of knowledge of divine
> things. On the one hand there is relative knowledge, rooted only in
> reason and concepts, and lacking in the kind of experiential
> perception of what one knows through active engagement; such
> relative knowledge is what we use to order our affairs in our
> present life. On the other hand, there is that truly authentic
> knowledge, gained only by actual experience, apart from reason or
> concepts, which provides a total perception of the known object
> through a participation by grace.[283]

Knowing God is not a matter of speculation but of concrete engagement,

and in this, wisdom is connected to asceticism, practical virtue, and

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[281] Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Neoplatonist Tradition," 503.

[282] Bradshaw, *Aristotle*, 192ff.

[283] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60 (PG 90.621CD), translated in Blowers and
Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 126, slightly modified. See also
Ambiguum 7.1073C: "if one intellects, then one loves completely what has been
intellected. If one loves, then one suffers completely an ecstasy toward it in so far
as it is loved. [Those who suffer this ecstasy] come to be entirely within the
entirety of what is loved and entirely circumscribed by it" (translated in M.
Harrington, "Roots of Scientific Objectivity in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*,"
137).

prayer.[284] This reflects a move away from epistemology toward an ontological ethics.

All of this reflects Maximus' monkhood and his debt to Evagrius Ponticus (Origen's most dedicated disciple).[285] From this Egyptian desert hermit lineage, Maximus draws his concern for the concrete actualization of contemplative understanding, for the integration of our learning as living virtue, for the conversion of our theoretical knowledge of the world into a vital and tangible love. This is the interpenetration of theory and praxis, reminiscent of Socrates ("virtue is the only thing worth learning") and "philosophy as a way of life" as described by Pierre Hadot.[286]

Detachment from the passions—irrational desires and provocations—is the goal of ascetic struggle, but only so that in their purified state passion may be reincorporated as an ardent and holy love for God. Maximus adopts from Evagrius a three stage model: (1) *praktike* or ascetic struggle, following the commandments against temptation, and cultivation of virtues, leading to *apatheia,* dispassion, serenity; (2) *theoria phusike* or natural contemplation in which the serene, purified mind is able to contemplate the *logoi* of the natural order and understand its inner structure (enactive-epistemological participation); (3) *theologia mustike,*

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[284] Louth, *Maximus*, 33.

[285] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 62.

[286] *Philosophy as a Way of Life.*

mystical theology or knowledge and contemplation of God, a knowledge that is transforming, so that the mind becomes God or is deified, a state of prayer, not so much an activity-you-do as something-you-become.

But Maximus changes the tenor of the Evagrian program. While Evagrius employs prayer and spiritual practice to achieve purity of mind, Maximus emphasizes how we love, transmuting self-love into love of God and our fellow creatures: "Just as the thought of fire does not warm the body, so faith without love does not actualize the light of spiritual knowledge in the soul."[287] Evagrius flees from "mere thoughts" as distractions, whereas for Maximus the dispassion of "mere thought" permits us to love purely without attachment (it is not a simplicity of mind that allows the passage from contemplation to *theologia*, but an ecstatic love which conveys the intellect out of itself). To use the world in an ascetic or "rational" way is to employ material things to satisfy material needs—not saddling the physical world with demands that it cannot fulfill, such as happiness or ultimate satisfaction. The pitfall of "irrational love" for material things is that it is not truly love for other created entities, but self-love, a fixation on our own gratification, be it sensible (lust, greed) or intelligible (status, power).[288] Ascetic training

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[287] *Centuries on Charity* 1.31, translated in Louth, *Maximus*, 40.

[288] Theokritoff, "The Vision of St. Maximus," 230.

sublimates desire into divine *eros* and anger into divine *agape*.[289] The

natural drives are not reprehensible in themselves but simply need to be

properly directed as "wise desire" and "reasonable anger." Maximus

writes: "The soul makes use of its desires in order to long for the things it

seeks and uses its anger and courage to keep them and to care tenderly for

them."[290] The purpose of asceticism is to join inclination, or gnomic will,

to nature by restoring the soul to its proper and natural love of God,

which expresses itself as *agape* and virtuous acts.[291] Virtue is participation

in divine love, and thus a partaking of God. When virtue is present in us,

God in his love takes form and incarnates in us: "In you virtue also makes

God condescend to be human, by your assumption, so far as it is possible

for humans, of divine properties."[292] Such a transformation of the passions

into virtue brings about a transformation of the senses, and a

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[289] Louth, *Maximus*, 35–42.

[290] *Scholia on the Divine Names* 4.292C; *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 49 (PG 90.449B), translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 194f. See also *Centuries on Love* 3, 4 (PG 90.1017CD): "It is not food that is evil, but our gluttony; not procreation, but fornication; not money, but avarice; not glory, but our thirst for glory. There is nothing evil in things but the misuse [we make of them], which grows out of the disorder of the mind making use of nature" (translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 305).

[291] E. Dewhurst, "The Ontology of Virtue as Participation in Divine Love in the Works of Maximus the Confessor," 163ff.

[292] *Epistle* 2 (PG 91.408B), translated in Louth, *Maximus*, 93.

corresponding transformation of perception itself, to which we return below.

Maximus connects this assumption of divine properties to the practice of unceasing prayer, which is not so much something one does, but something one is or becomes. Rather than praying at a specified moment, unceasing prayer is a lifestyle, a way of being. It is not just an inward experience but a communion of act and body in the life of Christ, which manifests God in the world. Thus, under the banner of deification and incarnation, Maximus unites the transformation of bodily drives through asceticism, the surpassing of concepts, the practice of charity and virtue, and unceasing prayer.[293]

These activities bring about a reciprocal exchange of identities between God and human. Out of divine love for the creature, God condescends to become human, and by freely participating in that divine love through virtue, the human is made God. We become God by becoming like God, by partaking of divine love to the extent we are able through *agape*. Just as Proclus asserts that in our outstretched desire toward the ineffable One, we become like it, and thus grasp something of it since "like knows like," so too in our virtue do we become like the divine love that God is. But not just *like* God, we become God, since every agapeic act is both our deification and God's incarnation: "God and man are paradigms one of another, for as much as God is humanized to man

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[293] Bradshaw, *Aristotle*, 195–201.

through love of mankind, so much is man able to be deified to God

through *agape*."[294] We come around again to the *perichoresis* of divine and

human.

The full meaning of the incarnation is this mutual passing over of

God to humankind and humankind to God, which Maximus treats in the

context of the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Thabor. The disciples

pass over from flesh to spirit, beholding Christ's face in the divine light,

but also his garments, which Maximus says represent Scripture and the

created cosmos. Both through interpreting Scripture (in just the way

Maximus is doing here) and by contemplating the *logoi* of all created

things, one bears witness to the ongoing incarnation. There is a

complementarity to the written law of Scripture and the natural law or

order of the cosmos. Maximus does not place the written law above the

natural law, as do his forebearers, but conceives the two as mutually

complementary and of equal value. The natural order is like a book, and

Scripture like another cosmos, for at root, they are both expressions of

God's Word.[295] Maximus even writes: "The stars in the heavens are like

the letters in a book. Through both, people find access to knowledge of

things as they are. Through letters, they remember words and meanings;

through the stars, they come to know the 'signs of the times' in an equally

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[294] *Ambiguum* 10.1113BC, translated in Louth, *Maximus*.

[295] *Ambiguum*, 10.1152A; See also Louth, *Maximus,* 67ff.; Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 291–95

legible script."[296] Likewise of Christ: "He has wrapped himself

mysteriously, for our sakes, in the essences of things and can be spelled

out analogously from every visible thing as if from letters."[297] This is the

path of kataphasis, which garners positive knowledge of God's creative

energeiai.

   But Maximus also writes: "the face (*prosopon*) of the Word, that

shone like the sun, is the characteristic hiddenness of his being."[298] Here

Maximus acknowledges the apophatic side of the transfiguration, the law

of grace which is the fulfillment of the other two laws. Recall the Greek

prosopon means "face" but also "person." In passing over, the disciples

behold in the human reality represented by Christ's face, the hidden

reality of his divine *hupostasis.*[299] Indeed, Holy Scripture and the book of

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[296] Quoted in Messerschmidt, "Himmelsbuch and Sternenschrift," 68; then quoted in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 62.

[297] *Ambiguum* 33.1286–87, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 292.

[298] *Quaestiones et Dubia* 191.47–8, translated in Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas," in *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, 129.

[299] Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius," 129f.

nature are the fleshed face of the eternally active Word.[300] Just as the law

of Scripture and law of nature stand in mutuality, so too, analogously, are

they together the visible-side of invisible grace. There is nothing in the

cosmos that does not bear testament to the active self-impartation of the

divine *energeia*, and yet the creator remains hidden in *ousia*.

Because it is theophany, *being* itself is holy. Nothing can exist

except as it is God-in-otherness. Thus, to the very extent that a thing exists

at all, it is sacrament.[301] This is first creation. Yet the world is also

becoming the body of Christ, the unconfused union of God with his

creatures in second creation. There can be no rejection of body or world in

Maximus' vision, for "always and in all, God's Logos and God wills to

effect the mystery of his own embodiment."[302] The very structure of

created things offers insight into this mystery.

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[300] For more details on Maximus' exegetical practices, see Blowers, "Exegesis of Scripture," 189–204. Blowers treats several topics of interest including: the Origenist analogy of text and flesh; the polyvalence of Scripture according to the capacities of the reader; the biblical text as a script for ascetical performance through imitation of the virtues of great figures; intra-textual polyvalence of words and signs; parallels between natural contemplation and scriptural exegesis; Scripture as a deep and complex grammar of the soul's quest for intimacy with the Christ-*Logos*.

[301] Perl, "Methexis," 305–10.

[302] *Ambiguum* 7.1084CD, translated in Tollefsen, *Activity*, 122. For an ecological angle on this issue, see Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 220.

Maximus draws parallels between the human, Scripture, and the cosmos—what he calls "the three human beings."[303] Just as the soul is the inner reality of the body, so too is meaning the inner reality of text, the New Testament the inner reality of the Old, heaven the inner reality of earth, the invisible the inner reality of the visible, the uncreated the inner reality of the created—so many instances of unconfused union. Maximus applies the same logic to the architecture of the church, offering nave, sanctuary, and altar as parallel to body, soul, and mind, and also to the three stages above—ethical philosophy (*praktike*), natural contemplation (*theoria phusike*), and mystical theology (*theologia mustike*). These parallels are summarized in Figure 2:

→ **Nave**	**Sanctuary**	**Altar**
→ **Body**	**Soul**	**Mind**
→ ***praktike***	***theoria phusike***	***theologia mustike***

Figure 2. The *Mystagogia's* parallel triads. Adapted from Torstein Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 171.

The nave is the place of the congregation, where the people learn moral lessons and direct their bodily existence toward a Christian life. The sanctuary is the place of the clergy, where reason sees through the distractions of the world in service of the life of the soul. The altar is the

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[303] *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91.684D–688A), my translation; Louth, *Maximus*, 71–74. R. Bordeianu traces the history of the idea of cosmos as *makranthropos* in "Maximus and Ecology: The Relevance of Maximus the Confessor's Theology of Creation for the Present Ecological Crisis," 113–24.

place of the mystery of the Eucharist, where the mind is summoned to

holy silence in the presence of the divine transubstantiation:

> The human is a mystical church, because through the nave which is his body he brightens by virtue the ascetic force of the soul by the observance of the commandments in moral wisdom. Through the sanctuary of his soul he conveys to God in natural contemplation through reason the principles of sense purely in spirit, cut off from matter. Finally, through the altar of the mind he summons the silence abounding in song in the innermost recesses of the unseen and unknown utterance of divinity by another silence, rich in speech and tone. And as far as is possible for humans, he dwells familiarly within mystical theology and becomes such as is fitting for one made worthy of his indwelling and he is marked by dazzling splendor.[304]

Thus, the human is a microcosm of the church, of Scripture, and of

creation as a whole. The signature of the Word appears as the mirror-play

or "echoing correspondences" of a holographic mosaic that manifests the

divine unity and beauty.[305] In liturgical worship, sanctuary and nave

function together as two distinct levels within a single encompassing act,

as do body and soul in the person. We have seen the interpenetration of

universal and particular, *logos* and *tropos, ousia* and *hupostasis.* Likewise,

sensible and intelligible are two ways in which the single creation exists

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[304] *Mystagogia,* 4, translated in Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius," 132.

[305] Louth, *Maximus,* 77. With regard to the holographic signature of the Word, Theokritoff writes: "This observation is interesting in light of the parallels that have been drawn between the notion of implicate order and 'holographic universe' advanced by physicist David Bohm and the 'hierarchical' universe of Dionysius, whose cosmic framework is especially evident in the Mystagogy. Maximus' vision and its Christological basis anticipate Nicolas of Cusa, from whom the idea of implicate and explicit orders is drawn. The parallels suggest that the holographic approach to the physical world might fruitfully be developed further in the framework of a Christocentric cosmology, in which the reality imprinted on all Creation is the mystery of Christ, of divine embodiment" ("Vision of Maximus," 229).

and can be comprehended.[306] The deeper significance of these parallels is

that reality exhibits a self-similar *perichoresis* at all levels, what we may call

a *holoarchy*:

> This cosmos is a unity and is not divided up along with its parts;
> rather, precisely through its tendency to rise toward its own single
> and undivided being, it puts limits on the differences of its natural
> division into parts. So it proves that the parts are always the same
> as itself, even in their unconfused differentiation; that every whole
> dwells within every other whole; that all of them fill up the one
> whole as its parts and are in turn made one and are completely
> filled in themselves because of the integrity of the whole. In fact,
> the whole intelligible world seems mystically imprinted on the
> whole sensible world in symbolic forms, for those who are capable
> of seeing it, and conversely the whole sensible world subsists
> within the whole intelligible world, being rendered simple,
> spiritually and in accordance with intellect, in its rational
> principles. The sensible is in the intelligible in rational principles,
> and the intelligible is in the sensible in types; but the result of both
> is a single world.[307]

This reciprocal reflexivity at the heart of things is finally an image of our

relation to God's transcendence. In Balthasar's words, the universe is a

"closed house" (non-contrastive transcendence of God) that is "God's

mirror."[308] But because of God's dynamic and elusive transcendence, the

cosmos only manages to image the divine by stretching itself between the

poles of its reciprocities. Thus, the whole world is the enactment of a

cosmic liturgy, the earthly performance of a heavenly drama. Both cosmos

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[306] Bradshaw, "Maximus the Confessor," 818.

[307] *Mystagogia*, 2 (PG 91.669C), translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 173,
modified.

[308] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 176.

and liturgy share a Christological foundation.[309] Ceaseless human *askesis*

(ἄσκησις) is a "micro-drama of the macro-drama of salvation," whereby

we participate in the transfiguration of the cosmos and thus "share

actively in Christ's mediation of the new Creation."[310] By our perceiving

of the celestial script, the world is made diaphanous to its divine

meanings.

Such an awakening to the divine presence in the world is brought

about by the transformation of the senses mentioned above. Maximus

develops an elaborate correlation between the five senses and the five

faculties of the soul, which by their paired interweaving produce the four

cardinal virtues, which are again interwoven to produce wisdom and

meekness, whose combination results in the most comprehensive virtue,

agape.[311] In this way, the senses are made "rational" according to the *Logos*,

allowing them to perceive the *logoi* of the world, and thus to read the

cosmic text of revelation.[312] The sensible becomes transparent to the

intelligible, and the intelligible is seen to illuminate the sensible. Their

perichoresis is unveiled, helping to draw the universe into more perfect

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[309] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 322.

[310] Blowers, *Transfiguration*, 38; Theokritoff, "Vision of Maximus," 230.

[311] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 304f.

[312] *Ambiguum* 21.1248B–49B; Bradshaw, "Maximus the Confessor," 822.

theophany as it resonates in mutual in-dwelling through love throughout its entire architecture.

Maximus extends this dipolar holography with Gregory's idea that all reality is made up of successive divisions.[313] It can first be divided into uncreated and created being, which latter can be divided into intelligible and sensible being. Intelligible beings include celestial angels and terrestrial humans, while sensible beings include the living and the lifeless. The living can be divided into sentient and non-sentient, the former of which can be further divided into rational humans and irrational animals. These paired divisions converge on the human who, as microcosm, thus embraces all the partitions of reality (see Figure 3). Because the human partakes of each division, the human is the "natural bond" of the universe and constitutes "the great mystery of the divine purpose."[314] This purpose is to bring the entire created order into harmony with itself and into union with its creator. As we have seen, this is done through virtuous acts of charity, unceasing prayer, ascetic self-denial, sublimation of the passions, contemplation of nature and

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[313] Balás, Μετουσία Θεού, 34–53; *Ambiguum* 41.1304D–1316A. Maximus has his own series of divisions that divides sensible into heaven and earth, and divides earth into paradise and human civilization, and divides human civilization into male and female (Blowers, *Transfiguration*, 127). While much could be said about Maximus' scheme, I mention Gregory's because it has broader application outside the Christian sphere, and in any case, makes a similar point about the human as mediator and microcosm.

[314] *Ambiguum* 41.1305B.

Scripture, and liturgical and sacramental participation. In this way, the entire creation shall be deified as the incarnated cosmic body of Christ.
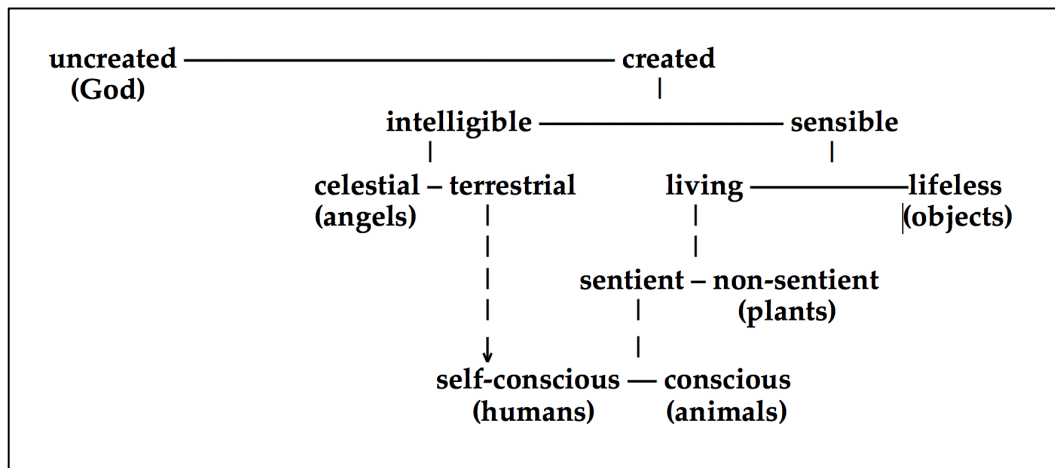


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uncreated ─────────────────── created
  (God)                          |
              intelligible ──────────── sensible
                   |                        |
          celestial – terrestrial      living ──────────lifeless
          (angels)      |                  |            (objects)
                        |                  |
                        |        sentient – non-sentient
                        |              |        (plants)
                        ↓              |
                  self-conscious ── conscious
                  (humans)        (animals)
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Figure 3. Gregory of Nyssa's cosmic divisions. Adapted from David Balás, *Μετουσία Θεοῦ*, 50.

1.8: Reciprocal Ecstasies

In love for humanity, God deigns to become human, and in love for God, the human incarnates the divine love as *agape* and *eros*. These are the conditions of first and second creation: *the ecstatic love of God* as the world-blood circulating in the cosmic Christ-body. God wills to incarnate himself and thus imparts his perfections to the cosmos as his *energeiai,* according to his *logoi* (embedded participation). The otherness necessary for this impartation is provided by the free choice of the creature (enactive participation), who is thus absolutely other than God in *ousia*, but becomes absolutely identical to him in *hupostasis* (deific participation).

> He who. . .established the origin. . .of all creation. . .had a super-good will, which was, to be himself changelessly contained by the *ousia* of men through true union in *hupostasis*, to unite human *ousia*

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changelessly to himself, so he might become man. . .and make man God by union with himself.[315]

The Christ-*Logos* is the "self" of the cosmos, the person whose body the cosmos is. Just as the divine *hupostasis*, without change, contains Jesus' human *ousia*, so too does it become the *hupostasis* of creation as a whole. Thus, in deification we find our true self in God. Perl writes that the difference between deification and the Fall is "the difference between loving God as oneself and loving oneself as God." Maximus writes:

> [The loving creature] will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it, willingly receiving the whole salutary circumscription by its own choice, so that it might be wholly qualified by the whole circumscriber, and, being wholly circumscribed, will no longer be able to wish to be known from its own qualities, but rather from those of the circumscriber, in the same way that air is thoroughly permeated by light, or iron in a forge is completely penetrated by the fire.[316]

The deification of the creature is equally the incarnation of the divine, putting God and creature in a relation of mutual erotic ecstasy.[317] Divine desire aspires to move humanity's desire toward it as the Desired:

> As intense *eros* and *agape*, the divine is in motion, while as the longed for and beloved he draws to himself everything that is receptive to intense *eros* and *agape.* To put it more clearly: he is in motion in that he creates a relationship of *eros* and *agape* in those receptive to these, while he causes motion inasmuch as he attracts by nature the desire of entities that move towards him. And again:

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[315] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (PG 90.317BC), translated in Perl, "Methexis," 212.

[316] *Ambiguum* 7.1073D–76A, translated in Constas, *On Difficulties*, 89, slightly modified.

[317] Blowers, *Transfiguration*, 124.

he moves others and is in motion in that he thirsts to be thirsted for, and longs intensely to be longed for, and loves to be loved.[318]

The *logoi* are analogies of participation offered by God to creatures on their own particular level of existence, constantly differing invitations to participate in the divine *energeiai* according to the creature's capacity.[319]

Analogy does not refer to a similitude of *ousiai,* but to complementary action on the part of two different agents leading to union. The divine proposal is always crafted to the unique being in question as a call to synergy through interpenetrating ecstasies. The erotic *ekstasis* of God as creating through the *logoi* permits an analogic-ecstatic human response, completing the cycle of *eros.* According to Loudovikos, "analogical *ekstasis* is the vehicle of reciprocal *eros.*"[320] Rowan Williams writes:

> The human subject, on earth the uniquely *conscious* bearer of *eros*, models what is in fact going on at every level of the universe's life: in abandoning the myth of protected self-sufficiency, the conscious and intelligent agent, the finite *nous*, moves in the mode for which it was created, moves in alignment with the purpose of God, habitually echoing in finite form the infinite desire of God for God, of love for love. And this is made possible in a world of distorted

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[318] *Ambiguum* 11.1206C, translated in Loudovikos, "Analogical Ecstasis," 242.

[319] Perl offers this helpful gloss with regard to Dionysius, which applies no less to Maximus: "In every being, including animals, plants, and inanimate things, there is an element of 'interiority,' of selfhood, an active share in its own being what it is and so in its own being. At the level of rational beings, this interiority takes the form of self-consciousness, of personhood and freedom. But the principle that any being's reversion is creative of it means that there is something analogous to freedom and personhood at every level of reality, even in inanimate things. For without this active selfhood, a being would have no unifying identity, it would not be this one distinct thing, and so would not be at all" (*Theophany,* 42).

[320] Loudovikos, "Analogical Ecstasis," 241–44.

desire by the crucial coincidence in the incarnate *Logos* between a free human habit, the "gnomic will" by which we deliberately shape the *tropos* of our existence, and the divine and unchangeable will which is the exercise in act of the essence of the Trinitarian Godhead.

The acme of God's reciprocal analogical *ekstasis* is Christ himself, as the ontological fulfillment of mutual love between creator and creature, "for the divine *Logos,* who is God, wants to see the mystery of his incarnation brought to realization constantly, and in all of us."[321]

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

In conclusion, we have seen how the Trinitarian distinction between *ousia* and *hupostasis*—and more specifically, between *logos tes ousios* and *tropos tes huparxis*—was transplanted into Christology and thereby elaborated anthropologically, and even cosmically. The accompanying notion of *perichoresis* intimates mutual containment and reciprocal interpenetration as union-in-distinction at multiple ontological and existential levels (*ousia* and *energeia;* divine and human *ousiai* of Christ in hypostatic union; creature and God; cosmos and God; universal and particular; intelligible and sensible).

