

The following Opusculum 3 and Opusculum 6 are both excerpts from:

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Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum 3*

Introduction by
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Introduction

Opusculum 3 is another work that stems from Maximus’s involvement in the monoenergist and monothelite controversies. It is a fragment of a lost treatise that Maximus wrote, *On the Activities and the Wills*, to Thalassius. Thalassius is most likely the theologian known as “Thalassius the Libyan,” who composed works of ascetic theology, including the *Centuries on Theology*, now included in the *Philokalia*. He was a leader of monks in Carthage during the reign of Heraclius (610–641). Maximus wrote several of his most important works in response to Thalassius, including his massive *Questions on Sacred Scripture* (ca. 633), in which he expounds on sixty-five difficult passages in scripture that Thalassius had identified. Maximus wrote *On the Activities and the Wills* in the early 640s, once he had fully entered the monothelite controversy. Only a few fragments of this treatise survive: chapter 50 (as *Opusculum 2*), chapter 51 (the present *Opusculum 3*), and some quotations in the florilegium known as *Opusculum 26b*.

Chapter 51 begins with the thesis that when “the fathers” referred to two wills in Christ, they had in mind “essential and natural laws” or “principles of the united entities,” rather than “deliberations.” The rest of the chapter defends that position through a series of *reductio ad absurdum* proofs directed against a statement Maximus claims (in a rare and enigmatic autobiographical statement) to have heard from some “false bishops” of the “party of Severus” when he debated them on Crete. This “Severus” is undoubtedly Severus of Antioch (ca. 459/65–538), the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch, whose name Chalcedonian theologians frequently used as a shorthand for miaphysite Christology. Maximus assigns these bishops the position that will (*thelēma*), activity (*energeia*), and person (*hypostasis*) are inseparable.

Accordingly, one must deny two wills in Christ, because that would ultimately necessitate two persons and destroy the unity of Christ.

Against this, Maximus argues that making will, activity, and person interchangeable terms leads to absurdities. He instead posits (very subtly here, it must be said) that will goes with activity, and activity goes with nature. In the polemic against “Severus” it is possible to detect Maximus nuancing his own Christological position, since as other texts in this collection show, he is adamant on the connection between will and activity. Thus, Maximus concludes that in Christ the duality of natures necessitates a duality of activities and wills, without, however, entailing opposition or separation.

Maximus is really interested here in developing a distinction between “natural” (*physikon*) and “deliberative” (*gnōmikon*) will. He affirms two natural wills in Christ as necessary consequences of each nature having its own appropriate activity. He does not, however, affirm two deliberative wills, or as these are sometimes translated “gnomic” wills. In his early works Maximus refers to Christ’s “deliberative will” and in his latest ones he denies its existence in Christ altogether. Here he denies a duality of “deliberations” but leaves the rest open. Thus, *Opusculum* 3 witnesses Maximus transitioning to his final position that in Christ there are two natures, activities, and natural wills, but no deliberative will whatsoever. The seeds of that thinking may be seen here, in Maximus’s admission that nothing natural opposes God, but that the beginning of sin and death was human beings’ deliberative will. The deliberative will is thus Maximus’s way of referring to making choices under the influence of strong emotional attachments, or in the absence of clear understanding. It is a description of human fallibility and our attempts to live with that fact. Such a mode of existence would seem to be problematic in Christ’s case.

The translation is made from the edition of François Combefis, *Sancti Maximi Confessoris, Graecorum theologi eximiique philosophi, operum tomus secundus* (Paris: Ex Almi Galliae, 1675), 22–34, as reprinted in PG 91: 45b–56d. Column numbers of the PG edition are indicated in square brackets.

Translation

From the Same Work, Chapter 51, That When the Fathers Said That There Were Two Wills in Christ, they Meant That There Were Two Natural Laws, not Two Deliberations.

[45] Let no one criticize the doctrine that rejects the duality of deliberative wills on the grounds that one finds nearly all the glorious teachers saying there are two wills. Nor for this reason should anyone in turn weigh anchor and sail his pious mind to one will in the manner of Severus, lest he make one evil follow upon another, I mean make confusion follow upon division. For it was not in reference to deliberative wills that the divinely inspired fathers spoke of quantity, but

in reference to natural wills, having rightly called “wills” the essential and natural laws and principles of the united entities. For indeed they did not have in mind the deliberative desire⁵ of a particular human being [which operates] by mental movements, but rather the natural desire of the flesh endowed with intellectual soul that has a natural capacity for yearning to exist and which is both naturally moved and formed by the Word towards the fulfillment of the economy – this they wisely designated as “will,” without which it is impossible for the human nature to exist.

