

Introduction

THIS BOOK IS A study of Maximus the Confessor's philosophy, focusing on his understanding of time and claiming he possesses a *threefold theory of temporality* that merits a position of its own in the history of philosophy. I approach Maximus' works and thought through the perspective of three original thinkers in the world of contemporary Christian Orthodox thought: mainly Christos Yannaras with his *critical and relational ontology*, an exposition of which will be provided, but also John Zizioulas and Nicholas Loudovikos. Apart from this contemporary perspective of ours, I will also invoke the Aristotelian theory of time, a most obvious influence on Maximus,¹ as a historical starting point for my enquiry into Maximus' temporality, rather than focusing on late antiquity and Neoplatonism as the Confessor's intellectual context—thus continuing and evolving Betsakos' comparative study of Aristotelian and Maximian theories of motion.² A comparison with Maximus' Neoplatonic and late antique contemporaries is a most fecund scholarly path that, however, has been already traversed by most Maximian scholars, providing us with ample material in this direction, which need not be re-invented here; thus, I choose to take a different route.

Maximus has not written a treatise on time, nor has he composed a comprehensive theory of time like, for example, Aristotle. However, the definitions and formulations scattered in his work bear the marks of a

1. I must here note that the reception of Aristotle and Plato in Maximus' time, in the seventh century AD, was radically different from today's. Plato and Aristotle were considered as more or less complementary to each other, resulting in an "Aristotelian Plato" and a "Platonized Aristotle." According to this, one cannot speak of Maximus as *either* Aristotelian *or* Platonic, his education must have incorporated both philosophers, while "Aeon" as a notion in Maximus' work seems to have originated from Plato's *Timaeus*, among other influences. However, the *language* that Maximus uses, his way of articulating philosophical thought, is clearly primarily Aristotelian in nature. One can draw much more fruitful conclusions by approaching Maximus' understanding of time as a continuation and—most importantly—radical renewal of Aristotle's understanding and definition, while at the same time examining Plato's passages concerning the Aeon (cf. *Timaeus* 37, especially 37d).

2. Betsakos, *Στάσις Αεικίνητος*.

unique understanding of this pillar of ontology and cosmology that is time and temporality. Maximus is not merely influenced by Aristotle, but neither does he resume the Stagirite's philosophy or try to fit the Christian worldview into Aristotle's system. Even identical terminologies do not necessarily signify identical worldviews. Maximus' use of Aristotelian philosophy as *the language of philosophical thinking and expression*, as a potent tool to formulate and express a radically different ontology from that of Aristotle's, leads us to examine his understanding of time, Aeon, and temporality in relation to Aristotle's theory of time. A philological and historical approach to these subjects would require that we also take into account other influences on Maximus, such as Plato and his notion of time and *Aeon* (αἰών) in *Timaeus*, or earlier notions of time in general. However, it is my conviction, as will be expounded in the relevant chapters, that Maximus consciously draws a parallel to Aristotle's theory of time in particular in his definitions and formulations concerning temporality. If that is the case, a comparison between Aristotle and Maximus rather than between Plato and Maximus would lead to a fuller hermeneutical efflorescence concerning Maximus' ontology, if one is to study this subject philosophically, rather than merely historically. Before proceeding to the examination of Maximus' hermeneutic approach to temporality, I will attempt to introduce the reader to his thought to his ontology, cosmology, and anthropology by referring to representative themes thereof, like his ontological λόγοι doctrine, his theory of motion, or the question of the body/soul relationship in the human person.

Aristotle was not the only major influence on Maximus. The Areopagite writings³ are crucial in understanding the Confessor, and a large part of his works is dedicated to explaining them (which also means: in

3. The fifth/sixth century author(s) of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* wrote under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian convert of St. Paul mentioned in Acts 17:34 and Athens' first bishop in the first century. His exact identity is still unknown, despite numerous hypotheses. The false attribution was not revealed until many centuries later, and one can safely suppose that his commentators, Maximus the Confessor and John of Scythopolis, as well as the most of the undivided Christian church, thought that the *Corpus Areopagiticum* was indeed Dionysius' work (despite the documented suspicions concerning the lack of citations in earlier church fathers). However, the *Corpus Areopagiticum*' unknown author has been elevated to the status of one of the most important church fathers due to the brilliance of the writings themselves. (One's writings can never be the sole criterion for such an exalted status in the church, but this is the matter of another discussion.) Today, researchers refer to the author of the Areopagite corpus as "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite" or "Pseudo-Denys" in their works. In my study, I will prefer the impersonal phrase "the Areopagite corpus" to refer to the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and its unknown author. (For a short introduction to the Areopagite corpus, consult Louth's *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 154–73, and his *Denys the Areopagite*.)

dispelling accusations of “too much Neoplatonism” in them and in helping to incorporate them—or to keep them incorporated—in the tradition of the church fathers recognized by the undivided Christian church).