In Christology, enhypostasization (two *ousiai*, one *hupostasis*) permits Maximus to avoid both Monophysitism (one *ousia*, one *hupostasis*) and Nestorianism (two *ousiai*, two *hupostaseis*); and in ontology, it permits him to avoid both pantheistic monism (God = world) and equivocal dualism (God divided from world). The theory of participation demands

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[321] *Ambiguum* 5.1084C, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 280. An alternate translation of this same line is quoted above.

two ontological levels, the world and its cause, and it demands that the world be both identical to and different from its cause, according to the paradox of participation. Maximus accounts for this simultaneous identity of *hupostasis* and difference of *ousia* through enhypostasization, which provides dialectical resolution while keeping the poles metaxologically open. He further provides a solution to the problem of the origin of difference through (1) the free will of the creature, (2) diverse creation as a reflection of the diverse inner life of the Trinity, (3) God's self-othering ecstasy, and (4) the hypostatic union as generator of difference itself. By making Christology functional ontology, Maximus realizes a fully coherent metaphysics of participation, fulfilling the journey that began in Plato's response to Parmenides. His vindication of *kinesis* and becoming echoes a similar rescue afforded by Plato in the face of both Parmenides' relegation of change to mere seeming and illusion, and Heraclitus' relegation of change to a finally homogenous medium of flux. Rather, participation validates the reality of becoming by relating it to divine being. In an echo of Anaxagoras, motion is what allows entities to move toward what is best for them in the Good. But while the Anaxagorean cosmology is primarily ontological and aesthetic in its movement toward order and beauty, Maximus incorporates an existential vector of freedom, interiority, and volition. By connecting ontological difference to creaturely choice, Maximus achieves the Platonic goal of providing ethics a secure metaphysical foundation. His theology of the will is the microcosmic movement that is the complement of the macrocosmic movement of

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eschatology as a whole.[322] Theology and philosophy are wholly

integrated, with the mystery of Christ standing as the cornerstone of the

theo-retical edifice.[323] Enactive participation (primarily synergic, but also

epistemological and transepistemological) is integrated with embedded

participation (both ontological and existential). The ecstatic self-

impartation of God that is creation climaxes in a freely willed reciprocal

analogical ecstasy on the part of the creature, incarnating Christ-as-

virtuous acts in second creation. The ultimate calling of the creature is to

embrace its creator in unconfused union through love, which is also an

embrace of the entire creation as manifestations of that same God-*Logos*,

drawing them all into perpetually deeper mutual participatory

interpenetration and dia-logue without ever violating the integrity of the

individual or the glory of God.

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[322] Manoussakis, "Being Moved," 45.

[323] Perl, "Methexis," 210–15, 311–18.

Part 2: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy

As I have had occasion to point out along the way, the primordial philosophical questions discussed up to this point are as existentially and theoretically salient today as they were 2500 years ago. Does that mean that the tradition we have traced failed to respond to these questions? Do we have here merely the anachronistic beauty of a late antique moment, or something with continuing relevance for our times? What can the tradition we have followed to its culmination in Maximus offer to contemporary concerns, both metaphysical and ethical? For my part, I find that Maximus' resolution of these primordial questions helps me to navigate postmodern dilemmas around issues such as identity, alterity, liminality, God, and the gift. In what follows, I engage the work of Richard Kearney alongside Maximus in order to more closely examine such dilemmas. I submit that Maximus' cosmology and Kearney's hermeneutics helpfully illuminate one another. Section 2.1 considers primarily the divine–human relationship, while section 2.2 examines the human–human relationship, with the guiding thread being the structural isomorphism and entwined nature of these two relationships. Kearney draws on a number of the antique sources we have explored but also on William Desmond and the French phenomenologists mentioned above— making him an ideal figure to mediate a conversation between Maximus and the contemporary milieu. Section 2.3 offers a close reading of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "As kingfishers catch fire" as an ecopoetic coda,

drawing together Maximus, Kearney, deep incarnation, and hermeneutics.

Section 2.4 brings our study to a close with several concluding thoughts.

2.1: The God Who May Be

"God neither is nor is not, but may be."

> –Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 1.

"As bees gather honey, so we collect what is sweetest out of all things and build Him."

> –Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet,* 6.6

Just as Plato offered a dialectical solution to the Parmenidean impasse of Truth and Seeming, Richard Kearney, one of the most creative and insightful of modern philosophers, offers a hermeneutic account that aims to do justice to the poles of similitude and difference, kataphasis and apophasis, within a dialectic of immanence and transcendence. Drawing explicitly upon William Desmond, Kearney calls his approach a *metaxology*—a middle way between the extremes of absolutism and relativism. In this section we are concerned particularly with the divine–human relationship and its familiar attendant questions: Is God accessible to us, somehow part of the being of all things? Or is God beyond this realm, always in excess of what we can see or name? Might the divine be manifesting more deeply in this realm every time an act of kindness or a virtuous deed is done? What consequences do our vision of God have for how we act in the world?

Kearney seeks to chart a course between two notions of the divine: (1) God as pure being according to ontotheology, and (2) God as pure non-

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being according to negative theology.[324] (1): Ontotheology risks making God a being among beings, albeit the highest, risks making an immanent idol out of a properly transcendent deity. Levinas, who I engage below, illuminates how ontotheology threatens to encompass God within philosophical thematization and thereby erase God's singular infinity by cramming it into a totality (as Robin Williams voiced in the mouth of Aladdin's genie: "Phenomenal cosmic powers! . . .itty bitty living space"). The kataphatic danger here is that God is too present, too known, becoming a metaphysical caricature rather than remaining a divine mystery.

(2): The excesses of the *via negativa* take two forms: (i) a *huper-*divinity so far beyond being that "no hermeneutics of interpreting, imagining, symbolizing, or narrativizing is really acceptable."[325] Kearney offers as examples Levinas, Marion, and even Derrida at moments. God's *radical alterity* resists all forms of communication and communion as so many modes of idolatry. And (ii) "The consigning of the sacred to the domain of abyssal abjection. . .some primordial zero-point of unnameability which is variously called 'monstrous' (Campbell, Zizek),

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[324] For a good summation of Kearney's definition of ontotheology with page references to *The God Who May Be,* see M. Westphal, "Hermeneutics and the God of Promise," in *After God,* 79f.

[325] Kearney, *The God Who May Be,* 7.

'sublime' (Lyotard), 'abject' (Kristeva), or 'an-khorite' (Caputo)."[326] In this case, the divine absconds back below the symbolic imaginary, beneath presence, beneath promise, murkily indistinguishable. Despite their opposition at zenith and nadir, Kearney and Caputo question whether (i) and (ii) are finally distinguishable. With reference to Marion, Kearney remarks that "the danger of God without being is that of an alterity so 'other' that it becomes impossible to distinguish it from monstrosity—mystical or sublime."[327] Caputo asks: "how do we know that we have been visited by a supereminent excess and not just invaded by khora?"[328]

This is one of the dangers associated with a radical alterity of the divine. Whether positive or negative, both (i) and (ii) deny mediation of any sort between sacred alterity and our reality (more like Kipling's "East is East and West is West and the never the twain shall meet").

By contrast, Kearney's diacritical hermeneutics serves just such a mediating function, while avoiding the fusional absorption of ontotheology and the irretrievability of negativity (here *ontotheology* exhibits the univocal sense of being, *radical alterity* the equivocal sense, and *hermeneutics* the dialectical sense). God, who is traditionally conceived

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[326] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 7.

[327] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 34.

[328] "On the Gift" in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism,* 78, edited by Caputo and Scanlon.

by Aristotle and Aquinas as highest act or actuality (*energeia*), is reconceived as divine *possibility* (*dunamis;* Latin: *posse*). Not mere potential conceived as less than the actual, but the creative possibilizing power of what comes to be, calling us forward toward a promised but open future that demands our participation in order to be realized. It is in this sense that Kearney calls the possible God a God of *eros*, who reaches out with divine promise toward us and toward whom we yearn when we incarnate that promise through just actions—giving a thirsty stranger a cold drink of water or welcoming the needy into our home. Kearney first opposes his eschatological becoming to ontotheological being, but later recharacterizes his approach as an onto-eschatology or third way, there "where the infinite eschaton intersects with the finite order of being."[329] God neither is nor is not, but may be—and this *may be* depends on us.

To anticipate my critique and elaboration here, I would like to prolong Kearney's diacritical hermeneutics into a metaxological moment that retrieves the God of being and the God beyond being, *after* ontotheology and excessive negativities—*ana-ousia* and *ana-epekeina*, to speak Kearney's language of anatheism. I propose to widen Kearney's own metaxology to include the two poles he is traversing along the third way, to expand the point of intersection of the finite order of being and the infinite eschaton to encompass both axes as the conditions under which such a transecting third way emerges. For as Maximus advises, "if the

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[329] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 8.

poles are denied, there is no longer anything in the middle."[330] And this

broad middle is the mutual containment of perichoretic embrace, what

Kearney calls, "the nuptial nexus where divine and human desires

overlap."[331] I submit that the *metaxu* is the open space around which the

other three senses of being can dance the triadic dance of *perichoresis*: (1)

God as being; (2) God beyond being; (3) God who may be (or God

becoming).[332] (1) is the immanent God in whom we participate by

embedded-ontological participation; (2) is the transcendent God who is

source and condition of those perfections in which we participate; and (3)

is God-in-the-making through enactive-synergic participation leading to

deification and incarnation-as-second-creation.

The broad middle appears again when Kearney describes his work

as a *metaphorology*, which seeks a two-way production of metaphorical

meaning between sensible and intelligible as well as divine and human.

This is resonant with Maximus' neutralization of the former hierarchy,

and his belief that the experience and choices of the individual will be

taken up into eternity. In a theological register, metaphorology traces a

course between apophatic and kataphatic approaches to divinity. Again,

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[330] *Disputation with Pyrrhus,* PG 91.348A, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 238.

[331] Kearney, *The God Who May Be,* 8.

[332] These three can also be seen as a reordering of Maximus' nature-choice-grace :: being-becoming-beyond.

rather than adhering to a singular third way, I contend that the apophatic, kataphatic, and metaphoric paths can be taken as three coordinated perspectives upon three divine modes of theophany (including negative theophany). Our traverse becomes multidimensional in its attempt to approach the infinite but must always remember the apophatic and metaxological imperatives that keep it open to the beyond and guard against the sins of adequation, literalism, concretization, and abstraction.

Conveniently, Kearney's dialectical approach traces all three paths in question, the two that he is transversing and the third upon which he treads. Central to the exposition is his reading of Exodus 3:14, Moses' ascent of Sinai, meditated upon by Philo, Gregory, Dionysius, Levinas, Derrida, Marion, and so many others before him.[333] Kearney sketches the three interpretations:

1. **Kataphatic**: "I am who I am" means "I am," or means "I am an *ousia*," or even more strongly put, "I am Being itself." This is the God of ontotheology.

2. **Apophatic**: "I am who I am" means "it is in my nature to be, but not to be called by name," an interpretation which dates back at least to Philo. One can know *that* God is but not *what* God is. This is the God beyond being of negative theology.

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[333] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 32, 126; Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 108f.; Marion, *God without Being,* 156ff.

3. **Hyperbolic**: "I am who I am" both assumes and surpasses the previous two interpretations, meaning: "I am the God who may be; the one who shall be. Forever. The one who is able to say 'here I am,' to call and to answer," a mystical theology reminiscent of Dionysius (both being and beyond being).[334]

Here Kearney is clearly very close to the reading that I am suggesting. I would gloss (3) in the Maximian context I have developed as: "I am the God who is incarnating through the eschatological choices of beings-in-communion. I am being insofar as I am incarnating, and I am beyond being in the *eschaton* insofar as I have not yet come." Notice this engages a limited sense of *being* and *beyond being* within the hyperbolic interpretation itself: *being* is incarnated second creation; *beyond being* is specifically the *Logos* as eschatological lure of becoming, drawing out that incarnation. Alongside this hyperbolic, enactive theophany of becoming (second creation), we can also acknowledge the kataphatic, embedded

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[334] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 8; Marion and Kearney, "Hermeneutics of Revelation," 329. In *The Idol and Distance,* Marion comments on interpretations (1) and (2): "(1) 'I am the one who is,' *par excellence,* to the point of recognizing the affirmation of Being, even of a supreme existence (Saint Thomas according to what E. Gilson names the 'metaphysics of Exodus'); or on the contrary, (2) 'I am what I am' without my presence receiving explication or commentary of any name other than that, silent, of my acting presence. *There is nothing more false than to oppose the two translations and traditions. . . .*The Name comes to us as unthinkable within the thinkable. . .just as a perfect, unknown, and anonymous poem reveals all of the poet and conceals him infinitely" (141ff.). Gilson writes that in a metaphysics of Being, all things are because the First Principle *is,* whereas in a metaphysics of the One, all lower grades of reality are only because the First Principle is not. He attributes the latter doctrine to Plotinus, and sees it as the reverse of a Christian metaphysics, which he identifies with the former. In terms of Gilson's interpretation then, Christian Neoplatonism would represent a genuine third alternative in which God is both Being and beyond being (*Being and Some Philosophers*, 23f.).

theophany of first creation in which we participate (by essence and existence), as well as the apophatic, negative theophany of divine transcendence that marks off the imparticipable divine *ousia* on the other side of the divine difference. Held open in the *metaxu*, with none of the interpretations trumping the others, the fourfold sense tentatively maps some of the coordinated avenues of relation between being and divinity in light of the paradox of participation.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

> The great obstacle that reason (*Vernunft*) puts in its own way arises from the side of the intellect (*Verstand*) and the entirely justified criteria it has established for its own purposes, that is, for quenching our thirst, and meeting our need, for knowledge and cognition. . . .The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same. The basic fallacy, taking precedence over all specific metaphysical fallacies, is to interpret meaning on the model of truth.

>   –Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 15

To better illustrate the hermeneutic conciliation I am recommending, let us consider a few aspects of Levinas' critique of ontotheology and his counterproposal of radical alterity (which correlate to the kataphatic and apophatic senses above). While a full presentation of Levinas' thought is beyond our scope, I wish to point toward the crucial spiritual and ethical importance of his critique, yet also toward some of the aporias it entails. Ultimately, my wager is that these crucial insights can be retained yet the aporias resolved in light of Maximus and Kearney's thought.

Levinas critiques philosophical thematization, insisting that philosophy tends to annul the difference between thought and object of

thought, absorbing and homogenizing real difference and subsuming it in the order of the same. This is the adequation of being and thinking, the mind's inclination toward univocity, the desire to affirm Parmenides' dictum without remainder (*the same is for being and thinking*). Such a deployment of being-as-thought tends to erase what resists being thought, swallowing everything in its path and integrating it all into a well-arranged systemic totality. God may be the exemplar of what resists thought, and Levinas laments what happens to the divine at the hands of such a philosophy: "Philosophical discourse must therefore be able to embrace God—of whom the Bible speaks—if, that is, God has a meaning. But, once thought, this God is immediately situated within the 'gesture of being'. He is situated therein as a being [*étant*] par excellence."[335] This would be an example of ontotheology—making God into the highest being—which we saw implies a contrastive sense of transcendence, with the divine occupying the zenith position in a spectrum of being. On the contrary, if the divine difference is taken seriously and God is truly *beyond* or *otherwise* than being (a nuance to which we return shortly), then the possibility of thematization or conceptualization should evaporate, foreclosing philosophical thought on God.

Levinas critiques the Heideggerean project, which considers any inquiry into beings which forgets being as an abandoning of the prey for

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[335] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 56; Narbonne, *Levinas and the Greek Heritage*, 7.

its shadow. Rather, Levinas believes that the quest to understand being

(which we noted tends to adequate being to thought), leads to an abstract,

empty, and general *there is* (*il y a*), *which is in fact the illusion*:

> This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable consummation of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself, we shall designate by the term *there is*. That *there is*, in as much as it resists a personal form, is "being in general." We have not derived this notion from exterior things or the inner world—from any "being" whatever. For *there is* transcends in inwardness as well as exteriority; it does not even make it possible to distinguish these. . . *There is*, in general, without our being able to fix a substantive to this term. *There is* is an impersonal form, like in it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity is essential.[336]

Because *il y a* renders being anonymous and neutral, "rather than to a

God, the notion of the *there is* leads us to the absence of God, the absence

of any being."[337] The Heidegerrean historical epochs of being remain

unpredictable if not arbitrary, and the human is simply a structure within

this ultimate ontologism. The equation of thought and being into a totality

without remainder, while temporarily achieving univocity, ceases to

explain both the particular beings of perception and the unique God of

faith—that is, it abolishes transcendence on both counts, bringing all of

reality into the immanence of thought:

> Materialism does not live in the discovery of the primordial function of the sensibility, but in the primacy of the Neuter. To place the Neuter dimension of being above the existent which unbeknown to it this being would determine in some way, to make the essential events unbeknown to the existent is to profess

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[336] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 52f.

[337] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 56.

materialism. Heidegger's late philosophy becomes this faint materialism.[338]

We could say that such a materialism of thought levels out singularities into variations in *matter*, rather than seeing them as differences that *matter*. Levinas is less interested in the question, *what is being*, than the question, *for whom or for what is being*? What is the meaning of being, in the sense of, what is the meaning of life? "It is a question of the meaning of being: not the ontological meaning of the comprehension of this extraordinary verb, but the ethical meaning of the justice of being."[339] What is our duty and our obligation before our fellows and before God—others whose transcendence flies in the face of the philosophical totality of the order of being?

> The intelligibility of transcendence is not ontological. The transcendence of God can neither be said nor thought in terms of being, the element of philosophy behind which philosophy sees only night. . . .[There is] a rupture between philosophical intelligibility and what is beyond being.[340]

That which transcends the order of being is not *beyond* being in a crassly superlative sense (something Levinas and Derrida impute to Plato, or rather Neoplatonism), but is *otherwise* than being, in terms of both meaning and direction, of an entirely different order than being. *Sense*

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[338] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 298f.

[339] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 171; Narbonne, *Levinas and the Greek Heritage,* 13.

[340] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 77.

rather than *essence* is at bottom the ordering condition of being. It is a

question of the *right* or *justice* of being. The particular condition grounds

the universal, and not vice versa:

> This is what is meant by the title of the book: *Otherwise than Being*.
> The ontological condition undoes itself, or is undone, in the human
> condition or uncondition. To be human means to live as if one were
> not a being among beings. As if, through human spirituality, the
> categories of being inverted into an "otherwise than being." Not
> only into a "being otherwise"; being otherwise is still being. The
> "otherwise than being," in truth, which would designate the event
> of its un-rest. . .it's putting into question of this being.[341]

The basic parameters and conditions of *being human* precede being *tout*

court. Thus, "first philosophy is an ethics."[342] In contrast to a universal

synthesis that reduces all experience to a total system, Levinas proposes

the *infinite*, a transcendence that is not reducible to totality. In this, Levinas

wishes to retain a sense of a God to whom one can pray—beyond the

necessary First Cause of Aristotle and beyond the Neuter of anonymous

being—and to retain a sense of our fellow human to whom we have an

ethical duty, even before we comprehend her within the order of being:

> To subordinate the relation with *someone* who is a being (ethical
> relation) to the relation with *the Being of beings* which, impersonal,
> allows the grasping, the naming of beings (to a relation of
> knowing), subordinates justice to freedom. . . .We radically oppose
> . . .Heidegger, who subordinates the relation with the Other to
> ontology. . .instead of seeing in justice and injustice an original
> access to the Other, beyond all ontology.[343]

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[341] Levinas and Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity*, 100.

[342] Levinas and Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity*, 77.

[343] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 16, 61.

Levinas has recourse to the *epekeina tes ousios* of the *Republic* in elucidating his notion of otherwise-than-being. His reading of Plato is crucially informed by the Neoplatonic exegesis of that passage. While Plato can be read as suggesting the more modest claim that the Good is beyond essence, meaning some particular determination of being, Plotinus heightens this claim to a beyond-being-all-together, which is more resonant with Levinas' infinity which transcends totality. Indeed, the relatively new concept of a positive infinity was decisive for both early and later Neoplatonic innovations. But for Levinas, the Good beyond being signifies the order of the ethical as distinguished from or even opposed to the order of being—two orders which were conjoined for the Neoplatonists and for everyone else we have examined in this study. The Neoplatonic Good tends to be emphasized as the guarantor of ontological being, its condition of possibility, which also orders the *kosmos* according to *logos* and beauty (and is also the end toward which all things tend for the best). The Platonic primacy of ethics is partially eclipsed by the Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic predilection for ontology. At least insofar as the Good beyond being is posited primarily to ground the order of being, it is *more continuous* with that order than is the Levinasian otherwise-than-being which runs countercurrent to it. The Neoplatonic *epekeina* is a "being otherwise" but perhaps not an "otherwise than being." Levinas is concerned with the axiological justification of being, concerned with an otherwise that gives a reckoning or an answer, from the outside, as to the meaning of being.

He further grounds this infinity beyond totality in *creatio ex nihilo,*

which entails a freedom antecedent and exterior to created being:

> The idea of creation *ex nihilo* expresses a multiplicity not united into a totality; the creature is an existence which indeed does depend on another; but not as a part that is separated from it. Creation *ex nihilo* breaks with system, posits a being outside of every system, that is, there where freedom is possible. . . .For the idea of totality, in which ontological philosophy veritably reunites—or comprehends—the multiple, must be substituted the idea of a separation resistant to synthesis. . . .The absolute gap of separation which transcendence implies could not be better expressed than by the term creation, in which the kinship of beings among themselves is affirmed, but at the same time their radical heterogeneity also, their reciprocal exteriorization coming from nothingness.[344]

The fact that God, the wholly other, creates in freedom before and beyond

being—across the radical gap of the divine difference, so to speak—

underwrites a "radical heterogeneity" and "reciprocal exteriorization" of

beings (their kinship as created beings notwithstanding). But this

relationship to God is first indicated by the relation with the other as

infinite:

> We think that the idea-of-the-Infinite-in-me—or my relation to God—comes to me in the concreteness of my relation to the other man [*sic*] in the sociality which is my responsibility for the neighbor. Here is found a responsibility that I contracted in no experience, but of which the face of the other through its alterity and through its strangeness, states the command that came *from who knows where*. . . .It is as if the face of the other man, who from the first "asks for me" and orders me, were the crux of the very scheme of this surpassing by God.[345]

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[344] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 104, 293.

[345] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, xiv.

We could read here a certain radical and ethical version of the Platonic notion that the sensible provides mnemonic prods leading us to an understanding of the intelligible: it is the face of another human, in all its flesh-and-blood-thereness, that bespeaks the transcendence of the divine. Ultimately, Levinas is inscribing his project within the Platonic one, yoking together Jerusalem and Athens: "The invisible of the Bible is the idea of the Good beyond being."[346] Levinas puts the Neoplatonic elaboration of the *epekeina* in service of the original Platonic primacy of ethics.

But what is perhaps most original to Levinas is the emphasis on alterity and asymmetry that differentiates the *otherwise* from the *beyond.* This alterity appears to be both strategic and confessional. On the one hand, it is a reaction to what Levinas sees as the totalizing tendency of philosophy generally, and of Heidegger in particular. On the other hand, it seems to reflect an apophaticism inherent to the Jewish faith. Levinas is reacting against the contrastive sense of transcendence entailed by ontotheology and the levelling effect of the Heideggerean thematization of being:

> Desire is desire for the absolutely other. . . .A desire without satisfaction precisely understands the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other. For desire, this alterity, non-adequate to the idea, has a meaning. It is understood as the alterity of the other

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[346] Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, 114.

and of the Most-High. That this height is no longer the heavens but the Invisible is the very elevation of height and its nobility.[347]

No longer the heavens *above*, which can imply the contrastive sense associated with the Great Chain, but the Invisible—that which does not even appear in the order of being. The divine must remain absolutely other in order to resist interpolation by the systematics of being.

And yet, as we saw with the radical apophaticism of the Neo-Arians, if the alterity of the divine difference is conceived too starkly, God may end up locked away on the far side of being, reinstituting the contrastive sense that was trying to be surpassed by an intensified transcendence. Furthermore, as noted at the outset of this section, the holy and the monstrous become indistinguishable behind the veil of radical alterity, reinstituting the leveling effect that was also trying to be surpassed. So while radical alterity counters certain tendencies toward idolatry and homogenization, it reintroduces problems of its own.

What kind of relationship is possible with a God who is wholly other? Or if such a relationship is possible, is God still wholly other? Derrida, in his deconstructive commentary upon Levinas in "Violence and Metaphysics," makes clear that the participatory approach is being purposefully excluded in favor of a more asymmetric relationship, but a relationship nonetheless, and one rooted in phenomenology rather than ontological speculation:

> The foundation of metaphysics—in Levinas' sense—is to be
> encountered in the return to things themselves, where we find the

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[347] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34f.

common root of humanism and theology: the resemblance between man and God, man's visage and the Face of God. "The Other resembles God." Via the passageway of this resemblance, man's speech can be lifted up toward God, an almost unheard of *analogy* which is the very movement of Levinas' discourse on discourse. Analogy as dialogue with God: "Discourse is discourse with God. . . .Metaphysics is the essence of this language with God." Discourse with God, and not in God as *participation*. Discourse with God, and not discourse on God and his attributes as *theology*.[348]

The discourse is *with* God, *alongside* God—neither a too fusional participation *in* God, nor an overly removed theology *on* God—one's disjuncture from God appearing universally as the alterity of relationship with every other, but not thereby annulling the rift, which is the only final bulwark against totalizing univocity in all its forms. Derrida continues:

> And the dissymmetry of my relation to the other, this "curvature of inter-subjective space signifies the divine intention of all truth." It "is, perhaps, the very presence of God." Presence as separation, presence-absence—again the break with Parmenides, Spinoza, Hegel, which only "the idea of creation *ex nihilo*" can consummate. Presence as separation, presence-absence as resemblance, but a resemblance which is not the "ontological mark" of the worker imprinted on his product, or on "beings created in his image and resemblance" (Malebranche), a resemblance which can be understood neither in terms of communion or knowledge, nor in terms of participation and incarnation. A resemblance which is neither a sign nor an effect of God. Neither the sign nor the effect exceeds the same.[349]

This is a radical *ex nihilo,* one that resists being equated with *ex deo* creation (as in Maximus' participatory metaphysics). The corresponding relation with the other person is characterized by just as radical a break. It

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[348] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference,* 108 (emphases in the original).