For natural will is the desiderative capacity for natural existence and contains all the properties that essentially belong to an entity’s nature. [48] In accordance with this, the natural disposition to will is always rooted in that which wills by nature. Now the natural capacity to will and willing are not the same thing, just as the natural capacity to speak and speaking are not the same thing. For that which has the capacity to speak is disposed by nature [to speak], but does not always speak, since what belongs to the substance is contained in the principle of its nature, but what belongs to choice is shaped by the deliberation of the speaker. Accordingly, the natural capacity to speak always belongs to nature, whereas the precise manner in which one speaks belongs to the hypostasis. The same holds true for the natural capacity to will and willing.

If the natural disposition to will and willing are not the same thing (for as I said, the former belongs to the substance, whereas the latter to the choice of the one who wills), then as a human being the incarnate Word had the natural capacity to will, which was moved and formed by his divine will. For “his willing,” says the great Gregory, “involved nothing contrary to God, but is wholly deified.” But if deified, it was clearly deified by the union with the one who is deifying, and the one deifying and the one being deified are surely two, not one and the same in nature. For the one who deifies and the one who is deified belong to the category of relatives, and relatives are by nature co-introduced with each other, and the one is co-conceived with the other.

So then, since he is naturally disposed [to will] by nature, the Savior who wills even his own recoil before death along with the rest of the passions is shown as a human being in a fleshly manner, disclosing the economy purified of every illusion and redeeming our nature from the sufferings to which it had been condemned because of sin. Then again, he indicates the impulse [toward death], having in his flesh put death to death, so that both as a human being he may show that our natural disposition is saved in himself and as God show that the Father’s ineffable and great wish is fulfilled in a bodily manner. For he became a human being not primarily that he might suffer, but that he might save.

For this reason he says, “Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me. But let not my will, but your will be done.” Here he shows by his recoil the impulse of the human will, but by his agreement the impulse of the divine will, existing and formed in accordance with the intertwining of the natural principle with the mode of the economy. For incarnation is a vivid

demonstration not only of nature but also of economy, I mean, not only of the natural principle of the united entities but also of the mode of the hypostatic union that both confirms and renews the natures, without change and confusion. But he does not pray for the same thing in the same respect to be both deactivated and activated – that is absurd. For the Son’s will is by nature that of the Father. So then, as a human being the Savior had a natural will, which was formed, not opposed, by his divine will. For nothing natural is ever in any way opposed to God, so long as it does not involve deliberation. Thus too, [49] a division of persons appears, if the opposition is according to nature, since the maker who has made something that by nature fights against him has only himself to blame.

How could the incarnate Word have truly become a human being if he lacked what especially characterizes our nature as rational? For what is deprived of voluntary movement according to desire would have no share in any vital capacity. And what does not have vital capacity from its nature clearly possesses no soul of any kind, without which the flesh could never subsist. Therefore, if, according to Severus, the Word incarnate according to hypostasis did not possess a natural will as a human being, then he made the economy illusory by the mere appearance of flesh, but did not fulfill it by nature with flesh endowed with rational soul and intellect. For if he were truly lacking a natural will as a human being, he did not truly become a complete human being. And if he did not truly become a complete human being, he did not become a human being at all. For what existence is there for an incomplete nature, which lacks a principle?

So then, the objective of Severus and his followers is, by [attributing to Christ] as it were some utterly defective nature, to expel the nature assumed in the ineffable union, and to ratify the filth of Mani’s illusion, Apollinarius’s confusion, and Eutyches’s conflation of substances. For I remember, when I was dwelling on the island of Crete, that some false bishops from the party of Severus quarreled with me. I heard, “For this reason we do not confess two activities in Christ in accordance with the Tome of Leo: because wills follow upon activities, by which a duality of persons is necessarily introduced. Nor again do we confess a single activity that cannot be regarded as simple. Instead we profess, in accordance with Severus, that a single will and every divine and human activity proceeds from one and the same God the Word incarnate.” [52] To these one might bitterly assign that part of the prophecy: “Oh, Oh, flee from the land of the north; be saved in Zion, you who dwell in the daughter of Babylon.” For “the land of the north” is truly like the mind of Severus, a gloomy place deprived of the dwelling of divine light. The “daughter of Babylon” is the confused teaching of false doctrines wickedly engendered from that most despicable habit that clings to him, which those who have turned away from the light of knowledge “dwell in” and do not wish to be saved by conversion to “Zion,” I mean the church. For Severus’s argument, when investigated, fights against both the theology and the economy. For if, according to Severus, wills follow naturally upon activities, and persons are introduced by two wills, just as effects [follow upon] causes – what sort of demonstration this is I won’t say! – then clearly according to him for every person there is a will and a corresponding activity is

always introduced with it. For Severus's logic, holding the category of relation as an indissoluble relationship makes the things related equally interdependent.