Part of this study’s hypothesis is that Maximus’ notions of time (χρόνος) and the *Aeon* (αἰών) play a crucial part in his teaching on deification (θέωσις), and that the seemingly contradictory concept of *ever-moving repose* (στάσις ἀεικίνητος) and *stationary movement* (στάσιμος ταυτοκίνησις)⁴ is a key concept for understanding θέωσις. Apart from examining Maximus’ perspective on time as an attribute, a quality of the *cosmos*, I will also approach it as a key component of his anthropology, or rather his *ontological anthropology*, i.e., the participation of man in an event of primarily ontological importance, θέωσις—which, together with his eschatology, permeates the totality of his thought in a definitive manner. As such, deification becomes a key concept in expounding Maximus’ thought on a number of subjects that may seem unrelated with this doctrine in particular.

Apart from Aristotle’s theory of time and the Areopagite corpus itself, I will not focus on tracing the *influences* on Maximus’ thought, but on implementing my hermeneutic tools in order to understand Maximus’ ontology. I will examine Maximus’ work from a philosophical standpoint, recognizing not merely the annotation of a given *doctrine* in his work, but an *original synthesis*, a philosophical interpretation of the nature of creation, existence, reality, being and becoming, meaning, cause, and purpose; an *ontology*.

As has already been said, a considerable aid in approaching Maximus’ ecclesial language as a philosophical theory and an instrument for the realization of this undertaking will be the philosopher Christos Yannaras⁵ (but also John Zizioulas⁶ and Nicholas Loudovikos⁷) work in philosophy and theology respectively, who undertook a task similar to that of Maximus’

4. Maximus the Confessor, *Q. Thal. II*, 65.544–46.

5. I will use a great part of Yannaras’ work, but will primarily rely on the approach expounded in his greatest work, *Person and Eros*. As my study will be saturated by the perspective found therein while focusing on Maximus’ work, I will attempt to keep my explicit references to this monograph at a minimum, in order to minimize the reader’s distraction. However, it must be clear that the basis of my *approach* to Maximus and the patristic thought in general is to be traced in *Person and Eros*. My illustration of *apophaticism* will also rely on Yannaras’ monograph entitled *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*. His general philosophical approach will be studied through *Relational Ontology and Propositions for a Critical Ontology* (in Greek, *Προτάσεις κριτικής όντολογίας*).

6. I will rely on Zizioulas’ *Being as Communion* and *Communion and Otherness*.

7. Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology*, but also his recently (2016) published *Church in the Making*.

namely to express the testimony of the church fathers and of the ecclesial body in a consistently philosophical language. It is no coincidence their work draws heavily on Maximus the Confessor among the church fathers, and I maintain that their focus on Maximus played an important role in the kindling of the recent scholarly interest on Maximus, among other factors. As a consequence, the *perspective* of this study will be the *perspective* of a critical and relational ontology, of Yannaras' contribution to philosophy. In this work, I will implement Yannaras' approach more extensively than any other's in philosophy and Maximian scholarship. As such, this study is not only about Maximus the Confessor, but also about Christos Yannaras' philosophical approach.

This study is divided in two parts. In the first part, I introduce the reader to the framework of my contemporary reading, Christos Yannaras' philosophy, as well as to themes in Maximus' thought. This includes an introductory exposition of the Confessor's ontology and the importance of the created/uncreated distinction in it, as well as of elements of his philosophical anthropology. I examine key terms such as apophaticism, substance, hypostasis, otherness, and so on. The second part is concluded with an examination of Maximus' doctrine of the λόγοι, a key concept in his ontology and a prerequisite for approaching my main research question.

The second part of this study is dedicated to motion and temporality. First I introduce the reader to the Aristotelian theory of motion and time, in order to proceed to Maximus' radical innovation thereof. I examine Maximus' understanding of motion as either a motion according to nature (κατὰ φύσιν), a *returning* motion, or a deviation thereof. Subsequently, I examine the motion and motionlessness of the uncreated according to Maximus, as well as the world as the outcome of a perpetual creative motion and repose (στάσις) as the goal of the *returning* motion. In understanding Maximus' conception of time as χρόνος, we see that he speaks of the unity of spatiality and temporality in the sensible world, a kind of spatiotemporal continuum; as a consequence, spatiality and temporality are examined together on the basis of a number of passages from his *Ambigua*. Furthermore, and drawing from a number of Maximian primary sources, I proceed to the examination of the Confessor's *second* mode of temporality apart from time (χρόνος), the *Aeon* (αἰών), a "time without movement" and the temporality of the intelligible—but not quite what we today understand with the concept of eternity. After an examination of the notion of καιρός, I proceed to Maximus' *third* mode of temporality, the radical transformation of temporality and motion in the ever-moving repose (στάσις ἀεικίνητος) of deification. I expound Maximus' understanding of temporality in deification through the λόγος-τρόπος distinction and the notion of the *eighth day*.

With these three distinct modes of temporality, χρόνος, αἰών, and στάσις ἀεικίνητος, a unique Maximian theory of time can be reconstructed. In this, time is not merely measuring ontological motion, but rather a *relationship*, the consummation of which effects the transformation of time into a dimensionless present devoid of temporal, spatial and generally ontological *distance*—thereby manifesting a perfect communion-in-otherness. This Maximian understanding of temporality is far from being commonplace among his contemporaries (or Christian philosophy in general) and, in my opinion, demands more attention than it has received—both in the context of the history of philosophy and in today’s ontological enquiry concerning the question of time.

SAMPLE