[349] "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference,* 108. Derrida quotes from *Totality and Infinity* in these passages, except where he attributes Malebranche.

is implied that the alternative to this fundamental divine cleft is some form of pantheism. The corresponding relation with the other person would thus be characterized by an unhealthy blurring of boundaries, threatening total mastery and domination of the other by the regime of the self. When these are the only two options on the table, two options that appear to be in a zero-sum game with one another, we surely must side with alterity in hope of securing the ethical. But such a zero-sum presentation of the alternatives reveals the hidden contrastive sense of transcendence implicit in radical heteronomy. If any immanence (communion, participation, incarnation) is a threat to divine transcendence, then immanence is in competition with transcendence in some way, leading to the pervasive Levinasian sense of abjection before the other. Though such humble surrender certainly possesses a noble austerity, I would argue that it falls short of fulfilling the human need for sociality, psychological mirroring, and shared experience. Must all continuity between self and other, between human and divine, be rooted out as vestiges of an ontotheological power play? Must discontinuity carry the day as avatar of the infinite ethical injunction against the voracious mind's circumscribing mastery? Could a dialectic of transcendence and immanence, appropriately restrained by metaxological correctives, do justice to alterity while preserving the non-contrastive sense that alterity initially pursues?

I wish in no way to denigrate Levinas' or Derrida's project—on the contrary, I believe the deep insights of radical alterity are crucial in our time, especially in the wake of the modern obsession with apodictic

knowledge. While the latter may tend toward a total dominating mastery,

Derrida sees in alterity a condition for true care and even love:

> But why not recognize there love itself, that is, this infinite renunciation which somehow *surrenders to the impossible.* To surrender to the other, and this is the impossible, would amount to giving oneself over in going toward the other, to coming toward the other but without crossing the threshold, and to respecting, to loving even the invisibility that keeps the other inaccessible. . .a love without jealousy that would allow the other to be—after the passage of a *via negativa.* Unless I interpret it too freely, this *via negativa* does not only constitute a *movement* or a *moment* of deprivation, an asceticism or a provisional kenosis. The deprivation should remain at work (thus give up the work) for the (loved) other to remain other. The other is God or no matter whom, more precisely, no matter what singularity, as soon as any other is totally other [*tout autre est tout autre*].[350]

Accepting the other *as other,* rather than as somehow a reference back to

myself, is harder than it seems. The tendency of thought to adequate being

to itself is ever-present, demanding a vigilance that remembers the limits

of thought. Such exercise of the *via negativa* is not temporary or

provisional but rather perpetual. Thus, any sense that the apophatic, in

running through negative propositions, is taking steps closer to

adequation must be given up. Like Levinas before him, Derrida

underlines the point by identifying the alterity of the singular other with

that of the transcendent God. Derrida's famous maxim carries a punch

because on the surface it seems to be a statement of identity (*tout autre =

tout autre*), while in fact it is a statement of radical difference. This

difference is invisible in written form, and yet is the core meaning of the

phrase, much like alterity is a constitutive difference that remains beyond

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[350] Derrida, *On the Name,* 74.

presence and appearance. Yet if every other is wholly other, then we have no means of distinguishing between the others, which arguably undercuts our ability to act ethically toward those others. In the next section, we will pursue further the ethical implications of these heteronomic structures, arguing that the vital teachings of radical alterity can be accommodated within a model of relative alterity.

Let us turn back to Kearney now, to see how the hermeneutic approach may trace a path between ontotheology and radical alterity. While the next section will more directly address the ethical question of human-to-human relationship, I continue to focus here on the divine–human relationship. Kearney follows up his reading of Mt. Sinai discussed above with a reading of Jesus' transfiguration at Mt. Thabor. The Gospel of Luke attests that as Jesus was praying, "the aspect of his face (*prosopon*) was changed and his clothing became sparkling white."[351]

Kearney notes that "it is the face that registers the transfiguring event, marking an ethical openness to transcendence which refuses idolatry." He goes on to remark that the Greek, *prosopon heteron,* means literally "his face was othered," and yet Jesus remains *recognizable* as himself.[352] So while the *prosopon heteron* recalls the face of Levinas, it also resists the *radical* alterity of that face. The face is othered insofar as it becomes an icon

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[351] Luke 9:29–30.

[352] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 39f.

of divine transcendence, and yet it is interwoven with enfleshed human immanence precisely as visible icon of the invisible deity. This is the Chalcedonian chiasm that breaks with the exclusiveness of radical alterity by containing heteronomy as one of its aspects. It does not betray that distance by confusing the natures, for as Saint John Damascene explains, Christ "receives glory, by investment not by fusion. . .in an indivisible difference, in a union without confusion."[353] For Levinas, the face as a site of transcendence is a marker of God irrupting into immanence, but for Maximus so too are all the *logoi,* which can be revealed through natural contemplation (*theoria phusike*). The whole cosmos is the face of Christ. Thus, there is an ethic of responsibility before *every* other, not just *anthropos*, but the ecological cosmos as a whole.

We know that *prosopon* also means "person," the locus of singular particularity as distinguished from general ontological *ousia,* and that these too are joined in Christ. The hypostatic union consists of two forms of union: the union of divine and human natures *within* the *hupostasis,* so to speak, and the union *of* nature(s) and *hupostasis* as a single entity. The first form of union is incompatible with Levinas' hard division between divine and human, while the second is incompatible with his hard division between ontology and metaphysics (the latter conceived as grounded in ethical singularity).

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[353] See "Homilies on the Transfiguration by Saint John Damascene and Saint Anastasius of Sinai" in Roselyne de Feraudy, *L'Icône et la Transfiguration*, 156, 152 (quoted in Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 41, 43).

A similar articulated continuity is evinced between Christ's face and his garments. The Damascene writes: "Just as the sun's light is other, so the *prosopon* of Christ shines forth like the sun and his garments white as light; they glisten with the splendor of the divine light." The sun is different than its light, but not so much that the former cannot be portrayed in terms of the latter. If we additionally recall that Maximus correlates Christ's face with the apophatic theologies, and his garments with the kataphatic, we can read a certain continuity between these too. All of this highlights the role of dialectical mediation in contrast to radical alterity. In Christ, the Invisible has become visible, yet remains invisible—coordinated kataphatic and apophatic moments.

Kearney calls Thabor a "gospel replay" of Sinai (and Horeb), declaring that Christ refigures the theophanic burning bush and prefigures the messianic kingdom.[354] It is this latter notion that furthers the hyperbolic interpretation (alongside the kataphatic and apophatic). Saint Paul invokes Thabor as a summons for each of us to become metamorphosed in the light of Christ: "And all of us, with our unveiled *prosopa* like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transfigured from glory to glory into his very *eikon*."[355] The divine glory shines forth as a promise of what is to come, if we become Godly through the incarnation

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[354] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 41–45.

[355] 2 Corinthians 3:18.

of second creation, if we as free willed *prosopa* choose to build the kingdom. In eternity, all that is unique to our persons, as unique as each one of our faces, will be safeguarded and celebrated, remaining distinct from the divine, even as we commune in perfect deific participation therein. Thus Thabor, like Sinai, carries all three registers of theophany: apophatic, kataphatic, and hyperbolic. In Maximian terminology: (1) God *is not*, as the divine transcendence that surpasses any mere thing, that is, as the preeminent *Logos* that is the condition and source of all being; (2) God *is*, as the very being, life, and mind in which we participate, the divine perfections; and (3) God *may be* as regards our freely chosen response to the *logoi* that initially orient us in the trajectory of becoming stretched between endowed being and the eschatological beyond.

In themselves, there is perhaps nothing about Levinas' versus Maximus-Kearney's depictions of the divine–human relationship that necessarily recommends one over the other. However, I believe that the corresponding human-to-human relationship that each entails does provide a basis for evaluation. Before we pursue this inquiry in the next section, let me fill out my reconstruction of Maximus and Kearney by responding to several issues raised by William Desmond in his reply to the latter. What we have learned from Maximus will help us to respond to Desmond's critique of Kearney. Because Desmond has been with us in the background throughout this study, these responses may not be so surprising. He writes: "My conviction is that we cannot think last things without first thinking first things, there being no re-creation and

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eschatology without first creation."[356] The horizontal-existential axis of

eschatological possibility and ethical decision-making is suspended from

the vertical-ontological axis of created being. More simply, there must first

be something that *is*, before a *may be* can emerge from it. What gives rise to

this *is*, within which the *may be* invites us to make real our highest ideals?

What is the condition of possibility of possibility itself? Desmond: "To do

justice to this hyperbolic possibilizing, I think we need an agapeic origin.

There is a divine possibilizing in excess of the erotic."[357] While second

creation as incarnation and deification involves a reciprocal erotic

dynamic between divine and human, respectively, first creation is

characterized by an agapeic givenness. Similarly, we noted earlier how

deep incarnation distinguishes the *incarnation* of the *Logos* as Christ and

virtuous acts from its *immanence* in creation as the *logoi* and Scripture.

Before willing, and perhaps even before consciousness, *something presents*

itself. In phenomenological terms, Marion's third reduction points to the

givenness that is necessary in order for phenomena to present themselves

to consciousness: "what *shows itself* first *gives itself.*"[358] This is why

Desmond insists

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[356] Desmond, "Maybe, Maybe Not: Richard Kearney and God," 56.

[357] Desmond, "Maybe, Maybe Not," 73.

[358] *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 5. Marion says he aims to "radically reduce the whole phenomenological project beginning with the primacy in it of givenness" (*In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena,* xxi).

that the "may be" cannot be divorced from the "is"—granting again that the "is" is as deeply mysterious and perplexing as the "may be". . . .But the "is" here has to be referred to creative power, creative power which itself possibilizes possibility in a more than determinate and finite sense.[359]

Rather than thinking origin statically as an Eden from which we fell or as a year zero from which we progress, Desmond invites us to think the *arche* hyperbolically, agapeically—with Marion we could even say, in a saturated manner. The excess we find in the beginning defies adequation just as much as the possibilities of the *eschaton* or the infinity of the divine beyond, yet each is a different sort of transcendence. By keeping all three in play metaxologically, we can, through a kind of checks-and-balances, protect against the temptations of each to dominate the field. As Desmond asserts: "An eschatology without a robust sense of creation, hence without an adequate archaeology of coming to be, always risks collapsing into the historicist idolatries of holistic immanence."[360]

We could compile a list of idolatries indexed to the senses of being:

1. Ontotheology is the idolatry most associated with the being that is given at the origin as ontological endowment (univocal).

2. An overbearing and single-voiced negative theology is the idolatry most associated with the infinite beyond; this is ontotheology's idolatrous flipside (equivocal).

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[359] Desmond, "Maybe, Maybe Not," 66.

[360] Desmond, "Maybe, Maybe Not," 67.

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3. Historicist pantheism is the idolatry most associated with eschatological becoming, what Desmond refers to as "holistic immanence" (dialectical).

Under (3), I assume Desmond includes the rational mysticism of Hegel and the dialectical materialism of Marx, for example. Clearly both Desmond as well as the present study owe a great debt to Hegel. And while our particular foci prompted us to skip modernity entirely, Hegel would be a deeply worthy interlocutor to the present discussion. The sticking point for Desmond is clearly the loss of real transcendence, the counterfeit double that comes to stand in for God when divinity is adequated to mind as rational becoming, whether in Hegelian form ("What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational") or Marxist (scientific socialism).[361] Without real transcendence, there can be no true surprise or rupture, what Derrida calls *l'avenir* as opposed to *le futur*:

> The future is that which—tomorrow, later, next century—will be. There is a future which is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, *l'avenir* which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival.[362]

In their own ways, each of the idolatries above forecloses the possibility of surprise, rupture, or *l'avenir,* by closing off transcendence (both their own

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[361] G. W. F Hegel, *Philosophy of Right: Was vernüftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernüftig* (1819/20).

[362] Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, *Derrida: Screenplay and Essays on the Film*, 53.

and that of the other two paths). By metaxologically keeping all three paths in play, the idolatries are avoided through their mutual tensions in a perichoretic dance:

1. The univocal is checked by the equivocal

2. The equivocal is checked by the dialectical

3. The dialectical attempts to move toward the univocal

4. The absolutely dialectical is checked by the equivocal and the metaxological

The above could also be illustrated by simply running steps 1–3 in a repeating loop that spins in the space opened up by the *metaxu* of step 4.

> Desmond elaborates on the importance of a divine agapeics:

> Excess of love that, in exceeding self, can give itself over to a poverty of being to make way for the other as other; and so making way, that it looks to be in one sense erotic, but in fact the eros is possibilized by a surplus, superplus enabling power that lets be, in order that the good of the other may come to be. God is a lover, God may be an erotic lover, but the eros of the divine, and the porosity of love between humans and the divine, are possibilized by God as agapeic servant.[363]

Once again, there could be no erotics of divine–human synergy without a prior agapeics of divine gift. The gift is given unconditionally.[364] We are free to respond as we like, but the gift carries a promise with which we are entrusted. This is the endowment of creation as the *logoi*, at once the

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[363] Desmond, "Maybe, Maybe Not," 74.

[364] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 29: "the promise is granted unconditionally, as pure gift. But God is reminding his people that they are free to accept or refuse this gift. A gift cannot be imposed; it can only be offered. A gift neither is nor is not; it gives."

bedrock of our being and the stage upon which we act out our becoming as dialogical reciprocity with that divine donation.

> This releasing creating may show itself, in one sense, as "depending on us" to realize the promise of the endowment. But in a more fundamental sense, it is not dependent on us, for we are radically dependent on it: without it we would be nothing. And God would be God, no matter what.[365]

Here Desmond resists a tendency he sees in Kearney to imply that God could not be God without our cooperation. Within the terms we have sketched, we can make a distinction: the divine who creates as agapeic origin needs nothing from its generous creation, thus embedded participation happens automatically, while the divine who incarnates as second creation does depend upon our willed synergic participation to do so. The loving ontological bounty of agapeic procession reveals the myriad theophanic faces of divine being, while the erotic return enables the constructive incarnation of God as love of the Good in eschatological becoming. Love of the Good is becoming-in-communion with our fellows, a testament to the promise of the divine communion beyond being. Love as *agape* and *eros* are both ecstatic, as generous creation flaring forth out-of/as God, and as the divine–human mutual embrace of incarnation-deification. The paradox of participation shows up both in being and becoming: we are and are not God as agapeic creation; we are and are not God in erotic deification; God is and is not us in erotic incarnation. We are *acting a-part in the ecstatic love of the divine.* We turn now more directly to

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[365] Desmond, "Maybe, Maybe Not," 77.

the ethical questions of human-to-human relationship which emerge from

the issues of divine–human relation sketched above.

2.2: Alterity and the Gift

> [Love is] mingling. . . .The result of fear and longing, consisting of reverent hesitation and attraction. . . .[One must take care] that fear does not change into loathing by losing its hold on longing, but also that longing does not change into contempt, if it no longer has a moderate fear as its companion, and that instead love reveals itself as our inner law and take the form of tender inclination.
>
> –Maximus the Confessor[366]

> The challenge now is to acknowledge a difference between self and other without separating them so schismatically that no relation at all is possible; the attempt to build hermeneutic bridges between us and 'others' (human, divine or whatever) should not be denounced as ontology, ontotheology or logocentrism—that is to say, as some form of totalizing reduction bordering on violence. For such denunciation ultimately denies any form of dialogical interbeing between self and other.
>
> –Richard Kearney[367]

The perennial question of the one and the many is a question about

similitude and difference, about what unites and distinguishes things. As

an account of the relation between these poles, participation is relevant to

ongoing conversations about otherness, specifically whether the alterity of

the other is radical or in some way mitigated. The question of

participation is ultimately a question of relationship. With the divine, but

also beyond or before the issue of God: what does it mean to inhabit a

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[366] *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer,* PG 90.873A, translated in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 328f.

[367] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters,* 9.

world together? How do we navigate the complexities of relationship, which I argue inevitably involve the paradox of participation? How do we authentically, carefully, and meaningfully give to the other, and at the same time practice self-care and good boundaries? How do we hold both sides, not admitting of dialectical collapse, but sitting extended in the *metaxu*—the deeper tensive difference of participation, what Catherine Pickstock calls a higher harmony that mediates and resolves in its contrast?[368]

We have mentioned the example of Gregory of Nyssa and the Neo-Arians: The radical alterity of God championed by Eunomius threatens the communion of participation so dear to Gregory (which is also a mysticism). We must ask analogously, if the radical alterity of Levinas, Derrida, and Caputo threatens the prospect of personal communion with the other, advocated by thinkers of relative alterity, such as Kearney (who in this regard follows in the lineage and Gabriel Marcel and Paul Ricoeur). In this section, I wish to elucidate the debate and highlight what is at stake before commending the latter approach, in collaboration with the former. Let me briefly trace the two positions as I did in the introduction, following Brian Treanor in *Aspects of Alterity*.[369]

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[368] "Duns Scotus: his historical and contemporary significance," 130ff. As with Maximus' concept-pairs in Part 1, the apparent contrast ultimately reveals a deeper communion (see supra p.108 and Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology*, 124).

[369] *Aspects of Alterity*, 8. Treanor's book focuses on a comparison of Emmanuel Levinas and Gabriel Marcel, and then follows their respective lineages through the thinkers mentioned here.

If otherness is considered an absolute, all-or-nothing affair, then we are prompted to protect and preserve the alterity of the other as our main objective. There's no questioning the other since their otherness is absolute, so the appropriate response is to maintain distance and respect for their alterity. Because of this emphasis on distance and respect, philosophies of radical alterity tend to promote *justice* as the model of relating to others. Good fences make good neighbors. No trespassing.

However, if otherness is considered relative, questioning and understanding the other is not violent or impossible. Because the difference between me and another is not absolute, there is no ethical injunction to protect and preserve the alterity of the other. Rather the injunction is to understand the other better, since otherness is only relative, making understanding possible. This opens the way to intimacy and participation. Concern for bridging distance rather than maintaining it prompts philosophies of relative otherness to privilege *love,* rather than justice, as the model of relating to otherness.[370]

Kearney and Treanor's claim is that we can think otherness in non-absolute terms and yet still be respectful of the other as other, that we can do justice to the ethical gains and epistemological concerns of alterity without privileging it as absolute. Non-absolute otherness is not simply otherness relative to me and to the self-same, but can be a genuine

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[370] Throughout *Aspects of Alterity*, Treanor offers a nuanced account as to how Levinas and Marcel's respective religious commitments do and do not dovetail with the justice-love distinction. See page 152, for example.

encounter with the other as both accessible and inaccessible. The phenomenal otherness that presents itself is always a crossing of similitude and alterity, since absolute otherness cannot enter into relation. Treanor argues that such an approach can resolve several problems of radical alterity, including aporia, hyperbole, and even what he calls soft relativism and soft determinism.[371] I build on this approach by considering the repeatable genera of *ousia* as a domain of similitude that is always already entwined with the unique particularities of *hupostasis-prosopon* as a domain of difference. In the crossing of *ousia* and *hupostasis,* as well as similitude and difference, the whole person is always both, the two only separable conceptually, not actually. Kearney proposes *diacritical hermeneutics* as "a practice of narrative interpretation capable of tracing interconnections between the poles of sameness and strangeness."[372]

Treanor calls his approach a chiastic-hermeneutic model of otherness. To explore these issues further, we return to one of the earliest inquiries into alterity, Plato's *Sophist,* in which the Eleatic Stranger risks the parricide of Parmenides.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

> STRANGER: [We must] say that the kinds blend with each other and that *what-is* (*ontos*) and *the other* (*heteron*) pervade each and every kind, that *the other* participates in *what-is* and, because of that participation (*methexis*), is. But because *the other* is different from that in which it participates, being other than *what-is*, it is most

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[371] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 258.

[372] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters,* 10.

clear and necessary that *what-is-not* is. . . .To dissociate each thing from everything else is to destroy totally everything there is to say. The weaving together (*symploke*) of forms is what makes speech (*logos*) possible (*gegonen*) for us.[373]

To totally separate similitude and difference, the same and the other, would mean the destruction of all *logos*—speech and thought. Even Derrida pushes back against Levinas on this point: "The Stranger in the *Sophist* who, like Levinas, seems to break with Eleatism in the name of alterity, knows that alterity can be thought only as negativity, and above all, can be said only as negativity, which Levinas begins by refusing."[374]

While Parmenides wishes to absolutely negate negation, Plato secures a place for relative negation, which ensures the intelligibility of the world and permits one to distinguish between truth and error. Otherness shares or participates in what-is, the self-similar. Otherness as a discrete category is only comprehensible relative to *some* other: "The other is always said in relation to another (*pros heteron*)."[375] This relation is the relativity of

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[373] *Sophist*, 259A–E, translated in Cooper by N. White, modified. This passage clearly recalls *Timaeus* 36C, where the Demiurge crosses together the circles destined to be the rotations of the Same and the Different "together center to center like a *chi* [χεί]" (as in the Greek letter χ from which comes "chiasmus").

[374] "Violence and Metaphysics," 127. In this essay, Derrida critiques *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas responds in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (especially in section 4, "Substitution"). The exchange continues in Levinas' "Wholly Otherwise," Derrida's "At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am," and even Derrida's eulogy for Levinas, "Adieu"; see Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, 140.

[375] *Sophist*, 255D.

otherness, the crossing of its similitude and alterity.[376] Derrida writes:

"Passing through the parricide and the murder of Parmenides, this dialectic receives the thinking of nonbeing as *other* and not as absolute nothingness or simple opposite of Being."[377]

Levinas' insistence on absolute otherness to the exclusion of any relationship signifies a radical break between language and the transcendence it attempts to describe. Is such a position coherent? Is it self-subverting? Has absolute alterity led to absolute aporia? Kearney points out that "Levinas' idea of absolute alterity presupposes the very phenomenology of speech and appearance it seeks to transcend."[378] Is Levinas' oeuvre another grand attempt to speak what cannot be said? Does that make it negative theology? In noting Levinas' refusal to speak (absolute) alterity as (relative) negativity, Derrida interrogates Levinas' radical division between the ontological order and the infinite Other, between being and the beyond of being. In contrast to Levinas' stark rift, Derrida characterizes his own project thus:

> I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are

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[376] On the philosophical history of absolute versus relative negation see Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, Monsters,* 15ff. On this same history with reference to Maximus, see Natalie Depraz, "The Theo-Phenomenology of Negation in Maximus the Confessor between Negative Theology and Apophaticism," especially 142f.

[377] Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking," 103.

[378] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters,* 15.

imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the "other" and the "other of language."[379]

Is Derrida yearning for an encounter with the other? Would that mitigate the other's alterity in any way? Is it possible to encounter the "other of language" for whom we search? Notice how with the mention of the "other of *language*," Derrida broadens the inquiry beyond Levinas' more theocentric-anthropocentric approach. Derrida testifies to our earlier suspicion: "Levinas's resignation has its limits; he is resigned, not to denying the experience of alterity or rendering it incoherent, but to betraying it by saying it, as in negative theology."[380] The classic derridean objection to negative theology here is that apophasis always knows in advance the Biblical-monotheistic God that it addresses and unsays, regardless of its own most elaborate negations of negations. Because of his faith, Levinas brings a theological and ethical orientation to his philosophy that Derrida does not. For deconstruction, Levinas remains too metaphysical, too resonant with a classical Neoplatonism of *eros, epekeina,* and *agathon.* Caputo writes: "Levinas is vulnerable to all of the criticisms that beset metaphysics, for this is metaphysics indeed, a metaphysics of the Good not the true, a metaphysical ethics, not a deontology, but

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[379] Derrida, "Back from Moscow, in the USSR," in *Politics, Theory and Contemporary Culture,* 197–235.

[380] Derrida, "Circumfession," in *Jacques Derrida*, 155.

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metaphysics still."[381] Not a metaphysics of the true, which through

knowledge (pure and practical reason) would determine the best course of

moral action according to a categorical imperative. Rather a metaphysics

of the Good, erotic though not ecstatic. Eschatological desire for the

infinity beyond totality. A metaphysical *eros* "beyond everything that can

simply complete it. It is like goodness—the Desired does not fulfil it, but

deepens it."[382] The transcendent Good acts as a vector of responsibility to

this *eros* in the double sense of responsibility. This shows up in

relationship:

> Love remains a relation with the Other that turns into need, and
> this need still presupposes the total, transcendent exteriority of the
> other, of the beloved. But love also goes beyond the beloved. This is
> why through the face filters the obscure light coming from beyond
> the face, from what is not yet, from a future never future enough.[383]

We almost glimpse the beloved other but then they recede into an

inaccessible future. Derrida and Caputo will widen the scope of the

wholly other to the all-inclusive *tout autre est tout autre.* Brought down

from divine height, does this democratization of alterity bring us closer to

or further away from the "other of language"?[384]

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[381] Caputo, "Hyperbolic Justice," 200f.

[382] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34; Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 64.

[383] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 255.

[384] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 213; Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 72.