Therefore, since "will" when said without qualification is polyvalent, [there are several possibilities.] If natural wills are introduced interdependently with persons, then, according to Severus, the blessed monad will also be a triad of natures. But if deliberative wills [are introduced interdependently with persons], then the monad will certainly be at odds with itself, since as a triad of persons it would not agree with their wills. And certainly, if there is a single will of the supersubstantial Trinity, it will be a single-personed divinity with three names.

And again, if, according to Severus's proposition, will always follows upon activity, and a person is introduced together with it, then necessarily when the activity is destroyed both the will that follows upon it and the person introduced with it will be destroyed together with the activity. But if the will is destroyed together with the activity and the person together with the will, then, according to Severus, Christ will be non-existent. For when the will is destroyed together with the activity, the person introduced together with the will has been destroyed together with it.

And again, if, according to Severus, wills always follow upon activities, and persons are introduced together with the wills, when he says that "every divine and human activity proceeds from one and the same God the Word incarnate," [53] then he must mean that every will (clearly both divine and human) will always be produced from "one and the same Word incarnate," since will follows upon activities along with persons introduced with them in equal number. And no argument can deny this.

According to Severus, then, by the destruction of his natural activities Christ will be without substance, and by the erroneous ascription of a single [activity] he will be without a will and without existence, and by every additional product of both his divine and human activity he will be both multi-willed and multi-personed. Or to put the point more properly, he will be both infinitely willed and infinitely personed. For Severus having said "every activity" has signaled a countless quantity.

Therefore, in keeping with the interdependence necessitated by the proposal of Severus, his account of theology collapses since he has introduced Arian polytheism, Sabellian atheism, and a nature of divinity that fights against itself in a way that smacks of Hellenic paganism. And in keeping with his proposal, clearly his account of the economy is corrupted, with the one Christ being without substance, without will, without existence. And again the same one as he grows older ends up infinitely willed and infinitely personed. What could be more impious than this?

Do you see where the rule of Severus leads those who are persuaded by it? For such is every doctrine that lacks the truth as its unshakeable foundation. But when you say, my fine fellow, that

Christ has one will, in what sense are you saying this and what sort of thing do you mean? If you mean Christ's natural will, you have alienated him by nature from his Father and his mother, because he has been united to neither of them in substance, since Christ belongs to neither of them by nature. And how, when you say this, do you escape the danger of polytheism? But if you mean his deliberative will, it will be characteristic of his hypostasis alone. For the deliberative will is distinctive to the person, and so it will be demonstrated clearly that Christ has a will that is different from that of the Father and the Spirit, and that he will fight against them both. Now if you mean the will of his divinity alone, then the divinity will be subject to passion, being given over, contrary to nature, to food and drink. But if you mean the will of his humanity alone, then it will not be naturally efficacious. For how could it be, since it is merely human? His display of miracles would be shown to be monstrous.

But if his will is by nature common to both, how can the will [55] be common by nature to things different in nature? Or if you mean that his will is wholly composite, then you are on the verge of a novel myth and fiction. For what is a composite will anyway? Again, you have alienated him from the Father since you characterize only the composite hypostasis by this composite will. Accordingly, then, when the Word came he would uproot "every plant that the Father did not plant." For it is not his nature to acquire a field that belongs to another.

But as it seems Severus denied the natural will of Christ's humanity, not realizing that the more proper and primary trait of every exceedingly rational nature is its movement according to appetite. Our fathers, having seen this, splendidly confessed a difference between the natural wills in Christ, but not of deliberative wills. For they would have never affirmed a difference between deliberative wills in Christ, lest he have two aims and intentions, and, so to speak, fight against himself by discord of thoughts; and lest for this reason they proclaim that he is two-personed. At any rate they knew that both the entry of sin and our separation from God had happened in the life in accordance with this difference between the deliberative wills alone. For in no other way is evil established except in the difference between our willing by deliberation and the divine will. Along with this difference, a corresponding quantity, and the number indicative of it, is necessarily introduced, which shows the antipathy of our deliberative will to God.