For Plato, and perhaps for deconstruction too, being and its beyond must finally encounter one another. Whereas Levinas mostly insists on an alterity outside my horizon of experience, Derrida and Caputo tend to speak in terms of an otherness that disturbs, intrudes upon, or shocks that horizon. Plato goes further in saying that being and its beyond must positively undergo mediation—but not without confrontation. The Eleatic Stranger recounts the "never-ending battle" between "gods and giants."[385]

The former insist that what truly *is* are intelligible forms that can be thought, while they deride sensible bodies by verbally decomposing them into processes that possess no deeper reality. The latter declare that only tangible things really *are* and attempt to drag everything invisible down from the heavenly spheres. The philosopher, however, must refuse to accept from the champions either of the One or of the many Forms the doctrine that true reality is changeless, and she must likewise turn a deaf ear to those who represent it as everywhere changing. The philosopher must "be like a child begging for both," and say that *what-is*—everything—is both the unchanging and that which changes. Without taking one side or the other, nor by striking some median compromise, the philosopher guards the poles of transcendence and immanence intact, stretching her arms to embrace the paradox. This is *perichoresis,* a non-competitive relation between transcendence and immanence, a metaxological approach, a chiasmus.

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[385] *Sophist,* 246A–249D.

Of course, it is no accident that the principal interlocutor in the dialogue is an unnamed *stranger* (*xenos* [ξένος]), interrogating the status of *otherness*. The Greek *xenos* means most simply "foreigner," but can also ambiguously signify "guest-friend," "stranger-enemy," and "foreign-host."[386] The status of the stranger, of the other, is precisely what is in question. Is the strangeness of the stranger, the otherness of the other, absolute or relative? Plato realizes that the status of the divine (the Big Other) is connected to this question: Socrates asks, "are you bringing a stranger, Theodorus? Or are you bringing a god without realizing it, instead?"[387] Here Plato intimates the interchangeability of god and the other. Derrida senses a similar priority given to God's alterity in Levinas' treatment of the other: "The face-to-face is not originally determined by Levinas as the vis-a-vis of two equal and upright men. The latter presupposes the face-to-face of the man with bent neck and eyes raised toward the God on high."[388] It is the negative-theological asymmetry that seems to be Levinas' model for personal absolute otherness, even if the alterity of the person is, paradoxically, our only means of accessing the

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[386] Cf. Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*.

[387] *Sophist,* 216A.

[388] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 107.

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alterity of the divine.[389] Though radical, Levinas will never rightly pass for an atheist.

But even as Derrida critiques Levinas, he extends him. Derrida points out this privileging of God as part of his project to generalize Levinas' insights more broadly: "one should say of no matter what or no matter whom what one says of God."[390] God's radical transcendence is mobilized to help us think the transcendence of any particular thing: "one or other persons but just as well places, animals, language."[391] Caputo calls this a "generalized apophatics," which extends to the sheer alterity of each other.[392] Consequence: if this otherness is absolute, it cannot but lead to undecidability, substitutability, translatability, when it comes to evaluating identically withdrawn others—in short, deconstruction: vigilance in the face of impossibility, under the threat of failure. Caputo writes:

> Everything about deconstruction requires that we let the *tout autre* tremble in undecidability, in an endless, open-ended,

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[389] "The problem of transcendence and of God and the problem of subjectivity irreducible to essence, irreducible to essential immanence, go together" (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence,* 17).

[390] Derrida, *On the Name,* 73. While I try to do justice to Derrida's positions here, his work is always a written text that demands relentless attention to specificity and context, as it often undermines itself or plays upon undecidability.

[391] Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money,* 71.

[392] Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion,* 27.

indeterminable, undecidable *translatability*, or *substitutability*, or *exemplarity*, where we are at a loss to say what is an example of what, what is a translation of what.[393]

While there is a *conceptual* difference between the divine and the monstrous, for example, they cannot *actually* be distinguished, since they are both wholly other, and thus substitutable for one another. To the query "God or khora," Caputo responds: "our experiences of the two are not necessarily so widely divided, for in both cases we experience a certain confusion (Levinas), a kind of bedazzlement (Marion), or what Derrida and I would call an 'undecidability,' which I think can be resolved only by *faith*."[394] In what does this faith consist and how does it achieve resolution? For Kearney wonders: if every other is wholly other, meaning we have no criteria or reasons (*logoi*) to distinguish them from one another, does it still matter who or what exactly the other is?[395] How do we distinguish between the guest-friend and the stranger-enemy?

Caputo contends that Kearney has confused undecidability with indecision. The former is the condition of possibility of a decision; undecidability's opposite is not decisiveness but programmability. If a situation were not undecidable then it could be settled by a formal rule, obviating the need for real judgment or responsibility, erasing the threat

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[393] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 25.

[394] Caputo, "Richard Kearney's Enthusiasm," 315.

[395] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 74.

of failure. Decision is only truly called for when the selection process is unclear, idiosyncratic, or somehow eludes general law. Undecidability is

> the desert sphere, in which any genuine decision or movement of faith is to be made, where God and *khora* bleed into one another and create an element of ambiguity and undecidability *within which the movement of faith* is made. Without *khora*, we would be programmed to God, divine automatons hardwired to the divine being, devoid of freedom, responsibility, decision, judgment, and faith.[396]

Without undecidability there would be no surprise and no true choice. Without such freedom to live and create in the ways to which we aspire, there could be no God of possibility, no eschatological enabling of the longed-for promise. This is the deconstructive im-possible—not the opposite of possibility but rather its renewal and true arrival as unpredictable event. On this, Derrida and Kearney agree: No event worthy of the name merely actualizes a foreseeable potentiality. The true event is both a *possibility*, insofar as it comes to pass, but also was an *impossibility*, insofar as it was unanticipated.[397] So while undecidability does not equal indecision, and in fact opens up a space of alliance between deconstruction and diacritical hermeneutics, the question of *discernment,* of how decisions are made, remains. We will return to this question.

Let me offer a brief rejoinder as a preview of my position, agreeing with Derrida's statement that "one should say of no matter what or no matter whom what one says of God," but replacing his radical alterity

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[396] Caputo, "Richard Kearney's Enthusiasm," 316.

[397] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 94ff.

with relative otherness. Just as God is unknowable in God's *ousia*, but knowable and participable in God's *energeiai,* so too does any particular person or thing present a knowable side, with perceivable characteristics, and yet in some aspects remains withdrawn. Even us complex human beings are able to share something of our inner lives with one another, even if such sharing can never be complete. It is as if Derrida only considers the *ousia* portion, thus making every other totally other. But that misses half the story: every other is both wholly other in aspects of their innermost world, but also knowable and participable in their activity and energies. This makes understanding, compassion, and cooperation possible, not merely as a humble surrender before the other's mystery, but as positive knowledge and a true joining of streams of effort and feeling. The alterity of the other is guarded intact on one level, but an interpenetration of energy and activity is also availed. Because this analogy employs the *ousia-energeia* distinction from *God's* point of view, the unknowable *ousia* is the analogue of otherness, while the knowable *energeia* is the analogue of similitude. From the *person's* point of view, we could employ the *ousia-hupostasis* distinction to say something similar, but in inverse fashion: the shared kind or general *ousia* is a locus of similitude, while the unique and particular *hupostasis* is a site of otherness (notice how this is no longer, strictly speaking, an *analogy,* though the mapping is

not one-to-one).[398] Both sides of the coin are necessary, alterity so we stay open to the mystery of the other and our inability to encapsulate or comprehend them fully, but also participation so that true communion, compassion, and mutual understanding are possible. This does not lead to a final totalizing grasp of the other; the risk, on the contrary, is that a too great insistence on alterity may completely isolate us from one another.

We have now transitioned from the divine–human relationship to the human–human one. Recall how we have followed many of these terms from their specialized use in Trinitarian thought, through Christological applications, on to anthropology, where they continue to have relevance for parsing the complex nature of human responsibility and relationship. Let us inquire further into the status of personal alterity.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

> "ROBERT: No man ever yet lived on this earth who did not long to possess. . .the woman whom he loves. It is nature's law. . . .If you love. . .what else is it?
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> RICHARD: (hesitatingly) To wish her well."
>
> –James Joyce, *Exiles*, 77–78

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[398] Shared kind, in an ontological sense, is certainly a *primary* form of similitude that presents itself, though perhaps not the only one (e.g. shared experience, emotional empathy). Furthermore, not all the particularities that uniquely distinguish someone are withdrawn (e.g. the shape of their nose, or the way they walk; though one can wonder if we really see the nose and the gait in all their idiosyncrasy or only through a conceptual approximation that always employs shared kinds to some degree. Indeed, Gregory and Maximus both espoused this view to some degree, asserting that if one were to remove all the categorical properties or predicates from a given thing, there would be nothing left to intuit. We will examine the status of things more closely with respect to these distinctions in the next section). Kearney will explicitly associate the *prosopon* with otherness, as we will examine, though his use of the term is not textbook Patristic.

For Levinas, otherness is an all-or-nothing situation: either it is absolute, or finally it is not really otherness at all: "The same and the other at the same time maintain themselves in relationship and absolve themselves from this relation, remain absolutely separated. The idea of Infinity requires this separation."[399] In this quote it is as if for a moment Levinas sees that radical alterity precludes relationship and almost applies a paralogic (at once *maintaining* and *absolving* relationship), but then doubles down on absolute separation as the defining criterion of otherness. Something which is merely relative to something else (predictably the self), is not truly other. Otherness in relation to me is dictated on my terms, not the terms of the other, which brings the other into my circle of the self-same and thereby violates their alterity by subsuming them in my totality.

The alternative to this all-or-nothing position would be a neither-all-nor-nothing position. Instead of Levinas' choice between *other* and *same*, the alternative would offer the choices *other*, *same*, or *both*. While *transcendentally*, the other may be absolutely other, *concretely*, even Levinas concedes that absolute alterity slips away: "As citizens we are reciprocal, but [this] is a more complex structure than the Face to Face."[400] While the ethical is bedrock of human relations, their everyday stomping grounds

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[399] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 102.

[400] Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, 107. See also, Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 35.

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are justice, morality, and politics. These latter spheres engage the art of the possible (perhaps with an eye to deconstruction's im-possible, but expressly engaged in *decision-making*). Here we must compare incomparable singularities, make judgments in the dark, and assert our own needs in the face of adversity. We do so on the limited basis to which the other person is only *relatively* other to me, which is in fact how the other always presents themselves to me, especially outside the face to face:

> If I am protecting x from the violence of y, then my inhospitality to y becomes an essential component of my hospitality toward x (that is, my inhospitality toward y constitutes the conditions of the possibility of my being hospitable toward x). It is in this way that there remains a necessary mutual contamination between the "unconditional law of hospitality" and the "conditional. . .laws of hospitality."[401]

For all intents and purposes, the height of absolute otherness becomes mixed with the relative on the ground. Just as radical alterity cannot be spoken, neither can it enter the horizon of my perception. As Derrida puts it to Levinas: "how is alterity to be experienced as other if it surpasses all our phenomenal horizons of experience?"[402] Absolute otherness cannot appear, since anything that does appear is somehow related to me as perceiver. In this sense, radical alterity can be charged with hyperbole. Anything that I encounter is in fact a crossing, or a chiasmus, between similitude and difference. This is what allows it to appear to me.

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[401] Bob Plant, "Doing Justice to the Derrida-Levinas connection," 442. Plant cites Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 79, in this passage.

[402] "Violence and Metaphysics," 114f.; Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, 143, 153, 201, 212f.; Kearney, *God Who May Be*, 76.

Levinas' depictions of the face of the other betray this shared ground: stranger, widower, orphan. I can feel and understand these persons' vulnerability and need, I can experience the call to responsibility, precisely because I can somewhat, though not fully, relate to their situations. I have lived abroad and felt alone; I love my wife and would die to lose her; my parents have helped shepherd me to myself. Though my understanding of the other varies both in kind and amount, something comes through that allows me to appreciate where they are coming from and how I may hear and help, or at least not hurt. If they were absolutely other, other as God is invisible, how could I experience them at all, let alone respond in a way fitting to their particular situation? Another person does not present as a black box, nor does conversation imply that I can know nothing about them. In fact, knowing them better actually serves my capacity to act ethically toward them. For example, only knowledge of this person's nut allergy would allow me to realize that humbly offering my peanuts at their feet would in fact be an unkind action. While totalizing knowledge must be staved off, radical alterity would actually seem to impede my ability to do right by the other. *Some* knowledge of the other is what allows me to tend to their specific, personal needs. The encountered other is in fact always, necessarily, relatively other—even when they intrude: "The *tout autre* comes but it comes *relative* to a horizon of expectation which it shocks and sets back on its heels, instead of confirming and reinforcing this horizon in its

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complacency," says Caputo.[403] This seems to be a generative nexus

between deconstruction and diacritical hermeneutics, here where the

relative other is experienced as rupture and surprise, where they enter my

world without being leveled within a homogeny of the self-same.

But Levinas remains too extreme, abstracting otherness from its

chiastic crossing with similitude, and thereby concretizing what is

properly an aspect or part of a whole.[404] While otherness is a legitimate

and crucial facet of human experience, Levinas reifies it to such a degree

that absolute alterity appears to exist independently of its joint-

manifestation with similitude. This rarefication can teach us invaluable

ethical and epistemological lessons, but if the abstraction is not returned

back to reality, it succumbs to what Marcel calls the *spirit of abstraction*, or

what Whitehead calls the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*, or what Barfield

calls the *sin of literalness*.[405] Levinas does not sufficiently reunite concept

and reality in such a way that the abstraction is acknowledged *as*

abstraction. The fallacy is precisely a forgetting that takes the derived

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[403] *Prayers and Tears*, 22, my emphasis.

[404] At least in his early work, Levinas remains too extreme. To be fair, it could be argued that *Otherwise than Being* addresses some of these concerns. My purpose, however, is to paint radical alterity in its extreme form so as to better understand its contrast with relative alterity.

[405] Whitehead defines the fallacy of misplaced concreteness as "the accidental error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete," in *Science and the Modern World*, 51. Barfield writes, "The needful 'virtue' is that which combats the besetting sin. And the besetting sin to-day is the sin of literalness, or idolatry," in *Saving the Appearances*, 162

construct as originary reality. Unhinged from the primordial chiasmic phenomena, Levinas can write about similitude and alterity as if they were oil and water.

Rather, Treanor counters, they are like water itself. Just as water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen, real persons are a crossing of otherness and sameness:

> To talk about a relationship with absolute alterity is something like talking about drinking hydrogen from a mountain spring. In one sense it makes sense, for in drinking the water I am drinking the hydrogen; however, in another equally important sense, it makes no sense, for I cannot drink the hydrogen without drinking the oxygen at the same time. I do not drink hydrogen; I do not drink oxygen; I drink water. Of course, the abstraction that allows us to focus on the hydrogen apart from the oxygen and apart from the water from which it is abstracted is useful on some level. However, to talk about "drinking hydrogen" generally obfuscates things, taking me away from the experience rather than taking me toward the experience and fostering an understanding of it.[406]

Abstractions help us to do chemistry—no small feat—but will not quench our thirst. Hydrogen and oxygen, similitude and alterity, *ousia* and *hupostasis,* and all the other dyads we explored in the section on Maximus—can be separated *conceptually* but not actually. They are all perichoretic structures, not unlike covalent bonds: The bonded atoms are unconfused and undivided, their union-in-distinction consisting of a mutual reception of participating electrons (shared between the atoms to complete their valence shells) alongside unparticipated protons. Both aspects of the structure, as well as their conjunction and disjunction, demand our attention:

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[406] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 234, 143, 204f.

> If the alterity of the other plays a special role in conditioning the ethical aspect of "ethical relationship," the similarity of the other plays an equally important role in conditioning the relational aspect of "ethical relationship." Both speaking about alterity without reference to similarity and speaking about self hood without reference to alterity are abstractions that fail to do justice to our experience of otherness.[407]

Here Treanor's double rhetorical chiasmus underscores his theoretical one. My invocation of the figure of *perichoresis* underlines that both poles are necessary to give a full account of the encounter with the other. While we can agree with Kearney that "the other is neither absolutely transcendent nor absolutely immanent, but somewhere between the two,"[408] this between is not an average or a median. Just as I elaborated the third way of Kearney's God-who-may-be to include the God-who-is and the God-who-is-not, I believe it important here to stress the crossed dyad rather than the fusional third. Treanor's language of "chiasm" and chiasmic language highlight this point. Kearney acknowledges as much when he writes:

> A complex phenomenology of the self-other dyad prompts us to espouse a hermeneutic pluralism of otherness, a sort of "polysemy of alterity"—ranging from our experiences of conscience and the body to those of other persons, living or dead (our ancestors), or to a divine Other, living or absent. There is no otherness so exterior or so unconscious, on this reading, that it cannot be at least minimally interpreted by a self, and interpreted in a variety of different ways—albeit none of them absolute, adequate or exhaustive.[409]

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[407] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 235.

[408] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters,* 79.

[409] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters,* 81.

This interpreting happens between the poles of the dyads: Neither the self-other dyad nor the related similitude-difference dyad are dialectically synthesized, but rather mark the tensive opposites between which dia-critical hermeneutics can shuttle: "By thus ensuring that the other does not collapse into sameness or exile itself into some inaccessible alterity, hermeneutics keeps in contact with the other."[410]

Collapsing into sameness is idolatry of the univocal, while the self-other chasm brought on by exiled alterity is idolatry of the equivocal. If the third way is over-literalized, it risks becoming an idol of dialectic, but when properly dia-logical and reciprocal, can open and maintain the metaxic di-stance of relationship. The dyadic structure is between two persons and within each one (holographically). A person's observed similitude can present as icon of their alterity; what incarnates in some way attests to who is incarnating, as the phenomenality of phenomena attests in some way to the thing itself. Insofar as a person is alter- they are absolutely alter-, and insofar as they are present they may participate and be-participated. This is the dialectic of transcendence and immanence, the paralogic of participation: two unconfused aspects which yet always only present as an undivided whole person. The hermeneutic spiral of interpretation spins in the *metaxu*, perceiving similitude, whose dominating re-turn to the self is checked by the alterity of the other, whose

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[410] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, 81. This is similar to what Balthasar calls a "preservative synthesis" (*Cosmic Liturgy*, 232).

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stalemate is disarmed by the hermeneutics of relationship, which achieves

a more complex similitude *and* difference in higher-contrast harmony,

which is in turn checked by alterity, in the ongoing perichoretic dance

(this time in the Trinitarian sense).[411] Kearney writes:

> If the deconstruction of the cogito was a necessary correction to the modern idolatry of the ego, it needs to be supplemented by a critique of the postmodern obsession with absolutist ideas of exteriority and otherness. The suspicion of "sameness". . .requires to be suspected in turn lest it lead to a new idolatry: that of the immemorial, ineffable Other. And it is with this in mind that I have been making hermeneutic soundings and chartings of the limits of ultimacy. The threat to a genuine relation to others comes in fetishizing the Other as much as it does in glorifying the Ego. Both extremes undermine our practical understanding of ourselves-as-others. For each ignores that strangers are both within us and beyond us.[412]

Kearney commends this chiasmic understanding of self-as-other

and other-as-another-self as one of the best ways to de-alienate the other

person. Just as ethics demands that I respect the unique singularity of the

other qua *other*, so does it prompt me to recognize them as another *self*

who possesses rights and responsibilities like mine—another self who is

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[411] Kearney on *perichoresis*: "What emerges is an image of the three distinct persons moving toward each other in a gesture of immanence and away from each other in a gesture of transcendence. At once belonging and distance. Moving in and out of position. An interplay of loving and letting go; We thus find ourselves players in an eschatological game of which we are neither the initiators nor the culminators, a game which we cannot master since its possibles are always beyond our possibles, refiguring the play of genesis, prefiguring the play of eschaton, a game that knows no end-game, no stalemate, whose ultimate move is always still to come. But if we cannot master the divine play of the possible, we can partake of it as a gift given to us, a grace that heals and enables, a love that comes to us from the future summoning us toward the other beyond ourselves" (*The God Who May Be*, 109).

[412] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, 299.

able to recognize me in turn as an *other* and as a *self* who too deserves respect and recognition. "To declare with the prophets of alterity that the other is so absolutely other that it defies all narrative acts of rememoration or anticipation is not only to compromise the basic practice of promise-keeping but to threaten the equally ethical practice of testimony."[413] I cannot keep a concrete promise to a wholly other with whom I cannot communicate; I cannot testify on behalf of a radical alterity who I can neither perceive nor understand; I cannot honor the memory of an absence that was never present.

In order to keep such ethical actions on the table, Treanor points to Marcel's concept of a *constellation* of beings, in which other and self are clearly distinct from one another, yet connected in a meaningful way. Within a constellation otherness is limited, and thus not absolute, yet that otherness is not limited by my own determinations, and thus is not part of a totality. The other person is not simply part of my system, but nor are they wholly outside my horizon of experience. Constellations allow for real communion without forming totalities. Treanor speaks of "aspects of alterity" to designate how otherness contains both aspects of absolute otherness as well as aspects of similitude. There will always be real ways in which another person is utterly foreign to me, wholly beyond the grasp of my knowledge, absolutely other. Yet so too is there at least some minimal shared experience and shared reality, if only the fact that we are

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[413] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters,* 80.

encountering one another—but more likely a number of common traits concerning our histories, desires, and projects. How do we open to these shared, constellated spaces without compromising the equally imperative axiological and epistemological insights of alterity?[414]

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> "For union, in setting separation apart, has in no way undermined difference."

> –Maximus the Confessor[415]

Absolute otherness reshapes our assumptions about ethics and justice by protecting the unique singularity of the other at all costs. Absolute otherness reshapes our assumptions about epistemology by placing limits on human knowledge, revealing its provisional, incomplete, and contextual nature. These limits guard against the closure of totalizing systems, ensuring a degree of play that allows for novelty, that welcomes the im-possible. The epistemological revision serves the ethical one by protecting the other from the overly univocal tendencies of thought.

However, if every other is wholly other, then my relationship with any other should be wholly identical. As wholly other, every other is the same *to me.* While this removes any basis for negative discrimination (e.g., sexism, racism, homophobia), it also removes the basis for positive discrimination (e.g., between premeditated murder and unintentional

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[414] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 157f., 218.

[415] *Ambigua* 5.1056C.

manslaughter). Kindness is not just offering a drink of cold water, but perceiving a parched person in the hot sun and heeding the call of their specific need. Though I would like to help all marginalized people, is not the island community whose homes were just decimated by a hurricane in more pressing need than some other groups? The danger, however, is spelled out in the epigraph to Edward Said's *Orientalism,* taken from Marx: "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented."[416]

When we know what someone needs better than they know themselves, we have drawn them into our totalizing circle of the same. But a robust dia-critical approach need not do so, taking seriously that *insofar as they are other, the other is wholly other,* and thus deserving of all the affordances of a radical alterity. Yet the boundary of the "insofar" is a moving one, permitting of a participation and a communion that may better inform my care toward the other, though without ever reaching some final adequation point.

Neither epistemologically speaking need the game be played out in an all-or-nothing fashion. Absolute unknowability is sufficient but not necessary to circumvent total comprehension. Knowledge admits of degrees and does not lead inexorably to programmability. Knowledge admits of kinds (e.g., practical, emotional, intuitive) that do not lead

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[416] "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* edited by Tucker, 608.

inevitably to domination.[417] It is here that the postmodern suspicion of the

modern quest for apodictic knowledge betrays itself as a negative image

of that quest. Both camps tend to construe knowing as re-presentation, but

while modernity finds this instructive, postmodernity considers it an

essentially violent distortion. Yet, even as it is ridiculous to posit that

failure to achieve apodictic knowledge is tantamount to not knowing

anything, so too is it ridiculous to posit that conceding the least bit of

knowledge of the other or admitting the least bit of communion with them

is suddenly tantamount to totalizing control. I both humbly and

continually recognize the unknowable remainder of the other, but I also

commune with and celebrate those aspects of the other that divide evenly

into aspects of myself, that find a common factor and produce a quotient

of relation.

This apodictic fervor carries over into Derrida's analysis of the

proper name, which Caputo says "cannot be an absolutely *proper* name. . .

if it is to be a proper *name*. A proper name is an attempt to utter something

repeatable about the unrepeatable."[418] Agreed: as a person, I am a singular

site of alterity. But despite my changes and growth, there is also

something continuous in me that repeats. If we see each other today,

tomorrow I would like you to remember who I am, my traits, and what

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[417] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, 236–239.

[418] "For the Love of the Things Themselves," par. 10.

we did and discussed. I do not want you to treat me as a full-on singularity about whom nothing is known. The repetition of my name, the remembrance of my qualities, and your belief in the continuity of my character do not do violence to my alterity, but rather allow me to be a person in the fullest sense, that is, someone who is becoming-in-communion. The argument for alterity will *save* my being totalized by your knowledge and discourse, will demand a humble ethical response to my person, but if *no* knowledge is possible, *no* communion, then surely this love and desire for me-as-other will eventually grow tired, frustrated, bored by my utter inaccessibility. Fully fulfilled desire falls away in satiation, but so too does fully blocked desire wither without a sign, a word, a favor from the beloved. The stoking of desire is not just a matter of withholding, but of allowing a peak through the door, behind the veil, when the moment is right, as a pact and promise of what is to come, of what is be-coming together in that very process, not toward some final synthetic fulfillment, but in an eschatological co-creativity, in dialogical reciprocity, in mutual revealing in stepwise fashion, framed by an always apophatic stance toward the finality of comprehension—which stance is indeed "for love of the things themselves" that cannot be revealed—but also with an optimism for what can be shared, created, and lived together in an unconfused communion-in-otherness.

The postmodern over-emphasis on difference and heteronomy is the flipside of the modernist over-emphasis on identity, autonomy, and subjectivity, revealing the postmodern as ideologically (and etymologically) derivative—postmodernity as hypermodernity. Catherine

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Pickstock contends that the "secular postmodern is only the logical

outcome of the rationalism of modernity, and in no sense its inversion."[419]

Treanor declares:

> We do not need a radically heterocentric philosophy in order to
> overcome the traditional autocentric modes of thought that do
> violence to the other; polycentrism can accomplish the ethical and
> epistemological goals of philosophies of absolute otherness without
> the hyperbole and paroxysm with which they have been
> charged.[420]

Relative alterity, *polycentrism,* seeks understanding of the others, however

imperfect; whether better or worse, such understanding will never be

comprehensive or absolute. By contrast, radical alterity, *heterocentrism,*

tends to construe relationship with the other as a betrayal that does

violence. Knowledge is never adequate to otherness and thus inflicts

injustice. But if anything short of apodictic knowledge is steeped in

undecidability, then there is no *metaxu,* there are no criteria for imperfect

knowledge, which (as Plato knew) leads toward relativism.[421]

> We all know objective truth is not obtainable. . .but we must still
> believe that objective truth is obtainable; or we must believe that it
> is 99 per cent obtainable; or if we can't believe this we must believe
> that 43 per cent objective truth is better than 41 per cent. We must
> do so because if we don't we're lost, we fall into beguiling
> relativity, we value one liar's version as much as another liar's, we

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[419] Pickstock, *After Writing,* xii.

[420] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 241.

[421] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 246ff.

throw up our hands at the puzzle of it all, we admit that the victor has the right not just to the spoils but also to the truth.[422]

Since undecidability is not the same as indecision, deconstruction *decides*, if for no other reason than that it is forced to by circumstance. But if undecidability holds, decision happens without a why, without a real reason, which wanders dangerously close to the edge of relativism. This is not a hard relativism, but it remains a covert, soft possibility. Treanor writes: "A deconstructive ethics does not say or claim that all positions are equally valid, because it has chosen and repeatedly affirms one position rather than another. Caputo and Derrida invariably speak of undecidability in ethical terms of justice, hospitality, and generosity."[423]

Treanor's point is that they do so without a why. If there is no criterion of choice between X and Y, we must admit they are equally (in)valid positions *for me*. Even if they are not equally valid in themselves, my lack of access dictates that this amounts to the same. He continues:

> If undecidability really leaves us without landmarks in the desert of khora, in which we are at a loss to say what is an example of what, why is it that the examples that Caputo and Derrida unfailingly use are ethical examples? Why is absolute otherness ethical, just, generous, hospitable, or responsible, to name just a few of the values that deconstruction uses to characterize the impossible? Why not equally vicious, unjust, greedy, inhospitable, or selfish? . . .Merold Westphal points out that "nothing about deconstruction

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[422] Julian Barnes, *History of the World in 10 and a Half Chapters*, 244, quoted in Kearney, *On Stories*, 149.

[423] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 250.

requires us to side (as I think Derrida himself does) with Levinas against Nietzsche."[424]

In the absence of any definite reasons or criteria of judgment, Treanor warns that a soft cultural determinism may fill that void (e.g., my upbringing and social class lead me to Levinas instead of Nietzsche). To evade such determinism, which is ultimately the kind of programmability that deconstruction resists, there must be reasons that we choose X over Y (e.g., X is *more* just). These reasons are fallible and may be works in progress, but we use them, and to some degree they work. Otherwise ethics is undermined from the outset by obviating freedom and responsibility. God and *khora* may resemble one another, but hermeneutics holds out the possibility that they are not completely indistinguishable and that it is the responsibility of ethical beings to discern them as best they can.

Aristotle calls this capability *phronesis* (practical wisdom [φρόνησῐς]), and it is something that deconstruction and hermeneutics can nearly agree upon. Caputo describes it as "the acquired skill of figuring out what to do in the situations that are unique enough to fall below the radar of rules and universals." Kearney calls it "a form of practical wisdom capable of respecting the singularity of situations as well

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[424] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity,* 251ff., quoting Westphal, "Postmodernism and Ethics: The Case of Caputo," 162.

as the nascent universality of values aimed at by human actions."[425]

Aristotle calls it a "true and reasoned state or capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man," and further explains that "virtue aims at the right mark and *phronesis* makes us take the right means."[426] While Caputo would not be so comfortable speaking of a transcendent value like virtue, Kearney includes a transcendent orientation to the Good in his account of *phronesis.* This is meant to preserve its ethical character and prevent it from deteriorating into mere cleverness, which could serve any end upon the axiological spectrum (as the Sophists knew). While our understanding of the Good will always be imperfect, we do seem able to distinguish the civil rights achievements of Rosa Parks from the oppression and genocide of Pol Pot. If that oppression was less obvious in the early phases of Pol Pot's regime, it only increases the demand upon our hermeneutic vigilance: "surely it is important to tell the difference, even if it's only more or less; and even if we can never know for certain, or see for sure, or have any definite set of

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[425] Caputo, "Abyssus Abyssum Invocat," 126; Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, Monsters,* 100; quoted in Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, 255. Caputo critiques *phronesis* in *Radical Hermeneutics.* See also S. Gallagher, "The Place of Phronesis in Postmodern Hermeneutics," *Philosophy Today* 37, no. 3 (1993): 298–305, on Caputo's critique of *phronesis* and development of meta-*phronesis*, which he glosses elsewhere as "the wit to move about in a world where there is no agreement about the good life, where there are many competing good lives, too many to count and tabulate, a world where there is no agreement about the person of practical wisdom, or the schemata" (*More Radical Hermeneutics,* 183).

[426] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by David Ross, 142, 145.

criteria."[427] This hermeneutics of practical wisdom is meant to help us decide between justice and injustice. "For if we need a logic of undecidability to keep us tolerant—preventing us from setting ourselves up as Chief High Executioners—we need an ethics of judgement to commit us, as much as possible, to right action."[428]

All otherness calls for interpretation. The hermeneutic account of relative otherness asserts that, while there is no final interpretation that fully comprehends the other in epistemological transparency, the other is interpretable and some interpretations are better than others. While aporias arise for relative otherness, it aims to engage and traverse them through perichoretic interpretations: "Between the logos of the One and the anti-logos of the Other, falls the dia-logos of oneself-as-another; a hermeneutic retrieval of selfhood through the odyssey of otherness."[429]

Kearney makes two claims at the end of *Strangers, Gods, Monsters*: (1) that we are beings at the limit and (2) that we are beings who narrate. First, *at the limit* means that our existence is always poised upon the borderlines that mark the passage between other and same, unknown and known, absent and present, and all the other dyads. The limit is where

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[427] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, 226f.

[428] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, 71.

[429] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, 17ff.; Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, 222, 228.

participation happens. Second, we possess a narrative identity composed of the many stories we tell and are told by others. Our existence itself is narrative, and ecstatic, because as finite beings we are charged with making sense of what exceeds our limits—that strange otherness inside and out, that haunting transcendence we can neither apprehend nor escape. This is why Kearney believes that storytelling always involves some kind of hermeneutic interpretation. There is no *pure* access to a pure ego, neither one's own nor another, but there is *access*. Though access always consists of mediations and detours, we return each time to where we began enriched by dialogue and interpretation. Though we live in a perspectival world, perspective grows and evolves, in constellated relationship with other selves who constitute our living community.[430]

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I now wish to give more flesh to this relation between self and other by discussing the phenomena of gift-giving—aporetically analyzed by Derrida, "theistically augmented by Marion, theologically disputed by John Milbank," and further challenged by Catherine Keller.[431] The gift will help illustrate the aporia, hyperbole, and other challenges of radical alterity, and how they may be remedied by a model of relative otherness. I

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[430] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, 230; Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, 268.

[431] Keller, "Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank's *Being Reconciled*," in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 19.

then conclude this section with several related reflections on the coimplication of transcendence and immanence from the perspective of liberation theology.

According to Derrida's analysis, in order for a pure gift to occur, there should be no thought of recompense on the part of the giver nor any anticipation of reward on the part of the receiver. Thus, the gift depends upon *freedom* on both sides of the equation. Any compulsion upon either party fundamentally alters the gift-character of the giving. Such compulsion pulls gifting into a restricted economy of exchange, rather than leaving it in a general economy of surplus.[432] For example, if the donor expects a return-gift in exchange, the freely given quality of the gift has been annulled by that expectation. Likewise, if the recipient feels any sense of obligation to return the gift, its free character is destroyed. Even gratitude on the part of the recipient would constitute a return-gift to the donor; or at the extreme, even the recipient's displeasure with the gift would still minimally reinforce the donor's identity as a subject. In fact, any awareness on the part of the recipient of the gift *as* gift results in an act of recognition that, however indifferent, at least minimally transforms the gift into a burden that is contracted as a debt to be repaid. Thus, knowing the gift *as* gift, as something that is marked by *presence*, turns it into a commodity, a value, a measure of exchange. Both the gift's freely-

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[432] G. Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy;* Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," in *Writing and Difference.*

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given nature (freedom) and its status *as* gift (presence), turn out, in point of fact, to be impossible, annulling themselves in their very enaction. Therefore, the gift's conditions of possibility are simultaneously its conditions of impossibility. As Derrida states: "If the present is present to [the recipient] as present, this simple recognition suffices to annul the gift."[433]

Milbank sums up the position and then contests it:

1. (*Freedom*): The disinterested gift is only truly given by a dead person, and only truly received by an absolutely anonymous other (paradigmatically the enemy, according to Marion).[434]

2. (*Presence*): This gift can possess no identifiable content beyond the gesture of giving.

Contesting the second point, *presence*, Milbank argues that, in fact, only the content of the gift determines whether it is an appropriate gift, and therefore a gift at all, rather than an unwelcome intrusion (recall the nut allergy example). Is a gift that fails to secure the other's happiness really a gift? Addressing the first point, *freedom*, he argues that where there is no inkling whatsoever of the giver, a gift may become an impersonal

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[433] Derrida, *Given Time,* 13. Derrida examines other conditions of the gift but this one is of primary interest for our discussion. See also: "On the Gift," 59f., edited by Caputo and Scanlon; R. Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift*, 1–9.

[434] Milbank, *Being Reconciled,* 156. Marion writes, for example: "Only the enemy makes the gift possible; he makes the gift evident by denying it reciprocity—in contrast to the friend, who involuntarily lowers the gift to the level of a loan with interest. The enemy thus becomes the ally of the gift and the friend its adversary" (*Being Given,* 89).

interference. Likewise, where there is no familiarity with the recipient

(even in the case of the enemy), there is no true gift, since a true gift must

be fitting to its receiver. Thus, before a gift can actually be given, there

must already be a relation or exchange underway:

> For gift-giving is a mode (the mode in fact) of social being, and in ignoring this, both Derrida and Marion remain trapped within Cartesian myths of prior subjectivity after all. . . .If there is a gift that can truly be, then this must be the event of reciprocal but asymmetrical and non-identically repeated exchange.[435]

The attempt to conceive gifting within the paradigm of radical alterity

unwittingly recreates the modern subject-object division that

poststructuralism contests. Rather, gifting is a normal, even preeminent,

manner of social interaction involving *reciprocal* but *asymmetrical* and *non-

identically repeated* exchange: I will address each of these criteria in turn.

Milbank presents his position as a *via tertia* beyond the impasse

between a self-regarding Aristotelian *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία) and a

Kantian other-regarding morality. The first reaches for happiness but

cannot finally find shelter from the whims of fortune without closing itself

within a Stoic citadel and thereby forgoing joy—thus undoing itself. The

second builds an edifice out of duty in its attempt to place the other before

the self, but ends up losing the happiness of the other behind that

edifice—also undoing itself. Though not without some nuance, Milbank

places Levinas, Derrida, and Marion in the latter camp—inadvertently in

league with Kant. In either case, the relation with the other is lost and the

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[435] Milbank, *Being Reconciled,* 156.

moral aspiration unachieved. Bringing out the relational aspect, Keller notes that feminist critics of Levinas concur with Milbank's self-subverting characterization of him: "Pure subservience to an absolute other. . .cannot acknowledge the subjectivity of the other without then in turn acknowledging the rights of the ethical subject as well."[436] What is more, this self-abnegation bears more than a passing resemblance to the familiar role cast upon women by the patriarchy. Real relationship between persons, and between woman and man, entails mutual recognition. And while many of Milbank's views on gender are extremely questionable if not downright patriarchal,[437] Milbank and Keller concur that ethics requires *reciprocity*.

They further agree that to reduce *exchange* to *contract, debt, or demand* reinscribes a quasi-Cartesian separation of subject and other. While Levinas may be guilty of such a charge, Derrida, as usual, seems to anticipate it. As he says at the Villanova roundtable: "I said it is impossible for the gift to appear as such. . . .I never concluded that there is no gift. I went on to say that if there is a gift, through this impossibility, it

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[436] Keller, "Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank's *Being Reconciled*," in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 27.

[437] For example, *Being Reconciled*, 207: "Men are more nomadic, direct, abstractive and forceful, women are more settled, subtle, particular and beautiful." For criticism of this statement, see M. Rivera, "Radical Transcendence?: Divine and Human Otherness in Radical Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology," in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 129. While I agree with Milbank that gender differences are real differences, he paints them in black and white, outdated terms. From a cis-gendered male, I would expect much more circumspection with regard to defining the traits of another gender.

must be the experience of this impossibility, and it should appear as impossible."[438] Derrida wants to think that edge where impossibility meets reality, what Kearney would call the more-than-possible. The impossible does not *stop* at the order of meaning, which analyzes the conditions of possibility as those of impossibility—but rather *begins* there: as event, rupture, promise, hope for a true gift:

> It is a matter—desire beyond desire—of responding faithfully but also as rigorously as possible both to the injunction of the order of the gift. . .as well as to the injunction or the order of meaning. . . . Know what you intend to give, know how the gift annuls itself, commit yourself [*engage-toi*] even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance.[439]

Here Derrida seems to open up a space for exchange with the other, thereby breaching absolute alterity, but not leading to *symmetric* contract. This is rather a faithful engagement with the other, an engagement beyond certainty. We desire to give a true gift; we know that it is logically impossible; and yet we try, we strive, we hope that the impossible gift may yet come (*venir*), may yet grace our meeting. Similarly, we noted above how (in contrast to Levinas) Derrida and Caputo accentuate the other's incursion upon my horizon, allowing an encounter that breaks through the separation of alterity, without yet rendering the other fully present or comprehensible.

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[438] "On the Gift," 59, edited by Caputo and Scanlon.

[439] Derrida, *Given Time,* 30.

Milbank and Keller both argue that reciprocity rather than the purity of unilateral exchange is the cornerstone of gift-giving. As such, the gift is charged with *expectancy,* which may introduce impurity, but is neither reducible to self-sacrifice nor to symmetrical contract. Expectancy is not demand, but hope—and neither hope of gratitude nor gratitude itself destroys the gift. In fact, some sort of mutual rejoicing is a defining characteristic of gift-giving in relation, while unilateral purity absolves itself of relation altogether. Let us reflect on a couple examples. First, consider an absent father who is barely a part of a child's life, has his secretary choose and send a generic gift by mail, and never finds out how his son reacts or if he even received the gift; indeed, by the next time they see each other, the father has forgotten he even sent it. While many aspects of this scenario resemble pure, anonymous, unilateral gift-giving, something is clearly amiss. The father expects nothing in return, not even perhaps the gratitude of the child, but because of his *apathy.* He does not know the content of the gift, but again, only because his lack of care funneled the work to someone else. Even the child, habituated to his absent father, had expected no gift in the first place, and perhaps even had doubts whether his father himself had chosen the gift. The gift certainly does not make up for the absent father, and the child shows no gratitude—but even if he had, the father was not there to see it. The father barely knows he gave a gift, the child that he received one, and perhaps the gift itself ends up in the trash because it was unsuited for the son, forgotten by both. Far from approaching some ideal gift, the lack of mutuality and relation in this scenario deals the death blow to the gift. The

child *wants* to know that the gift is from his father, *wants* to see in the chosen gift his father's familiarity with his likes and dislikes, and *wants* his father around to share his gratitude. Ideally, the father too intends the gift for his son, desires to choose well, and wishes to bond with his son in celebration. Far from annulling the gift, the impurity of mutual relation seems to be what is actually essential to the gift—the only part that really matters.

Another example: I buy a shirt with guitars all over it for my cousin who plays guitar, thinking this an apt gift. But my cousin's lack of enthusiasm betrays the fact that the last thing a stylish musician would wear is a shirt with guitars all over it. He is disappointed, but not because he now owes me a guitar shirt; and I am disappointed, but not because my ego smarts from a lack of gratitude. Rather, an opportunity for mutual rejoicing, for reciprocal sharing was missed. This is not to say that at an early level of development a child could not be disappointed on an ego-level simply because he or she did not like the gift; nor that a giver could not be disappointed on an ego-level because their gift was not well-liked. But such self-centeredness is not overcome by the extreme reversal of self-sacrifice entailed by radical alterity, which ends up losing the happiness of the other anyway. Rather, dialogical reciprocity is what allows us real, if always partial, access to the other. Such real access is requisite if we are to care for the other *according to the other's needs*—for otherwise care becomes at best blind optimism, and at worst another form of dominating mastery ("they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented").

There is an added awkwardness when someone gives an expensive present that is not suited to the recipient, perhaps hoping that the cost will redeem the lack of personalized thoughtfulness. But this only highlights the incommensurability of restricted and general economies. Think about certain wealthy families whose solution to their child's problems involves throwing money around, but which will never substitute for the personally tailored attention that a child needs in order to flourish. This is not strictly a gift-scenario, but that's just the point: the impure analysis we are bringing to gifting starts to open upon the whole ethical field of mutual relations.

All of these examples in contrast to the well-chosen gift that reflects both the recipient's taste and the giver's identity. For example, a good friend writes and performs a song for my wife's and my wedding. Only he could write and perform that song in that way, and it is done specifically for and about us. He hopes for our gratitude, but does not demand it. There is in fact *no way* I could repay him in kind, since the gift was uniquely keyed to us and to him. Additionally, everyone present at the ceremony partook of the gratuity of the gift, multiplying its surplus beyond donor and recipient. Perhaps I will someday have the opportunity to reciprocate, not out of obligation, but because this is a way we socialize with one another. I would not be able to give back the gift identically, both because it would be impossible to identically (re)create and perform the song, but also because the reciprocal nature of the gift should now be coordinated to each of us as unique *prosopa.* I give back the gift *non-identically* by writing my own song, or giving a speech, or designing the

signature cocktail—according to my unique abilities and the particular nature of my friend. The gift is a broad included middle that reaches out to embrace each of us.

This is not to say that we were not gratified by each other's and the group's appreciation, but such impurity becomes the norm if we are ascribing to a relative model of otherness, one which permits participation across the self-other divide. In contrast, we saw above how absolute alterity is the negative image of the modern aspiration to apodictic knowledge; thus, despite their opposed stances, both modernism and postmodernism covet a certain purity. Instead, we propose that the other is neither wholly knowable nor unknowable, and so our relation with them is inherently impure. Like undecidability is the ground of true decision, so this impure knowing of the other is the ground of a true gift, a gift which is suited to the recipient but is also capable of erring. If we knew what gift to give every time, it would be a program, not a sincere gift. But conversely, if we had no criteria whatsoever for our gift, it would be a shot in the dark, that even if it hit its mark, would for its lack of intention still not be a gift. Rather, *phronesis* is called for: we have some basis upon which to choose, but nothing that amounts to a formal rule. If the other is not wholly other, then we must strive for whatever mutual understanding is possible, though it always remains incomplete and in need of further dialogue. What is the perfect gift today may not be the perfect gift tomorrow, and the perfect gift for Bill is likely not the one for Sally, but this only reinforces the imperative for hermeneutic vigilance—

constant diacritical interpretation passing between other and self, in endless stepwise revealing.

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This impurity of the broad included middle between two persons helps protect radical alterity from being co-opted by the very dominance structures it seeks to contest. In closing this section, we circle back once more to the way that divine–human and human–human relationships inform one another. The stark divide of heteronomy risks reinscribing the worst sins of transcendence. As Mayra Rivera asserts:

> transcendence has worked to legitimize androcentric and hierarchical mindsets by establishing a metaphysical dualism where transcendence/immateriality/progress/independence/ Man/God are set over against immanence/materiality/ stagnation/dependence/Woman/Nature. Might it be possible to rediscover the idea of transcendence, of God's irreducible otherness, without reinscribing the cosmological dualisms that it commonly evokes?[440]

This is where I believe a well thought-through, non-contrastive sense of transcendence with regard to the divine can help neutralize or at least expose such pernicious dualisms. We saw how the non-contrastive sense actually increases the relationality of the terms (e.g., through omnipresence), while a contrastive sense hierarchizes one over the other, typically absolutely. Maximus' thoroughly non-contrastive sense sends echoes through his cosmos, neutralizing the hierarchies of intelligible over sensible, universal over particular, essence over existence. We saw how *perichoresis* describes a broad middle that embraces both poles in

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[440] Rivera, "Radical Transcendence," 119.

reciprocal interpenetration: universal depends upon particular just as much as particular upon universal. Thus, instead of masking the dependence relation as hyper-split binaries tend to (e.g., mind as not dependent on body, man as not dependent on woman, culture as not dependent on nature), mutual interdependence is invoked. And while we cannot deny an androcentrism in Maximus' work typical of Christianity, he does say that cosmic reconciliation starts with the mediation between female and male.[441] Maximus is also very clear that the *eschaton* is not something that will arrive *in time.* Again, between eternity and time there is a non-contrastive sense of transcendence. The *eschaton* is eternity piercing time in every virtuous act toward a needful other; the *eschaton* is *not* a guaranteed future. The *Logos* appears as the alpha and the omega from the point of view of time only; to think the *eschaton* is coming in time (messianism) is to project the contrastive sense onto the horizontal axis. This creates a fall narrative not dissimilar to Origen's, in which we have lost Eden but not yet regained Paradise. However, to possibilize God in our "infinite interpersonal relations" (messianicity) keeps to a non-contrastive sense, striving to create the conditions of cosmic salvation and divine social justice in the here and now.[442] The only way the kingdom

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[441] K. K. Boninska, "The Philosophical Basis of Maximus' Concept of Sexes: The Reasons and Purposes of the Distinction between Man and Woman," 230–37.

[442] Rivera, "Radical Transcendence," 124.

comes is if we craft it through enactive-synergic participation: the desire of God (double genitive) is to make transcendence manifest, not at the end of history, but *in* history.

Rivera cites Ignacio Ellacuría's "The Historicity of Christian Salvation," arguing that history is the "place of transcendence," where both human and divine intervene, which "affirms the dual unity of God in humanity and humanity in God."[443] Ellacuría speaks out against the separateness (contrastive sense) that certain philosophies have identified with transcendence, which leads to the assumption that "historical transcendence is separate from history." By contrast, he argues that we can "see transcendence as something that transcends *in* and not as something that transcends *away* from; as something that physically impels to more, but not by taking out of; as something that *pushes* forward, but at the same time *retains*."[444] Ellacuría clearly articulates a non-contrastive sense of transcendence, highlighting the divine presence *within* immanence, the possibility of eschatological blossoming *in* time.[445] He

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[443] Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation," 259, 264 (cited in Rivera, "Radical Transcendence," 134). Ellacuría writes that transcendence, "calls attention to a contextual structural difference without implying a duality. . . enables us to speak of an intrinsic unity without implying a strict identity" (254).

[444] Ellacuría, "Historicity," 254, my emphasis.

[445] Cf. Walter Benjamin's gloss on the eschatological kingdom: "This future does not correspond to homogenous empty time; because at the heart of every moment of the future is contained the little door through which the Messiah may enter" ("Theological-Political Fragment," 155f., cited in Kearney, "Enabling God," 43).

even comes close to Maximus' notion of the *logoi* when he writes: "each thing, within its own limits, is a limited way of being God. This limited way is precisely the nature of each thing. . . .God is in all things, as essence, presence, and potential."[446] The *logoi* constitute not only a thing's *ousia* (nature or essence), but also its potential for development, the vector of *posse,* the possibilizing power on the existential axis. Ellacuría calls the human being a "relative absolute" whose essence is to remain dynamically open to the experience of God's "more" by partaking of the Trinitarian life "intrinsic to all things."[447] Like the *logoi,* this opening to God's "more" turns us toward all the others of creation as the field in which the Good is pursued. The loving interpersonal life of the Trinity manifests as harmonious mutuality. Transcendence-in thereby undermines self-centeredness and leads humans deeper into, not away from, creation.

Rivera stresses that "this relation to transcendence requires a constant renewal of the received experience of God," and Ellacuría calls for the "historical repetition of what the Scripture expresses as *theopraxy.*"[448] This recalls the non-identical repetition of the gift as

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446 Ellacuría, "Historicity," 276. We could perhaps even read here transcendent *ousia* (essence), immanent *energeia* (presence) and dialectical becoming as *dunamis/posse* (potential).

447 Ellacuría, "Historicity," 277.

448 Rivera, "Radical Transcendence," 135; Ellacuría, "Historicity," 259, 63.

incarnation of second creation, as giving back the gift of first creation.

Theopraxy has similar roots as *theourgia,* and it offers an appropriate

parallel to the divine–human work invoked by liberation theology:

> Divine–human communication succeeds only inasmuch as the recipient succeeds in "transforming it into a humanizing difference within history.". . .The historical repetition of theopraxy brings about a future that "invalidates negativity and recovers old experience in a new way." The continuity between the old and the new is thus maintained through repetition with difference, through transformative practice, rather than through access to an external unchanging source. In history, "God and humanity collaborate," so that the future depends, although in different ways, on God's faithfulness and human response.[449]

We are co-workers with God, co-writers in the drama of human

salvation—which salvation will not come from the outside as a *deus ex*

machina, but through transcendence-in via socially just and soteriological

enactions. Rivera argues that the notion of a God who intervenes from

outside leads quickly to imperialism, "when theologians implicitly claim

access, through God, to a criteria of judgment external to the realm of

created existence—one of the most common traps into which theologies of

transcendence have fallen."[450] Christianity's violent imperial legacy is one

such example.

What transcendence promises is not so much another world out

there, but the possibility to surmount our tendency to reduce the world to

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[449] Rivera, "Radical Transcendence," 135 (first internal quotation from Juan Luis Segundo, "Revelation, Faith, Signs of the Times," 332; second and third internal quotations from Ellacuría, "Historicity," 259).

[450] Rivera, "Radical Transcendence," 136.

pure immanence, to what can be comprehended in a totality. The lessons of radical alterity help us to reconceive transcendence as an ethical opening to the other that is no less an opening to the divine. Immanent human needs are not subordinate to higher needs: "Instead, the processes by which human needs are met—people are fed, sheltered, and loved, and societies become mediators of such nurturing processes—are manifestations of transcendence, which is always already taking place in creation."[451] I have argued that a relative approach to otherness can retain these crucial lessons while mitigating the paroxysms of absolute alterity and opening new avenues of communion and participation.

> "There is surely another world, but it is in this one and, to reach its expectant perfection, must be acknowledged and testified to. Man must search out his condition to come in the present—and heaven, not at all above the earth, but within him."

> – Albert Béguin[452]

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[451] Rivera, "Radical Transcendence," 137.

[452] *L'ame romantique et le rêve,* cited in Paul Éluard, *Oeuvres completes I*, 986, my translation: "Il y a assurément un autre monde, mais il est dans celui-ci et, pour atteindre à sa pleine perfection, il faut qu'il soit bien reconnu et qu'on en fasse profession. L'homme doit chercher son état à venir dans la present, et le ciel, non point au-dessus de la terre, mais en soi." I translate "pleine" rather freely as "expectant" to underline its associations with pregnancy and connect it to the ideas of the possible and the gift.

2.3: As Kingfishers Catch Fire

"The icon, which is the same as the archetype, nevertheless differs from it."

–Gregory of Nyssa[453]

I would ask them why they oppose passivity with activity at the level of sensibility. Why would it not be possible to be active and passive at the same time? Could my becoming not be an aroused passivity, an attentive activity, for example? Or even an affection that is both passive and active?

–Luce Irigaray, "Each Transcendent to the Other," 91

In this penultimate section, I first amplify the concept of *prosopon,* combining what we have learned from Patristic sources with the work of Richard Kearney, John Manoussakis, and Christos Yannaras. This helps to elaborate the model of relative otherness by describing a relational structure that precedes the division between self and other. I then stage an ecopoetic engagement with the Gerard Manley Hopkins poem, "As kingfishers catch fire," to further unfold *prosopon* and expand its relational reach into the more-than-human world, in conversation with Timothy Morton. This leads to a discussion with deep incarnation scholarship on the scope of second creation as enactive-synergic and deific participation. How might a revisioning of the sacred reveal the divine fire in the relationship of all things with one another and with their source?

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Prosopon helps us to develop Treanor's hermeneutic-chiastic model of relative otherness. Manoussakis states that diacritical hermeneutics'

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[453] Cited in Marion, *The Idol and Distance,* 198.

methodological equivalent is the *prosopic reduction,* also known as the eschatological reduction or fourth phenomenological reduction (first proposed by Kearney). Like the previous reductions of Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion, it is a call to return to the things themselves, an attempt to bracket certain assumptions and outlooks that we bring to those things. It is the phenomenality of the thing, the non-coincidence of *what* it is and *how* it appears, that prompts the reductions, that alerts us to the fact that our everyday attitude about the thing cannot quite be correct. We will discuss this difference between *what* and *how* under several distinctions: essence-presence (Yannaras-Heidegger), essence-appearance (Morton), *ousia-energeia* (in the divine sense of withdrawn vs. knowable/participable), *ousia-hupostasis/prosopon* (in the creaturely sense of *logos* versus *tropos*), and the absent-presence of the icon. I summarize briefly the reductions:

1. In Husserl's transcendental reduction, the structure of *intentionality* allows a reduction of phenomena to *essence.* The constituting-I realizes its role in constituting the object from the fact of phenomenality.

2. In Heidegger's ontological reduction, the structure of *throwness* allows a reduction of phenomena to *Being. Dasein,* through anxiety and boredom, realizes the ontological difference between beings and Being, revealing the elusive horizon of Being against which phenomena appear.

3. In Marion's donological reduction, the structure of *surprise* allows a reduction of phenomena to *gift.* The *interloqué* sheds the

transcendental subject of the first two reductions, realizing that

it itself is constituted by the givenness of the phenomena.

4. In Kearney's prosopic reduction, the structure of *relatedness*

   allows a reduction of phenomena back to phenomena—a

   reduction of the reductions, so to speak, after their triple detour.

   The fourth reduction signals a return to the experience of

   relationship as the primordial "thing-in-itself" (which is thus no

   longer so aptly designated as a "thing"). Phenomena are

   reduced to *prosopa* as beings-disclosed-through-relationship.[454]

Manoussakis expresses this primordiality of relationship negatively when

he writes: "We refuse to assign fundamentality or priority to either the

experiencing I (rationalism, idealism) or the objects of its experience

(realism, materialism) [including the absolutely other (radical alterity)].

This refusal is our epoche."[455] The very categories of subject and

object/other are suspended in light of an anterior founding rapport or

arche-reciprocity.

   The relationship that precedes "I" and "other" is reflected in the

grammatical construction and etymology of *prosopon.* The preposition *pros*

("towards") is joined to the noun *ops* ("eye," "face," or "countenance,"

which becomes *opos* in the genitive) to form the composite word *pros-opon:*

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[454] Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 23f.; see also, Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology," 5, 11ff.

[455] Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 24.

most literally *a towards-turned face*, or *a face turned toward*. Allowing the

inevitable language of subject and object to creep back in: *my face turned*

toward someone or something; myself as opposite an other. Thus, the word first

indicates an immediate reference, a relationship.[456] To be a *pros-opon* is to

be on the way toward the other, to be in "a perpetual ek-sistence, a

stepping-out-of-yourself and a being-towards-the-other."[457] Such a

relationship both extends toward the other and receives the other into

oneself, in reciprocal *ek-stasis*. Thus, in indicating the relationship, *prosopon*

can equally signify: *the other's face turned toward me; the other as opposite*

myself. "*Prosopon* strongly implies reciprocity of gaze through which the

self is interpolated by the other, and ultimately, 'othered' [*myself as an*

other to the other's self]."[458] *Prosopon* always suggests this face-to-face,

mutually constitutive dyad. Thus, personhood is not a contained and

static individuality outside the field of relation but is the dynamic

actualization of relationship itself, individuals-in-relation. The *prosopon* of

the fourth reduction is *both* the other and the self, which expresses the

symmetry and reciprocity of relative otherness that breaks with

Levinasian radical alterity. Similar to *perichoresis,* both poles of the

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[456] Yannaras, *Person and Eros,* 5.

[457] Manoussakis, "Prosopon and Icon," 284.

[458] Manoussakis, "Prosopon and Icon," 284.

relationship establish the *prosopon*.[459] Relationship is the 'specific

differentia' of the *prosopon*, what defines it, literally *its definition*. The

prosopic reduction takes personhood as *the* fundamental relationship

which inaugurates beings as things-set-opposite one another.

However, Levinas himself proposes an "extremely audacious"

translation of Leviticus that exemplifies this primordial relatedness. He

separates the last word, *kàmòkhà,* from the rest of the verse, rendering the

golden rule: "Love your neighbor; this is yourself" or "this love of your

neighbor is yourself."[460] As John Llewelyn points out,

> If I am love of my neighbor, my responsibility for myself is
> responsibility for my neighbor. But in this case, through love of my
> neighbor, love of myself will be love of and responsibility for my
> neighbor, since on this 'audacious' reading of Leviticus the
> personal is redefined as love of my neighbor.[461]

This illustrates very well the way that the prosopic reduction isolates a

relatedness that precedes the division between self and other. Here, this

relatedness is given an ethical priority, one that I believe can, by Levinas'

own endorsement, underpin and make good on the axiological promises

of radical alterity within a relative, reciprocal model.

What presents itself in this dynamic relationship is the ongoing

hermeneutic circle of stepwise disclosure. Beings (*ta onta*) manifest being

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[459] Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 28f.

[460] Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée,* 144, cited in John Llewelyn, *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience,* 24.

[461] Llewelyn, *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience,* 24.

only in relation to one another as *prosopa*. Existence manifests in time on the horizontal axis as the intersection of the many *tropoi tes huparxis* of beings—their manner or modes of coimplicated existing. Defining beings outside of relationship is a convenient abstraction but never actually happens, since all being is disclosed relationally according to the prosopic reduction. Beings *are* only as phenomena, that is, "only insofar as they become accessible to a referential relation of disclosure."[462] The attempt to define things as they are in themselves, without any reference to their relation to whoever is defining them, extracts them from their given context. What is given is *things-in-context*. But even this, like individuals-in-relation, has already partially differentiated the things and the individuals from the given field of relatedness. So we could say, there is really just context. But if there is *just* context, then it is no longer *con*-text, which makes a pair *with* the thing it frames. Thus, there is perhaps only *text*. As Derrida says: *il n'y pas hors-texte,* which he glosses as meaning, "there is nothing outside of context," nothing that can truly be considered in isolation: "We can call 'context' the entire 'real-history-of-the-world,' if you like."[463] This is bottomless relationality without a known end or beginning (not so far from *différance*). As Manoussakis puts it: "Before an experiencer and before an experienced, there is *experiencing*. The relation

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[462] Yannaras, *Person and Eros,* 6.

[463] Derrida, *Limited Inc.,* 136.

between any two given *relata* is constitutive of them (with regard to their relationship) and, therefore, more primary and originary than their subjectivity or objectivity."[464]

This brings out the affinity between *prosopon* and the middle voice, which is neither active (subject) nor passive (object). Let us take a brief hermeneutic detour through the middle voice to help elucidate the in-between and chiasmic nature of the *prosopon.* Historically, the middle voice is an older form which over time became more rigidly separated into exclusive active and passive forms. Similarly, the *prosopon* is a form that is phenomenologically prior to the differentiation of subject and object. Jan Gonda gives the following definition of the middle voice, cited by Llewelyn in his book, *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience:*

> The "original" or "essential" function of the medial voice was. . .to denote that a process is taking place with regard to, or is affecting, happening to, a person or a thing; this definition includes also those cases in which we are under the impression that in the eyes of those who once used this category in its original function some power or something powerful was at work in or through the subject, or manifested itself in or by means of the subject on the one hand and those cases in which the process, whilst properly performed by, or originating with, the subject, obviously was limited to the "sphere" of the subject.[465]

Both the meandering quality of this definition as well as the multiplication of qualifiers underscores just how difficult it is for us to think the middle voice. The definition begins by construing the subject as more passive

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[464] Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 24, my emphasis; Yannaras, *Person and Eros,* 36ff.

[465] Gonda, "Reflections on the Indo-European Medium I," 66f.

("*happening to* a person"), moves through the intermediate case of a divine

force manifesting "*by means of* the subject," and arrives at the more active

"*performed by* the subject." Llewelyn notes:

> We need a notion of power which does not merely pass through the subject, and a notion of subject which is neither merely a conduit of passage (the "through" of pure passivity) nor the conductor entirely in charge of a performance (the "by" of pure agency) but is performed by as much as it performs the process.[466]

We could grab onto two of Llewelyn's words here in trying to explicate

the middle voice: *conductor* and *power*. If we consider "conductor" not just

in the orchestral sense but also in the electrical sense (closer to "conduit"),

it takes on a double significance that captures some of the hybridity of the

middle voice (the orchestral conductor actively directs while the electrical

conductor passively transmits). And if we consider "power" in terms of

dunamis and *posse,* it can signify the divine–human co-worked possibility

of second creation (*dunamis* at once as passive potential, active power, and

middle-pregnant-*posse*). Derrida too has recourse to the middle voice to

elucidate his concept *différance,* which we mentioned echoes the

bottomless relationality of the *prosopon*.[467]

> *Différance* neutralizes what the infinitive [*différer*] denotes as simply active, just as *mouvance* in our language does not simply mean the

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[466] Llewelyn, *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience,* ix.

[467] Derrida calls *différance* a "bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play" ("Différance,*"* 22). Or again: "we designate by *différance* the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of reference in general is constituted 'historically' as a tissue of differences" ("*Ousia* and *Grammē*," 76). By way of comparison, recall Yannaras' earlier statement that beings *are* only as phenomena, i.e., "only insofar as they become accessible to a referential relation of disclosure" (*Person and Eros,* 6).

fact of moving, of moving oneself or of being moved. No more is resonance the act of resonating. We must consider that in the usage of our language the ending *-ance* remains undecided between the active and the passive. . . .*Différance* is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling something like, the middle voice, saying an operation that is not an operation, an operation that cannot be conceived either as passion or as the action of a subject on an object, or on the basis of the categories of agent or patient, neither on the basis of nor moving toward any of these terms. For the middle voice, a certain nontransitivity, may be what philosophy, at its outset, distributed into an active and a passive voice, thereby constituting itself by means of this repression.[468]

Derrida is a formidable ally in the quest to rethink binaries. Here he suggests that philosophy itself emerges as a repression and distribution of the middle voice into sharply demarcated active and passive forms, which is perhaps not so different from identity/autonomy being constituted by the repression and distribution of original relatedness into sharply demarcated subject and object. Derrida locates a site of resistance to such demarcation in the grammatical ending *-ance,* which in *différance* indicates a compromise formation between the present participle (*différant*) and the substantive (*différence*). In English, we can encounter a similar crossing of participle and substantive in certain -ing constructions. Thus,

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[468] Derrida, "Différance," 9.

Manoussakis stages a similar resistance when he says: before an

experiencer and an experienced, there is *experiencing*.[469]

Both Manoussakis and Yannaras, with allusion to Heidegger,

illustrate and amplify the *prosopon* with the example of *observing* a Van

Gogh painting. In such a case, neither I (the observer) nor the painting (the

observed) takes priority over the other. Rather, it is our relation (the

observing) that discloses me as observer and the painting as observed.

Moreover, I am an observer *because* of the painting and *insofar* as it

presents itself to my gaze. Equally, the painting *is* a painting (i.e., *is*

observed *as* a painting) *because* of me and *insofar* as I gaze upon it.

Rigorously speaking, neither I-as-observer nor the painting-as-such

"exists" outside the relationship. We are mutually constituted by our

primordial relating-as-observing. Manoussakis states: "There is an infinite

number of such relations. Existence is this relational infinity."[470]

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[469] Marion compares the Greek *on* (being) and *différance:* "There is nothing stranger about the *a* [of *différance*], which indicates the present participle, than about the *on*/being, which indicates the verb and substantive, with the slight exception that the present participle of *einai* crosses and superimposes them exactly in the same orthography, whereas the differing (*le différant*, participle) does not coincide perfectly with the difference (*la difference*, substantive); this is registered in the compromise *différance,* where the participle (verb) imposes its vowel but supports the consonant of the substantive" (*The Idol and Distance,* 220ff.).

[470] Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 24.

These relationships are dynamic because the mutual offering that occurs is *iconic*.[471] *Prosopa* deploy the *energeiai* of the *ousia,* but the former never exhaust the latter. The art-object demonstrates particularly well this non-coincidence of presence and essence that in fact marks all things.[472]

Van Gogh paintings have a recognizable *style,* which are *in* the paintings without simply *being* them. The withdrawn essence somehow appears *in* the colors, lines, and brushstrokes without being reducible to them. The style is a testament to the artist, who is also not reducible to his bodily appearance. Likewise, the style is not perceived by the *eye* of the observer per se, but rather by the *I* of the observer, that part which also cannot be reduced to bodily appearance—transcendence perceives transcendence. Yet the *I's* are always embodied in the flesh, no less than the style in the painting. As icons, neither is reducible to their embodiments.[473]

Both the created thing (*pragma* [πρᾶγμα], which can also mean *deed*) and the creator are more than the materials of which they are

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[471] The association between *prosopon* and icon finds historical and theological support in Procopios of Gaza's (c. 538) *Commentary on Genesis* (PG 87.361A): "προσωπον γαρ εστι και εικον ο Υιος του Πατρος." Here the Son is said to be *prosopon* and *eikon* of the Father, linking the two terms as synonymous (cited in Manoussakis, "Prosopon and Icon," 292).

[472] Yannaras asserts that we can only speak of things as *being-there* or *being-present (par-einai),* as coexisting with the possibility of their disclosure to an other: "we know beings as presence (*parousia*) not as essence (*ousia*)" (*Person and Eros*, 6).

[473] Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 27.

composed. As the product of a personal act (*praxis* [πρᾶξις]), the painting attests to the person of Van Gogh. When I observe the painting, I enter into personal relation with Van Gogh's transcendence insofar as it is iconically conveyed by the personal act that created the painting. Were I with Van Gogh in person, the situation would be structurally similar, with my experience of his immanent appearance and expression (*energeia*) iconically conveying his transcendence (*ousia*). Thus, a painting is both a good analogy for and an actual instance of *energeia* expressing the *ousia* of the author (*pragma* as both created thing and deed or thing done). In the case of both the art-object and human expression: a personal act that enters into personal relation discloses the unique, particular, and unrepeatable *prosopon* of its initiator, but so too equally and fundamentally discloses the *prosopon* of its recipient insofar as she receives it as immanent icon of the other's transcendence. Transcendence relates to transcendence through immanence, but insofar as relatedness is primordial, it is a single, dynamic, immanence-transcendence relationship—a dialectic of transcendence and immanence. My ability to enter into personal relation with Van Gogh in his absence through the painting is actually not structurally different than what happens when he is present and I enter into relation with his absent transcendence. In this way, the *pragma* reveals "the person fundamentally as a *summons* or *invitation* to a relation which transcends the limitations of space and

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time."[474] But of course not even this invitation exhausts the transcendence

of the person.

> Kearney explains that to understand the other as *prosopon*

> is to grasp him/her as present in absence, as both incarnate in flesh and transcendent in time. To accept this paradox of configuration is to allow the other to appear as his/her unique [*prosopon*]. To refuse this paradox, opting instead to regard someone as pure presence or pure absence is to disfigure the other.[475]

In this way, *prosopon* begins to fill out the chiastic-hermeneutic model of

relative otherness—not only as a crossing of presence and absence, but

also of sameness and difference. We additionally see how the paradox of

participation shows up in the relation to the other: they are *a part of* what

is transpiring as "incarnate in the flesh" and they are *apart from* it as

"transcendent in time." *Prosopon* may serve as another word for the

otherness of the other, where otherness is understood as a chiasmus

between similitude and alterity. Kearney says that it is easier to mistake

the other's *prosopon* for an idol than to receive it as an icon of

transcendence. Moreover, "we disregard others not just by ignoring their

transcendence but equally by ignoring their flesh-and-blood thereness."[476]

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[474] Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, 36ff.

[475] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 10. Kearney tends to use *persona,* the Latin translation of *prosopon.* I substitute the latter for consistency. Elsewhere, Kearney notes the English rhetorical term prosopopoeia: "a figure by means of which an absent one is represented as speaking or acting, a sort of poetic personification, impersonation, or embodiment of some other self" (18).

[476] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 18.

Each of us is a complex doublet of immanence and transcendence, of similitude and alterity, at once near and far, and thus difficult to interpret faithfully. This once again demands our hermeneutic watchfulness, to avoid both the sin of literalism and the spirit of abstraction. The *prosopon* is the alterity of the other through the flesh-and-blood that faces me; it is equally my flesh-and-blood face as other to another self. This is transcendence in and through immanence, but not reducible to it— *transcendence-in* in Ellacuría's terms—what Kearney describes as, "the double sense of someone as both proximate to me in the immediacy of connection and yet somehow ineluctably distant, at once incarnate and otherwise, inscribing the trace of an irreducible alterity in and through the face before me."[477] (This structure echoes the transfigured face of Christ on Thabor, visible icon of the invisible divinity, at once present and absent, bespeaking another world, but within this one, bespeaking a transcendence that gives itself in immanent relationship).

Becoming-in-communion comprises a vast ecological field of dissimilar, and unrepeatable relationships, the *tropoi tes huparxis* of *prosopa*. Each being's mode of existence is objectively indeterminable and wholly unique, marking them distinctively in their otherness from everything else precisely by their particular configuration of relations. This cannot be defined by *knowing*, as it resists any totality, but only *experienced* as the actual state of affairs. Yannaras writes: "otherness is by

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[477] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 18.

definition referential; it is that mode of existence which is *actualized* as relation, not merely *disclosed* as relation; the person *is* only as dynamic reference, only as 'opposite-something,' only as unique, dissimilar and unrepeatable relation."[478]

It would behoove us to make a clarification here regarding knowing and experiencing, and to distinguish again two different uses of *ousia.* Insofar as we *think* beings, we think their common essence (*ousia*) in universal terms, while it is the particularities of *hupostasis-prosopon* that resist such generalizing thought. But insofar as we *experience* beings, we experience relation through the structure of *prosopon,* we experience the *energeia* of the *ousia,* but never the *ousia* itself. This reveals finally that we did not fully think *ousia* in the first place, but only that icon of it available to be thought through expression by the *energeia.* This brings out the more restricted sense of *ousia* that may be glossed as *core* essence or *bottom-most* essence.[479] This is what Gregory and Maximus have in mind when they say we cannot even truly know the *ousia* of terrestrial things (thus, how much more unknowable the *ousia* of the divine). So in the first case, general *ousia* is (partially) thought while particular *hupostasis-prosopon* resists comprehension, while in the second case, unique *hupostasis-*

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[478] Yannaras, *Person and Eros,* 17ff.

[479] And in this sense of "what the thing really is in itself," *ousia* simultaneously becomes more general by including some notion of the thing's particular uniqueness alongside its general attributes.

prosopon is experienced through the expression of the immanent *energeia* while *ousia* remains ultimately transcendent, withdrawn.

Let us conclude this portion with a litany, a review and an extension of our definitions of *pros-opon:* most literally *a towards-turned face,* or *a face turned toward; my face turned toward someone or something; myself as opposite an other; the other's face turned toward me; the other as opposite myself; myself as an other to the other's self; myself in and through the other; myself-as-mediated-by-the-other; myself-as-another; myself-in-difference; myself as an otherness that is experienced by others; myself mediated back to me by someone else and by everyone else, by all those who experience me as an other; a hermeneutic self that is chiastically related to the other; the other as a self that is experienced by me; the-other-as-myself; an other as self; another self.*

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

The forgoing focus on *prosopon* may seem anthropocentric, but I have tried to hint along the way how the relational perspective developed here extends beyond the realm of the human. While it is still important to distinguish the self-reflexive and self-willed aspects of the human agent, everything that has been said thus far about the field of mutual relationships broadly applies to all *hupostases* — real, particular, existing things, that is, everything. Everything is in relationship with everything else, and to this extent the prosopic reduction could also be called a hypostatic reduction. In this way, a touch of anthropomorphism can actually help to de-center *anthropos.* All things are constantly expressing the immanent *energeia* of their transcendent *ousia;* all things have particular hypostatic properties that mark them in their unique set of

relationships with everything else; all things have a history and can even be said to accrue experience insofar as they are marked by time. For example, the series of scratches and dents on my wedding ring are absolutely one-of-a-kind and attest to the story of its existence.

The "found" art-object (*objet trouvé,* or what Duchamp called a "ready-made") is perhaps a helpful intermediate case. What was simply a nondescript, factory-produced, industrial urinal suddenly becomes the *Fountain* in a museum—observed, contemplated, and experienced in all its unique *thisness* by persons. And while the involvement of a human agent certainly changes the relationship at hand, in some way *all* things are always already expressing their distinctive self. All objects are always already art-objects that are self-authored; all objects are always already *pragma* in both senses (created thing and deed). Furthermore, when we speak of constitutive relationship, it is not just with other human persons, but with all the multifarious things of the cosmos. We become our unique selves in constant interaction with all the others (things and persons) through time. This is mode of existence (*tropos tes huparxis*), a form of second creation that supervenes upon the ontological endowment of principle of nature (*logos tes ousios*). Mode of existence adds flesh to the skeleton of principle of nature. As Milbank puts it:

> A human aworldly self would be empty: "character" only emerges through doing and making, through interaction with things and with other people through the mediation of things. Personal character arises from the subjective alteration of objectivity. . . .The most definite human characters are precisely the most enigmatic ones. . . .Thus the people who convey the most unique flavour are also those who are sometimes the most unpredictable, or at least never precisely predictable, because no one else fully has the secret of that art which is these persons themselves. . . .However the

necessary resources for the emergence of this intensified and enigmatic personal character lies initially in the idioms proper to things, and especially in the transfiguring power that is already proper to things.[480]

Let us turn now to an ecopoetic reading of Gerard Manley Hopkins, a poet cited by both Milbank and Kearney, to further unfold the *prosopon* in the world of things.[481]

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

"Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany."

–James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, 218

"Only through singularities can we find the divine."

–Spinoza[482]

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Chríst — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,

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[480] "Sophiology and Theurgy," 56.

[481] Milbank writes: "Hopkins was right: 'there lives the dearest freshness deep down things.'. . .Divine incarnation must reach beneath even humanity into the material, the Eucharistic" ("Sophiology and Theurgy," 84).

[482] Cited in Kearney, "Sacramental Imagination and Eschatology," 55.

> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces.[483]

This is a poem, an art-object, a thing. Habitual thinking suggests I chose the thing, that I am the active agent who selected a passive poem on the basis of particular features that support my intentions. Instead, let me ask in what ways the poem chose me? I did not consider every existing poem and then choose the one that best suited my goals. I did not consider any great number. Rather the poem is a found object that showed up in my world in the course of my research, enough to catch my attention and make me notice it. It first revealed only four lines of itself in a Scott Knickerbocker essay on sensuous poiesis. Then it poked the head of its first verse out twice, in a book and essay by Timothy Morton, offering up the difference between "I" and "me." Finally, the last line reached out from a Richard Kearney piece, bespeaking the divinity of the quotidian. It kept calling out to me, and never quite in the same way. The thing has a life of its own, appearing with an insistence and with a history that intersects other moments and things in my world. The poem has made of each of these writers a prosthesis that carries and further unfolds it into varied environments.[484] And I too have been interpolated by it,

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[483] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame."

[484] "We are objects' prostheses, their way to overcome their physical limitations and to realize their own emotional, sensory lives more fully than they can on their own" (Peers, "Sense Lives," 16, quoted in Virginia Burrus, *Ancient Christian Ecopoetics*, 164).

pulled into relationship with it as its other. As a thing with a strong semiotic component, the poem simply has an excellent proclivity for doing what all things do already: be themselves-in-relation, implicate themselves, cohabitate and thus take up a history of being with other things, accrue stories as they exist.

So it is *not* that the thing is passive and that I am active, *nor* is it simply the reverse. Rather, like Morton says in the essay in question, "Spooky Passion at a Distance": "We need a new theory of action that doesn't so rigidly discriminate between activity and passivity."[485] This sounds a lot like Llewelyn on the middle voice above:

> We need a notion of power which does not merely pass through the subject, and a notion of subject which is neither merely a conduit of passage (the "through" of pure passivity) nor the conductor entirely in charge of a performance (the "by" of pure agency) but is performed by as much as it performs the process.[486]

The poem and I were each groping toward one another, and the story of how it made its way to me is an integral part of this section being written, as much as are my supposed reasons for choosing it. This distributed sense of agency counteracts flat notions of passive matter that is acted upon by human subjects. Such an unhelpful passive/active binary resonates with notions of a passive and homogenous nature separate from active and autonomous human culture. *If nature is passive and everywhere the same, in contrast to unique human actors, then it is much easier to justify*

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[485] Timothy Morton, "Spooky Passion at a Distance," 1.

[486] *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience,* ix.

ecological exploitation. This parallels the challenge to the modern outlook proffered by postmodern thinkers of radical alterity: *If the active and autonomous self is the seat of reality that comprehends relatively passive others within a totality, then it is much easier to justify unethical attitudes and behaviors (e.g., mastery and domination)*. Thus, upending the passive/active binary can help to upend the nature/culture and self/other binaries, which have led to such ecological and moral devastation in the Anthropocene. This section aims to do so, both by balancing the scales in favor of the activity of the thing, but also by framing the concurrent activity and passivity of each thing within a larger network of relation. What goals may the poem have, and how will they intersect my own? Might we both be ventriloquists, speaking through each other's words?

"As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;"

What strange and fantastic images this line evokes when it's casually first read. For a second, it feels more like *Game of Thrones* than a pastoral scene penned in 1877: Regal birds set ablaze by winged fire-breathing lizards. Or maybe this king-avian is a Targaryen, impervious to flame, and so catches it in her hand while the dragon traces its name on scorched city walls. So strong is the imagery created by the word associations that one commentator thinks Hopkins is literally talking about fireflies glowing in the dark.[487] A slower reading discerns light

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[487] "Hopkins compares the afterglow of the flight of the kingfisher and the flash in the wake of the movement of fireflies to the echo of moving water." Mitchell Kalpakgian, "Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire'" (par. 2).

glinting off the kingfisher's plumage and the iridescent streak of dragonfly wings. These creatures shine forth their colors, which normally we would perceive as a passive, automatic effect of their being rather than something actively willed. But Hopkins brings activity to the scene, through both the vivid implied imagery, and through the verbs "catch" and "draw" which in other contexts could function more actively (e.g., *catching* fire in your hand, *drawing* your name in flame). When something is just sitting there being itself, we do not tend to think of it as active (even if light is hitting it in a beautiful way), but Hopkins is inviting us to do just that, and thereby troubling the passive/active binary.

> "As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
> Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
> Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;"

Even stones—which we tend to think of as less animate than birds or insects—can be active, here making sounds as they fall, and also making ripples (double meaning of "ring"). Perhaps more obviously do plucked strings and struck bells actively sing forth their "name", just by being themselves.

> "Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
> Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*"

Kingfisher, dragonfly, stone, string, bell, and everything else are all doing the same thing: *selving*. This verb made from a noun also challenges the traditional binary of dynamic verbs and static nouns, achieving in form exactly what it is expressing in content: the self-actualizing activity of things. They are expressing something that is "inside" of them—what

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Hopkins would call *inscape,* what Morton would call *essence,* and what we have been calling *ousia* (in the *core* or *bottom-most* sense isolated above). I put quotes on "inside" because inscape or essence is not on the inside like a bodily organ or the pit of a fruit. Rather it is "inside" in a way that could never fully be made outside, and yet is constantly being made outside by things just appearing and being themselves: "*Whát I dó is me.*" The essence is constantly expressed by the appearance (though never exhausted by it). The appearance shows forth the unique "thisness" of each particular thing, which for Hopkins is an expression of its inner divinity. This idea derives from Duns Scotus, whose *haecceitas* I translate as "thisness." Rather than a stable and unchanging inner identity divided from the varied outward actions a thing exercises in the world, the outside is a constant exposition of a dynamic inside, again disturbing any simple passive/active binary—the *hupostasis* expresses the *energeia* of the *ousia.* Instead the world is shot through with activity, every appearance a part of the perpetual unfolding of an inexhaustible infinity of essence.

Emphasizing the unique thisness of "Every mortal thing" helps counter the notion of a homogenous nature, suggesting a rich and varied topography rather than a level plane. What's more, Hopkins has included stones and bells in the category of "mortal," eschewing any stiff difference between living and inanimate things, or between humans and the rest. Though "tongue" is the technical term for the clapper of a bell, here it also personifies (or "prosopizes"), bringing attention to the overlooked ways in which the thing "speaks and spells" at every moment. This is an example of a healthy anthropomorphism, which can strategically come to the aid of

the nonhuman world by actually contesting anthropocentrism.[488] We de-

center ourselves by becoming attentive to the thing's anthropic qualities,

but ultimately in service of a deeper respect for the thing through a

realization that those qualities are not finally anthropic but rather

ubiquitous. Rather than mirror the thing just as it is, this instance of

personification points out the active selving that the thing is always

already doing.

This strategic technique is related to another that Knickerbocker

calls "sensuous poiesis, in which, rather than mirror the world. . .poems

enact through formal devices such as sound effects the speaker's

experience of the complexity, mystery, and beauty of nature."[489] Hopkins

does not just give us the world as he sees it (as if that were even possible),

but stages a poetic encounter with the reader that re-creates the initial

encounter with the things. Take for example the first line, whose meter

and primary consonant sounds I indicate below:

"As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;"

˘ - ˘ ˘ - - - ˘ ˘ - -
  K F   K F D   F D F

Right away the line just seems to roll off the tongue, which upon closer

scrutiny is achieved by the repeated metric unit dactyl-spondee (- ˘ ˘, - -)

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[488] Wendy Wheeler notes, "As Hoffmeyer argues, the taboo against anthropomorphism carries a secret anthropocentrism at its heart" ("Natural Play, Natural Metaphor, Natural Stories" in *Material Ecocriticism*, 69).

[489] Knickerbocker, *The Language of Nature, The Nature of Language*, 13.

on both "kingfishers catch fire" and "dragonflies draw flame." The dactyls in repeating units along with the number of stresses (6) make the line a bit reminiscent of the heroic hexameter of Greek epics. Within each repeated metric unit, we notice the alliterative alternation of K and F sounds, followed by an isomorphic alternation of D and F sounds. Note too that K and D are both plosive consonants, creating an eight-fold plosive-fricative alternation. This symmetry of meter and consonant sounds gives the line a grace and majesty that re-creates the initial feeling of grace and majesty that may occasion a glimpse of a kingfisher or dragonfly. The rolling dactyl followed by the double-stop of the spondee seems to emulate the animals' swooping and sudden turns—as does the oscillation between the velar/alveolar (K/D) consonants further back in the mouth, and the labiodental F at the front of the mouth. The formal, constructed poetic effect is meant to create a spontaneous feeling in the reader that evokes the original surprising sight of the creature. Or as Knickerbocker puts it: "as in a garden, the poem's naturalness and spontaneity are constructed."[490] This revisiting of the inscape of particular things Hopkins variously calls "aftering," "seconding," "over-and-overing," or "abiding again" by the "bidding" of the singular. With reference to this poem, Richard Kearney calls it "a refiguring of first creation in second

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[490] Knickerbocker, *The Language of Nature, The Nature of Language*, 16.

creation."[491] Here we should keep in mind that the art-object simply

illustrates particularly well what all things are doing in their *tropoi tes*

huparxis: the ontological endowment of *ousia* (first creation) is constantly

being refigured in one's iconic manner of existing (second creation).

How do such formal poetic devices function for the other things

mentioned in the poem and how does this help convey the idea of

thisness?

"As tumbled over rim in roundy wells / Stones ring"
˘ - ˘ - ˘ - ˘ - ˘ - - -

As the dactyl-spondee evoked flight, here the repeating iambs (˘ -) make

the sound of the tumbling rock, ending with the full stop of the spondee

when it plunks into the water. The double-meaning of "ring" (splash and

ripple) functions both sonically and visually, enacting through poetic

effect the original sensuous experience.

"like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
˘ - - - - - - -

Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;"
- - - - ˘ - ˘ - ˘ -

Here the preponderance of stressed syllables points to the discrete

plucking of the string or tolling of the bell, while the internal rhymes

(string, fling; tells, bells; hung, swung, tongue) draw out their sonorous

quality. Each group of things (kingfisher and dragonfly; stones; string and

bell) is given a distinct meter, helping to execute sensuous poiesis, but also

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[491] Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday," 4.

underscoring on the level of form the thisness of each thing that the poem is conveying in its content. Indeed, the poem as a whole exhibits a wealth of stressed syllables, which also points to the incisive thisness of the thing, while its wealth of verbs points to the active *selving.*

That a single line of poetry conveys meaning on the levels of meter, sound, and content (to name a few possible levels), demonstrates what Hopkins calls *counterpoint,* the interplay of multiple concurrent rhythms.[492] These different registers of meaning are active in any text whatsoever, but poetry brings special attention to them by harnessing them to create poetic effects. In this way, the poem is always more than it says, making it a lot like the thing, which is always more than it appears (and like the painting that was more than its materials). The thing is more than it appears because it is constantly selving, bringing forth new expressions of its inscape. Each appearance is a take on the essence, a version of it, maybe like each performance of "My Funny Valentine" is the same standard, yet each time is different. For better or worse, "My Funny Valentine" will never be exhausted, no matter how many times it is played. The incessant selving of things demonstrates that they are more than they appear; recall how the special effect of personification in the case of the tongued-bell brought attention to this general quality in all things. Likewise, the poetic effect in general brings attention to the fact

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[492] With regard to counterpoint, Hopkins writes, "two rhythms are in some manner running at once" in *Poems,* 46, quoted in R. Jakobson, *Language in Literature,* 80.

that a text is more than it says, more than its content, meter, or sound alone—so many of its appearances. And this stands to reason, since the poem *is* a thing. Yet this particular poem also specifically talks *about things* (their thingliness, their thisness). This brings out why the "kingfishers" poem is properly ecopoetic: it both *reflects* upon and *is* an extension of the ongoing poiesis of *things in relation*, which is another way of naming the interconnected web of ecology, or what is revealed in the prosopic reduction. The poem *is* a thing that is *talking* about things: "*Whát I dó is me.*" And what do things do? They express their thisness, they selve, they appear as incessant expressions of their inscape, as *energeia* of their *ousia*.

The poem enacts this non-identical repetition of the thing's essence in its appearance through the internal rhymes that begin immediately with "king" and pass through "ring", "string", and "fling" before finally arriving at "thing." It is as if we are peeling through layers of appearance. Indeed, rhyme itself is not a bad way of conceiving the family resemblances that inhere among all a thing's different appearances. This crayon, for example, presents me with an endless number of appearances or perspectives from which I can see it, but they all rhyme, that is, they all resemble one another in some way, even though they are all different. And in another manner, we can say that all of the crayon's appearances rhyme with its essence in some way, even though the withdrawn nature of the essence makes it impossible to specify exactly how. The crayon is relatively other, a chiasmus of similitude and alterity, an iconic non-coinciding with itself. Each of its appearances participate in its essence, *having* in some limited, immanent way what the essence *is* transcendently.

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> "Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
> Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

> . . .keeps all his goings graces;"

King, ring, string, fling, thing, thing: The same rhyming -ing syllable then shows up in "being" and "crying," followed by "goings" in the next stanza. In the first instance, "being" functions as a verbal noun or verbal substantive, and could be glossed as the essence of the thing (recall this grammatical form from our discussion of the middle voice above). In the second instance, "crying" functions as a present participle. Here the continued internal rhyme is pertinent because the "crying" is another expression of the appearance sounding forth the essence. In the third instance, "goings" functions as a gerund, and it too stands in as the activity of the thing as it selves ("his goings" = his activity). Yet it also draws attention to the -ing form generally as the gerund (i.e., a noun formed from a verb). While "selves" is a noun-become-verb, a gerund like "goings" is a verb-become-noun. Gerunds too trouble the binary of passive and active, infusing the activity of a verb into a static noun.[493] As a general structure, the gerund reflects the insight of the poem that seemingly static things are in fact persistently selving. This connection to the gerund reflects back on the "thing", offering it up as a quasi-gerund (th-ing), a verb-noun whose constant activity is borne out by the ceaseless

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[493] Cf. Morton's use of the gerund in his essay "Attune" in resisting the implication that verbs are worthy and nouns unworthy, in *Veer Ecology*, 154f.

appearing of its inscape: the persistent th-ing of the thing. Similarly, the connection to the present participle "crying" can reflect back on the "thing," emphasizing how things are endlessly th-ing.

This queering of the *word* "thing" (a noun-become-gerund-become-present-participle-verb) makes it strange and brings out its thisness, just as the poem as a whole brings out the thisness of *embodied* things. But such a binary between words and bodies is not very helpful, since words are things too (the word "thing" is a thing). They have their own bodies, which are no more static than a dragonfly's or any other. Words too are selving. Just like the renditions of "My Funny Valentine," every time I read "kingfishers" it presents itself differently, offers a new appearance of itself. Every time I read the word "thing" it presents itself differently while still being one and the same—no less than the dragonfly.

In his book *Realist Magic* and in the essay mentioned above, Morton locates the nexus of this activity in the non-coincidence of essence and appearance:

> "What I do is me" points out the gap between I and me; we are not our appearances, a streak of blue flame, for we have an inscape, a withdrawn essence, and yet the streak of blue flame is also nothing but the expression of that essence.[494]

> In this difference between a reflexive and a nonreflexive personal pronoun, we detect archaeological evidence of the Rift (Greek, *chōrismos*) between a thing and its appearance. . . .What Hopkins gives us then is not a brightly colored diorama of animated plastic, but a weird stage set from which things stage their unique version of the Cretan Liar Paradox: "This sentence is false.". . .Every object says "myself." But in saying "myself" the

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[494] "Spooky Passion at a Distance," 5.

object is also saying "I am at this very moment lying," "This sentence is false."[495]

While Morton perhaps pushes this non-coincidence too far—distracting from the wonder of phenomenality, the spectacle of things' persistent selving—I take his point. As icon, the kingfisher is the fire, and yet it is more than the fire. The dragonfly is the flame, and yet it is more than the flame. They are the catching and the drawing, the swooping and the sudden turns, and they are more than this, always, interminably. And so, in a sense, the kingfisher is not the fire; the dragonfly is not the flame. The word *thing* is a thing, and as such it is just what you see on this page in red, and yet it is obvious that those marks have in no way exhausted or monopolized the word *thing* (see, there it is again). Like the poem itself, the strong semiotic component of the word-object simply makes obvious a truth about all objects: they are and are not their appearances. The stone is and is not the tumbling:

> "Tumbled over rim in roundy wells / Stones" are felt and heard before we hear what they have to say for themselves against the walls of the well and in the deep water within: the first line is an invisibly hyphenated adjective, tumbled-over-rim-in-roundy-wells. The adjective takes almost as long to read as it might take for an average stone to hit the water. The adjective draws out the stone, just as the dragonflies "draw flame." The stone becomes its tumbling, its falling-into-the-well, the moment at which it is thrown over the rim. Then splash—it's a stone alright, but we already sensed it as a non-stone.[496]

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[495] "Introduction" to *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, par. 33.

[496] "Introduction" to *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, par. 34.

We can find a metric parallel to the hyphenated adjective that draws out the stone:

"tumbled over rim in roundy wells / Stones
‒ ˘ ‒ ˘ ‒ ˘ ‒ ˘ ‒   ‒

Whát I dó is me: for that I came"
‒ ˘ ‒ ˘ ‒ ˘ ‒ ˘ ‒

In one sense, the second line draws out the first, explicating the relationship between the first line and its terminus, "Stones": "*Whát I dó is me*" explains the relationship between the tumbling and the stones. But if the first line leads to the stone—the thing that is appearing—to what does the second line lead? The parallel metric structure sets up an expectation. What in the second line corresponds to "stones" in the first line? We have reached the end of the stanza, so is it a blank, representing the withdrawn essence? Or more straightforwardly, is it the "I" that begins the next stanza? Or is it perhaps the second stanza as a whole that is in some sense the inner core of the first, illuminating the issues posed there as in classical Petrarchan style?

"I say móre: the just man justices;"

Hopkins continues the familiar structure: a just man by essence will bring forth justice in his outward activity; he "justices"—a verb made from an adjective (just), that evokes a noun (justice), again hybridizing the passive/active binary.

"Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;"

The grace that he possesses in his inner sanctum, of his essence, is what assures his goings-on will be graceful. The one "grace" of essence underwrites the many "graces" of appearances. Likewise, the double

usage of "keeps" in the senses of possessing (the essence) and assuring (or

underwriting the appearance) emphasizes the non-identical twinning of

essence and icon—or we could say *fraternal* twinning to evoke the family

resemblance idea. The motion of selving incessantly brings forth the

inscape, as the activity arising at the Rift between a thing and its

appearance, between *ousia* and *energeia*.

> "Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—"

Again, the just man *acts* (outward immanent appearance) what he *is*

(inward transcendent essence).

> "Chríst—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces."

It seems no accident that in both *Realist Magic* and "Spooky Passion

at a Distance," Morton never mentions the second stanza—even though

spooky *passion* at a distance describes very well the incarnational dynamic

that Hopkins invokes. Here is how Richard Kearney describes it:

> The idea is that Creation is synonymous and synchronous with
> incarnation, that each moment is a new occasion for the eternal to
> traverse the flesh and blood of time. *Ensarkosis*, or enfleshment: the
> infinite embodied in every instant of existence, waiting to be
> activated, acknowledged, attended to. The one ablaze in the many.
> The timeless flaring in the transitory. The holiness of
> happenstance.[497]

For Hopkins, then, it is Christ finally that is the divine inscape of all things

("ten thousand places"), and the world his beautiful *kosmic* body ("Lovely

in limbs and eyes not his"). It is Christ that ultimately underwrites the

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[497] Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday," 4.

selving activity ("plays") that constitutes the appearances of things ("the features of men's faces"). There in the iconic face, we see the trace of divine transcendence. Elsewhere Hopkins notes that our highest human vocation is to give this "beauty back to God" ("Christ plays. . .*To the Father through the features of men's faces*").[498] All the world is a theophany that gives the beauty of God back to God. Creation is the appearance of the divine inscape of the observing creator.

Yet as we mentioned earlier, Niels Gregersen's concept of *deep incarnation* alerts us to the importance of distinguishing between immanence and incarnation, between first and second creation.[499] God can be immanent in dirt without being incarnate there. Incarnation is more than immanence in the same way that enactive participation adds something to embedded participation. While we have mainly distinguished enactive and embedded as a difference of *kind,* evolution

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[498] Hopkins, quoted in Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday," 4.

[499] Gregersen defines deep incarnation as "the view that God's own Logos (Wisdom and Word) was made flesh in Jesus the Christ in such a comprehensive manner that God, by assuming the particular life of Jesus the Jew from Nazareth, also conjoined the material conditions of creaturely existence ("all flesh"), shared and ennobled the fate of all biological life forms ("grass" and "lilies"), and experienced the pains of sensitive creatures ("sparrows" and "foxes") from within. Deep incarnation thus presupposes a radical embodiment that reaches into the roots (*radices*) of material and biological existence as well as into the darker sides of creation: the *tenebrae creationis*" ("The Extended Body of Christ: Three Dimensions of Deep Incarnation," 225f.). On immanence versus incarnation see Gregersen et al., *Incarnation,* 2, 9, 198, 207, 263–67, 364. Deep incarnation was first proposed by Gregersen in "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World"; see also Elizabeth Johnson, "Deep Christology" and "An Earthly Christology."

presents them as a difference of *degree.* Already in *De Anima,* Aristotle

describes the nested realization of soul—how beings fold back upon

themselves to become vegetative, appetitive, rational—revealing the

continuum between embedded and enactive participation. Aristotle's first

act (*energeia*) belongs to *ousia,* while the second act belongs to *hupostasis-*

prosopon—the latter is erected upon the former.[500] Freedom is rooted in

and arises out of nature. Self-conscious reflexivity cannot be reduced to

life or being, but it is continuous with them. Being, life, and mind present

as different kinds but can be traced back to a difference in degree. Thus, it

does not make sense to draw a hard line between them when deciding

who or what merits inclusion in the body of Christ. Gregersen proposes

deep incarnation as an enlarged scope of ongoing divine influx in which

potentially all things can partake. We still distinguish a mode of

participation according to freewill, but this need not be the exclusive

mode of synergic and deific participation in incarnation-as-second-

creation. Evolution itself seems to be innovating increasingly enactive

forms of participation upon an embedded foundation. This enaction does

not suddenly emerge with the human, but is present to some degree from

the beginning.[501] Gregersen suggests a natural fit between deep

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[500] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 228.

[501] This is akin to *panpsychism*, but I prefer to think about it as *pansemiosis*, to avoid privileging the human psyche. Relational reference and meaning are present from the start. I certainly embrace a version of *psuche* that transcends the human, as do the Greek *nous* and *anima mundi.*

incarnation and soteriological universalism, adducing the principle of Thomas Aquinas that whatever is received is received according to the mode of the recipient.[502] Participating in the divine life will mean something different for a stone, a kingfisher, and a human, but all can partake according to their abilities. Duns Scotus' notion of *haecceitas* suggests that beings participate in the ongoing incarnation just by being themselves, by *selving*. Incarnation is already happening in the incessant "thisness" and particularity of each unique entity. Higher forms of complexity (life, sentience, mind) simply enactively participate in more complex ways.

Despite a certain Christian anthropocentrism, Hopkins goes a long way toward broadening the selving quality of the face to include the more-than-human world. In fact, through personification Hopkins recruits anthropomorphism in service an anthropo*de*centric gesture.[503] When he says that "Christ plays in ten thousand places," this sounds more like the 10,000 things of Taoism, which alludes to all entities and not just to human "faces." This opens upon a deeper sense of incarnation, beyond the rational animal. Christ is present in all things, not just humans but also the

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[502] *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* (*Summa Theologiae,* I q.75 a.5 resp.); see "Introduction," in *Incarnation,* 21, where Gregersen discusses a revisioning of freewill in which each entity accepts and acts according to their ability to do so.

[503] C. S. Lewis uses the word "anthropoperipheral" to describe a similar gesture with regard to Chalcdis' commentary on the *Timaeus*, in *The Discarded Image*: "The Medieval Model is, if we may use the word, anthropoperipheral. We are creatures of the Margin" (58).

kingfisher, and not just the kingfisher but the stone.[504] Each thing

participates in its own way, according to its capacities. At the level of

human freedom, virtue and ethics become salient in new ways, ways we

have tried to explore in this study. While ethics is a "human problem"

insofar as it is related to our freewill, the entire earth is implicated in our

decision-making process, now more than ever.

While it is well and good to extend the scope of Christian

incarnation to include the more-than-human world, why do we need

Christianity at all? What role could religion play in helping us to solve the

problems that it has helped to create? Simply put, I believe some notion of

the sacred, of the numinous, is necessary in order to understand both the

sickness of our civilization, as well as any healthy alternative. Do we live

in a disenchanted time, as Weber diagnosed? Or rather has our

omnipotent God become capitalism, our holy relics become commodities,

our divine visions become advertisements? To embrace secularism as if

the sacred were only a chimera of history is to become blind to the

numinous power of modern media messaging: *Just Do It*—after all, a

Greek God approves this message (*Nike*). Perhaps we do not need

Christianity or Christ per se, but I do think we need religious categories in

order to understand what has gone wrong, and to find ways of rekindling

a reverence for our nonhuman companions.

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[504] The kingfisher is an exemplary symbol of Christ, the fisher of men. The stone recalls those famous verses, "lift a stone and I am there" (Gospel of Thomas 77B) and "the stone was rolled away" (Luke 24:2; Mark 16:4) The former indicates divine omnipresence while the latter is a symbol of the resurrection.

Balthasar defines the Christian as the one who, "because he believes in the absolute Love of God for the world, is compelled to read Being in its ontological difference as a reference to love."[505] I see no reason why this definition need apply solely to card-carrying Christians. But that being said, Christians have done a lot of thinking, ontologically and ethically, about the ramifications of such a view. This is one reason why I find them such worthy interlocutors. Christianity is an attempt to make sense of the personal dimension of existence. What if our values, our cares, our desires, our loves, were not epiphenomenal accidents of a directionless evolution? What if they reached down to the very foundational structures of metaphysics? This is what Christianity helps us to think. Historically speaking, it proposed a compelling and innovative vision of divine love that offered a new worldview and a new relation to God. But being first does not make one the exclusive or privileged religion. If Christianity sometimes gives this impression, it may be because we literally could not think this thought or fully feel this feeling until Christianity offered it up in the contingent course of history. This is not to say that some other religion would not have done so had Christianity never come along. But because history unfolded how it did, Christianity becomes a privileged vision in a limited way, because it was the sensible symbol which permitted the intelligible idea, a mnemonic

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[505] Cited in Marion, *The Idol and Distance,* 249.

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prod of sorts. The universal depends upon the particular to build it up

from the bottom, just as the particular is informed by the universal.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

> The miracle of incarnation is not abstract; it is as tangible as the
> labor in which love becomes embodied and comes to belong, from
> eternity to earth, but not just earth in general. . .to this
> spread of land, to these boulders, to these trees, to this river.

<p style="text-align:center">–Erazim Kohák, The Embers and the Stars, 103</p>

> ". . .for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces."[506]

We return to the question of incarnation. Hopkins suggests a pan-

incarnationalism in which every single thing is an incarnation of Christ,

what Balthasar famously called a *cosmic liturgy* with respect to Maximus.

Kingfishers catch fire because of the "the ineffable and supranatural

divine fire present in the essence of things as in a burning bush," to

borrow a line from Maximus.[507] Indeed, all the iconic selving and quasi-

mirror play of the poem is reminiscent of the "I am that I am" that first

founded the *ousia-energeia* doublet; while the "face" (*prosopon*) heralds the

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[506] Hopkins, "As kingfishers catch fire."

[507] *Ambiguum* 10.1148CD. Fire too recalls the Pentecostal flames, and even Plato's cave. In the allegory, the fire in the cave is likened to the visible sun, allowing sensible objects to be seen, but the true light outside the cave is provided by the intelligible sun, the form of the Good, which allows knowledge and sustains being. However, it does so from beyond being.

similarly iconic transfiguration on Thabor.[508] But we need not see this

cosmic liturgy as an incarnation of the One Christ. Christ here simply

names the phenomena of incarnation itself, not what is incarnating. The

unicity of the Christ-*Logos* points to the fact that each incarnating thing is

ecologically interconnected, part of a mutually-related mesh of *logoi*.

Perhaps we could say that the Christ message stuck historically because it

was a message about incarnation, and not vice versa. While the Christian

messiah is certainly a contingent and culturally situated figure, the idea of

incarnation applies more broadly.

In fact, incarnation may be the best metaphor we have for

describing the phenomenality of the phenomena, for describing what

happens in the Rift between essence and appearance. Something appears,

comes forth embodied, and it just keeps doing so in unique yet related

ways, pointing back toward its essence, which is never made wholly

present. Something is incarnating; this strikes me as the simplest way to

understand the fact of phenomenality. Phenomenality is a basic feature of

the texture of perception, but it is easily overlooked. Incarnation, with its

sacred overtones, helps bring us back to the miraculous literal infinity of

the grain of sand: its appearance never exhausts its essence. But perhaps

for a fleeting moment, for us, we can perceive the phenomenality of

phenomena as incarnation: *the only phenomenon that coincides with its*

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[508] In French, *transfiguration* has additional resonances, since *figure* can mean "face."

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phenomenality; incarnation as the hypostatic union between phenomenon and phenomenality.[509] For the "what" of incarnation (content), is precisely its "how" (form); *logos* coincides with *tropos.* Essence coincides with existence, as with the Thomist God: this makes seeing the phenomenality of the thing a lot like seeing the divine in the ordinary, which is the whole point of the eschatological reduction. The phenomena suddenly (*exaiphnes*) becomes diaphanous to its transcendent ground. Manoussakis writes:

> Every phenomenon, insofar as it appears, is first and foremost a phenomenon of (its own) phenomenality. Although to the extent that it carries or conveys other information (more than the bare minimum information of its appearance), it registers as a phenomenon of this or that. In exceptional cases, however, which are no other than the ordinary, phenomena can, even if it is only for a moment, fully exhaust themselves in their wondrous *phainesthai*. That means that, in exceptional cases (and what is exceptional here is not the sort of phenomena we are to encounter but our attitude toward them) we can let ourselves be enthralled by the extraordinary ordinariness of the things themselves. . . .When we let ourselves take notice of the unnoticeable manifestation of the divine in everydayness, we have arrived back at the original philosophical passion of *thaumazein*.[510]

This is the fourth phenomenological reduction, in which the structure of *relatedness* allows a reduction of phenomena back to phenomena, after the detour of the first three reductions. The *prosopon*

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[509] Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 30.

[510] Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 29f.

receives "poetic license to start all over. To say it again. To do it again."[511]

Kearney invokes Hopkins in this call to return back to the "speckled, dappled things," to the epiphanies of the everyday in the unique thisness of things.[512] Such epiphanies "are always already there. But we do not heed them unless, at some level, we have an experience of sundering."[513]

"Without sundering there is no recognition. Some breaking down or breaking away from our given lived experience is necessary, it seems, for a breakthrough to the meaning of that same experience, at another level, one where we may see and hear otherwise."[514] The passage through the philosophical gymnastics of the first three reductions is just such a sundering.

> But my point is that epiphanies don't have to be exclusive moments of philosophical insight-through-detachment. . . .At best, philosophical deliberation permits a second knowing, which returns us to experience for a second time *as if for the first time*. . . . The eschatological reduction aims to bring a second sight to bear on the hidden and often neglected truths of first sight. It seeks to offer a form of recognition newer than cognition and older than perception.[515]

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[511] Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday," 13. Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 23.

[512] Hopkins, quoted in Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday," 3.

[513] Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday," 18.

[514] Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday," 16.

[515] Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday," 17–20. In this regard, Kearney also mentions Ricoeur's notion of "second naiveté."

What Kearney seeks then is very similar to what Hopkins aims to do in poetry generally (sensuous poiesis) and in "kingfishers" specifically (drawing attention to the things' thisness and selving): to reactivate a sense of wonder and miracle in the face of phenomenality. Sensuous poiesis, the new materialism of Timothy Morton and others, and the fourth reduction are natural allies. The fourth reduction is an attempt to practice sensuous poiesis, not through poetry, but as an activity of perception and recognition, as applied phenomenology. How do we do so? Reading poems like "kingfishers" helps by creating an encounter between reader and poem that serves as a model for an encounter between the person and other persons or things. This applied phenomenology is a sort of enactive-perceptive participation (also synergic), where the literal infinity of the grain of sand can suddenly appear to us, if we attend to it, if we choose to enactively participate, joining our *energeia* to that of the things around us, in a sacred acknowledgement of the ecological community of being of which we are always already a part. Indeed, we can bring vibrancy to "mere" appearances by thinking them as *energeia* of their essence. Appearance is activity, actuality, and sharable energy (three meanings of *energeia*):

- Appearance is activity as constant selving, an ongoing process rather than a static façade.
- Appearance is actuality in the sense that it is not "mere" appearance, but a micro-miracle, an icon of the inscape. In special moments of attention, we can perceive the phenomena

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as incarnation, that is, as the phenomena of phenomenality itself, the only case in which the appearance does coincide with the essence.

- Appearance is sharable energy in the sense that it can do things and have effects, but also that it can be affected. It is sharable energy in the sense of a fluid reservoir, a permeable agent, or quasi-prosopon, implicated in a mesh of relatedness. Syn-ergy thus names the cooperative action and distributed agency of the sacred community of all things—a field of participation.

And concurrent with all of this, things have an interiority, a withdrawn essence. Gregory of Nyssa may have been one of the first to think the withdrawn essence of the thing:

> Not even in the physical being itself, in which the bodily qualities inhere, has so far been captured by clear comprehension; for if one mentally analyses the phenomenon into its constituent parts and attempts to envisage the subject by itself, stripping it of its qualities, what will be left to reflect upon, I fail to see. When you remove from the body its color, shape, solidity, weight, size, spatial location, movement, its passive and active capacity, its relation to other things, none of which is in itself the body, but all belong to the body, what will then be left to which the thought of a body applies?[516]

This mysterious interiority of the thing commends an apophatics of perception, while vibrant appearance commends a kataphatics of perception. We must say what appears, we must unsay what appears in light of the essence, and we must unsay the unsaying in a return "back to

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[516] *Contra Eunomium,* II.115–16, translated in Karfíková, Douglass, and Zachhuber.

existence,"[517] what we could call *anapperception,* or a hyperbolics of

perception. Dionysius has a similar program for doing so, passing through

all manner of things as names of God in a litany not unlike those of the

new materialists: "sun of righteousness," "star of morning,"

"cornerstone," "sweet-smelling ointment," "charging bear," "worm."[518]

Everything is a name of God, not because we are Christians, but because

all things deserve our respect. We think of "worm" as a name of God, not

for God's sake, but because it makes the worm strange, emphasizes its

thisness, reminds us of its interiority.

We can call this approach *reverse theophany:* A thought experiment

where we imagine specific things as revelations of God, not so we can

understand God better, but so we can understand the thing better as its

own self-revelation. Recall Maximus' image of iron and fire in a forge to

illustrate the union-in-distinction of creature and God in deification.[519]

The iron takes on the whole nature of fire into its whole self, becoming hot

and glowing red throughout its full volume. The iron does not take on

only some of the fire's qualities, but all of them, and all through its entire

substance. Neither does the iron somehow copy the fire, or become like

the fire of its own accord, but rather it receives the whole fire into its

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[517] Kearney, quoted in Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction," 22.

[518] *Celestial Hierarchy*, 144C–145A, translated in Luibheid.

[519] *Ambiguum* 7.1073D–76A.

whole being. Yet both remain unconfused and discrete; they do not create some new third thing. We can transform all the classical physical analogies like this one into ways of understanding materiality more closely through the attention brought about by reverse theophany. The material is expressing something semiotic here, teaching us something about the way things can be together. We can even think the "the scandal of particularity" through reverse theophany (i.e., the scandal that God became the particular person, Jesus of Nazareth). The basic statement of Christology is that of God becoming material, or the incarnation. What if we were to change our perception, to look and care for the details of the everyday as if they were each the very arrival of the messiah?

The point is not a return to the original sacred, but the sacred after the secular, God after God, anatheism—I would even say an understanding of all things as smeared between sacred and profane, just as they are smeared between their essence and appearance.[520] Thinking God, thinking theologically, forces the attempt at an encounter with infinity, which in fact, we are always already encountering in every bit of phenomena—though the everyday attitude tends to overlook this fact.

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[520] Cf. Morton, "Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology": "Just as textuality smears the text–context boundary into aporia, if not oblivion, so the genomics version of ecological interrelatedness requires us to drop the organism–environment duality. This is the view of the 'extended phenotype': DNA is not limited to the physical boundaries of life forms, but rather expresses itself in and as what we call 'the environment.' The expression of beaver DNA does not stop at the ends of beaver whiskers but at the ends of beaver dams. Spider DNA is expressed in spider webs" (8).

Expressly trying to think the divine infinity in things effects a sort of epoche of the everyday. After the poetic detour called God, we return to the epiphanies of the ordinary, as if for the first time. In yearning participation, we recommit ourselves to the fecund relationships from which we are always already composed.

> "Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than the love that took its symmetry for granted when it was whole."

> –Derek Walcott[521]

2.4: Conclusion

> "The future is that which is not grasped. . . .The relation with the future is the relation with the other."

> –Levinas[522]

> "The [*prosopon*] assumes the form of an achronic figure that disrupts me before and after every as-if synchronism I impose upon it."

> –Richard Kearney[523]

The title of this study is "Acting a Part in the Ecstatic Love of the Divine." Most simply it refers to the entwined activity (*energeia*) and participation that describe our relation to the divine as a two-way street of ecstatic love on the stage of the cosmos. When *the ecstatic love of the divine* is taken as a subjective genitive, as God's love, this refers to God's self-

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[521] *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory,* par. 11.

[522] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, 64, my translation.

[523] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 16.

impartation to creation, in which God goes ecstatically out of Godself, *acting a part* in coming "to abide within all things" as the divine *energeia* of first creation. But as Dionysius reminds us, God remains, "nevertheless, within himself."[524] In this way, God *acts apart*, staying transcendently contained and unknown in God's *ousia*. But if instead of God being the acting agent, we consider the title as referring to the human actor, then this refers to our *acting a part* in God's perfections, the embedded participation freely given to us by God's act of love. Furthermore, even the human *acts apart*, insofar as our human nature remains itself and is not absorbed by the divine. Both meanings, *acting a part* and *acting apart*, can apply to both God and human, in the sense of *perichoresis* or unconfused union. Both divine and human partake of the other and yet remain apart from one another, thereby evoking a kind of middle voice beyond each member's passivity or activity. When *the ecstatic love of God* is taken as an objective genitive, as our love for God, it refers to enactive participation as second creation. We direct our activity and love (objective genitive) to *act a part* in the divine love (subjective genitive). But again, each also *acts apart* in the union-in-distinction that is deification from our point of view, and incarnation from God's.

Participation describes the relationship between the many and the one, and perhaps too between the many and the many. The question of metaphysics is *what is being,* but it has led us to the question, *what is being*

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[524] *Divine Names*, 712B, translated in Luibheid.

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together? While I have suggested that ontology and ethics were equally pressing, deeply united issues for Plato and Maximus, their relationship and compatibility have been seriously reevaluated in the modern era. Especially in the wake of totalizing Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment knowledge-projects, ontology has come under suspicion as a frozen idol of the discursive mind that inevitably passes over and does violence to the unique, suffering individual by subsuming them in an impersonal system. Today we are more awake than ever before to the systemic injustice and structural marginalization wrought by the oppressive juggernaut of patriarchal-industrial capitalism. The privilege of thinking can no longer be exercised in a hermetically sealed ivory tower, but need expose itself and pledge itself to life on the ground, life in the hermesian middle. But philosophy and ontology are capable of more than baroque ice sculptures built in the image of the self-same. As Adriaan Peperzak comments: "It is perhaps true that the Western—or the modern—tradition of thought has neglected, forgotten, or suppressed the otherness of *autrui*. . .[however], this does not mean that ontology is exhausted or is essentially incapable of taking the neglected phenomena into consideration."[525]

Indeed, the premodern trajectory we have traced essentially moves from a privileging of being and a rejection of becoming, to an acceptance and even favoring of the latter. While the vertical axis of ontological being

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[525] Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 84.

tends to abstract from visceral experience toward a synchronic still life, the horizontal axis of existential becoming structurally incorporates the alterity of time, what Levinas might call the ethical significance of diachronicity or the trauma of responsibility (in the double sense).[526]

Time, *l'avenir,* im-possibility, messianicity—all speak to the promise, the wager, the risk of the other, of the unforeseen, of the surprise to come. Our horizon is ruptured; we must respond; we are marked by the world and we mark it, irreversibly. But just as our verbs for being first emerge without regard for the difference between essence and existence, so must a philosophy of being again think them together—not univocally, but metaxologically.

Being outflanks thinking. Part of why it does so is because it never stops moving, never stops be-coming. Thinking will never corner, never grasp, never enclose, never encompass, never comprehend being. But *thinking can move* with it, and in some manner, let us say iconically, like is "known" by like. Being is never exhausted by thinking, but neither need thinking exhaust itself. As long as agapeic astonishment before the fecundity of being persists, mind's narrative may continue to testify to the other through the endless, erotic, interpretive detours of relationship.

I believe we need spiritual categories to make sense of the transcendences, both ontological and ethical, that our world exhibits. And

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[526] Cf. Cynthia Coe, *Levinas and the Trauma of Responsibility: The Ethical Significance of Time.*

like any other abstract categories, they need to be constantly revised, constantly and humbly brought back to the reality that they are meant to help illuminate, if they are not rather to become mind-forged manacles. For example, we need to critically reevaluate the purity and oneness we traditionally ascribe to the divine. As far back as Parmenides, we can see how these attributes are losing propositions, both for ontological explanation, but also, especially, for the sort of ethics in which they issue. Purity and oneness, while seeming to indicate our adoration and respect for the divine, also carry a covert contrastive sense that often ends up degrading our impure world of multiplicity. Rather, we saw how impurity, no less than twoness, is a basic condition of true gift-giving and relationship.

We can wonder whether the will to univocity is inherent to mind itself or is an artifact of the mind's colonization by the communications technology of writing. Recall the tendencies we analyzed at the outset with regard to the effect of writing upon thought:

- Orality → Literacy
- Communal identity → Individual identity (interiority, subjectivity, self-consciousness)
- Sound → Vision
- Time → Space
- Transience → Permanence
- Concreteness → Abstraction

But what if the situation were reversed? As Hans Krämer pointed out over

two decades ago, contemporary innovations in communications

technologies are leading to "a new kind of *orality*."[527] While writing used

to be the only way to access the best thinking in various fields, today I can

see and hear the world's thought leaders speak to me directly on

YouTube. While writing used to convey the world's news, today I can see

and hear the suffering of the global population like never before, from the

privileged comfort of my own living room. What would it mean to return

to orality, not naively or regressively, but *after* writing (*ana-orality*)? How

might the reverse tendencies manifest?

- Literacy → Orality
- Individual identity → Communal identity (exteriority, intersubjectivity, group-consciousness)
- Vision → Sound
- Space → Time
- Permanence → Transience
- Abstraction → Concreteness

Might not thought and philosophy follow suit, better adapting themselves

to the horizontal axis of time, person, particularity? And might our sense

of the divine metamorphose as well, shedding some of the vestiges of

unity, purity, permanence, omnipotence? Above I noted how Maximus

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[527] Krämer, "Plato's Unwritten Doctrine," 67.

neutralizes the dyadic hierarchies of the cosmos, realizing them as holographic icons of creation's non-contrastive relation to its creator. But if the relation to the creator is one of unilateral power or stark contrast, the dominance dynamic of such a pernicious dualism risks reinscribing itself in the binaries of the *diastema.* For example, Mary-Jane Rubenstein writes:

> The traditional enshrining of a particular kind of dominology between God and "man"—however purportedly benevolent—has rigidified and even deified the privilege of man over woman, light over dark, soul over body, reason over passion, and humanity over everything else. Surely we need not rehearse here the manifold demonstrations of these binaries' metaphoric sustenance of the Christian colonial project, the West African slave trade, the genocidal "civilization" of the Native Americans, or the ongoing racism and sexism both sustaining and destroying mainline Christianities. So I confess: I do not know whether there is a great chain of being or not. But I do know what happens when Christians act like there is. . . .And while I share radical orthodoxy's impossible hope for the peace that passes all understanding, it seems anti-historical at best and violent at worst to claim that the way toward it is to make the whole world Christian.[528]

Rather than glorifying the divine with no consideration for the effect it has on interpersonal dynamics, the image of God needs be resonant with the ethical virtues and relationships pursued here on the ground.

Dialogical reciprocity not only shapes the becoming of the creature, but determines the identity of the incarnating God of second creation (though not the God of first creation, as Desmond argues to Kearney). Only a God who truly relates to us can underwrite our own relations to one another. A God both too distant and too near has disastrous social consequences. Speaking to the latter, Levinas writes:

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[528] "Onward Ridiculous Debaters," 126.

> Plato constructed a Republic which must imitate the world of Ideas
> . . .and on this basis the ideal of the social will be sought in an ideal
> of fusion. One will assume that the subject relates to the other by
> identifying with him, collapsing into a collective representation,
> into a common ideality.[529]

This would be unfortunate indeed, were it Plato's view. Once again, if univocal attribution of divinity and the contrastive sense were the only games in town, one would have to opt for the latter to avoid both idolatry and fusion. But as I have argued throughout, the non-contrastive sense of transcendence provides a third-way, that of *articulated relationship,* which may be closer to Plato's view than commonly accepted. Like Levinas and Derrida, so many of us read Plato through the eyes of Neoplatonism, but if scholarship on the unwritten doctrines is taken seriously, which I believe it must be, then Platonic oneness, whether considered as overly fusional or overly eminent, must give way to the *relationship* between the One and the indefinite Dyad.[530] This is not to say that Plato's protology does not carry some baggage in the form of unhelpful Pythagorean dualisms. But we *can* say that there is no problem of the origins of otherness if it is relationship all the way down, something we also see when the Trinity is invoked as the ground of difference. The problem of

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[529] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre,* 88, translated in Kearney, *The God Who May Be,* 15.

[530] For Plato's unwritten doctrine (*agrapha dogmata* [ἄγραφα δόγματα]), see *The Other Plato,* edited by Dmitri Nikulin; and Giovanni Reale, *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato.* The doctrine of the One and the indefinite Dyad is referred to as Plato's protology.

the origins of otherness arises out of a desire to affirm the oneness of the One, which seems to be prompted by the mind's will to univocity. We can almost hear the Platonic protology in Kearney's response to Levinas:

> To this fusionary sameness of the One I would oppose the eschatological universality of the Other. This latter notion of the universal is more ethical to the extent that it is conceived in terms of a possible co-existence of unique [*prosopa*], whose transcendence is in each case vouchsafed. That such an ethical universal remains a "possibility" still to be attained—heralding from an open future— resists the temptation of acquiescing in the security of the accomplished. The fact that universal justice is an eschatological possible still-to come creates a sense of urgency and exigency, inviting each person to strive for its instantiation, however partial and particular, in each given situation. The eschatological universal holds out the promise of a perichoretic interplay of differing [*prosopa*], meeting without fusing, communing without totalizing, discoursing without dissolving.[531]

Along these lines, I have proposed a vision of the divine based in the fourfold sense of being—a God who is the One, who is the Other, and who May Be perpetually more as such a relationship unfolds, as our relationship with the divine and with one another unfolds. God is being (kataphatic), beyond being (apophatic), and as second creation may be even more (hyperbolic-metaphoric). God is immanent as the very being, life, and mind in which we participate, but God is also the source of being, life, and mind—their transcendent condition; and God is in the making, being built, eschatologically through the dialogue between *prosopa* and divinity, and between *prosopa* themselves as becoming-in-communion. The space of the *metaxu* allows God to be all these things, the hyper-*arche* of the agapeic origin, but also the ontological endowment itself, as well as

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[531] Kearney, *The God Who May Be,* 15.

the erotic incarnation of our highest aspirations and noblest ideals. Similitude as theophanic kataphasis, difference as apophatic theology, and dialectic as ongoing incarnation out of the divine *posse,* held open eschatologically as *l'avenir*.

As in relation to God, so in relation to every other there is (1) knowable and sharable dimensions such as our interests, projects, careers, background, family, common humanity, and worldview; (2) dimensions of particularity, thisness, and singularity that will always exceed my power to know and thus remain wholly other; (3) a vector of becoming and possibility that is evolving in time toward the unknown eschaton through our relationship (which according to the prosopic reduction is more fundamental than the self-other dyad). We are all stretched in the *metaxu,* evolving ecologically between a common inheritance and an intermediated future which depends upon our synergic co-being. We apply the paradox of participation as a model for relating to the other; we acknowledge firmly our sameness, and our difference, held dialectically, but in the open, metaxologically. We revise, we revisit, we narrate what is happening and we listen to the other who narrates back, non-identically, in stepwise fashion, as hermeneutic interbeing. We respect the other's inaccessibility, but we also hope to know them better in time, if they so permit and desire. We hold out the hope that by expressing our inner world and needs, and listening to those of others, we can together create a world that may merit the name divine.

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