So then, the objective of Nestorius and Severus is the same in terms of impiety, though the manner is different. For the former flees the hypostatic union over worries about confusion and so makes the difference between substances into a division of persons. But the latter denies the difference between substances over worries about division and so turns the hypostatic union into a confusion of natures. We must confess neither confusion nor division in Christ, but rather the union of things different in substance and the difference between things hypostatically united, so that both the principle of the substances and the manner of union may be piously proclaimed. Both Nestorius and Severus, having torn both these affirmations apart – the former endorsing

only the union of deliberative qualities, whereas the latter only the difference between natural qualities after union – have fallen from the truth of things. The former brazenly condemns the mystery to division and the latter to confusion.

End Opusculum 3

Maximus the Confessor, Opusculum 6

Introduction and Translation by
Jonathan L. Zecher Introduction

Opusculum 6 is another work of Maximus that stems from his involvement in the monoenergist and monothelite controversies discussed in the introduction to *Ambiguum* 31 to John.

Opusculum 6, “Concerning the statement, ‘Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me,’” dates to 640 or 641. By that time Maximus was thoroughly embroiled in combating monothelitism.

This position – which maintained that Christ had only one will (*thelēma*) – grew out of the somewhat vaguer and perhaps more conciliatory monoenergist position. When Heraclius promulgated the *Ekthesis* in 638, the deliberately nebulous language of the *Psēphos* gave way to a more definitive statement of the singularity of Christ’s activity and will. Maximus had already objected to monoenergism, and now all the more strongly to monothelitism. He argued that the distinction of human and divine wills in Christ did not imply their opposition, and this claim is most tested in Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39–40).

In this brief tractate Maximus writes to a monothelite, though we cannot know whom. He builds his reading of Matthew through a statement of Gregory of Nazianzus, whom Maximus regards as the greatest of the church’s teachers. The key is Gregory’s distinction between “the human being, understood as we are” and “the human being, understood as the Savior is.” That is, Christ is human but, through the union of divine and human natures, a totally unique one. Specifically, his human will, like his human flesh and everything that pertains to it, has been “deified” through that union. Thus, Maximus argues that the act of praying must have a single subject – the incarnate Word in both his natures – and so it cannot be divided between a “human” and a “divine” subject. Rather, both declining the cup and accepting the Father’s will belong to the same incarnate Word, and manifest not an opposition of wills but merely their distinction. Maximus is at pains to show that a monothelite reading leads to absurdities and, especially, to the conclusion either that the Son wills something opposed to the Father, or that Father and Son together will an outcome contrary to the salvific purposes of God.

Of particular note is Maximus’s correlation of emotional states such as fear to volitional stances. The strongly emotive language of Matthew’s gospel had long proven a difficulty for Christian

apologists, since the ascription of emotion – let alone fear – to divinity is philosophically problematic, and even the ascription of fear to Jesus suggests a lack of emotional self-control. In later years Maximus strove to redeem Christ's fear in Gethsemane (especially in the Disputation with Pyrrhus, 645), but for now he thoroughly rejects the idea since it implies an opposition between Jesus's will and the Father's.

The translation is made from the edition of François Combefis, *Sancti Maximi Confessoris, Graecorum theologi eximiique philosophi, operum tomus secundus* (Paris: Ex Almi Galliae, 1675), 22–33, as reprinted in PG 91: 65A–68D. Column numbers of the PG edition are indicated in square brackets.

Translation

Concerning the Statement, "Father, if Possible, Let this Cup Pass from me"

Perhaps you take the statement, "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me," [65B] as demonstrating the recoil of the human being, "understood," as the divine Gregory says, "not as our Savior is (for his willing, being wholly deified, involved nothing contrary to God), but rather as we are, in that the human will does not always follow God, but usually resists and struggles against him." In that case, what do you make of the rest of the prayer, that is, "Not what I will, but rather let your will be done"? Does this show recoil or courage? The utmost agreement or defiance? No one with half a brain would deny that the prayer shows neither resistance nor cowardice, but rather full accord and agreement.

Now, if it does show perfect accord and agreement, to whom [65C] would you expect that it pertains? As pertaining to the human being understood "as we are" or "as the Savior is"? If the former – "as we are" – then our teacher's statement about him errs in declaring that "the human will does not always follow God, but usually resists and struggles against him." If it follows, it does not resist; if it resists, it does not follow. For each is annulled by and yields to the other [68A] as opposites. But if you take the prayer – "Not what I will, but rather let your will be done" – as pertaining to the human being understood not "as we are" but "as the Savior is," then you have confessed the utmost agreement of Christ's human will with his divine will, which is also his Father's. You have also affirmed two wills belonging to the one who is dual in nature, since both willing and activity exist at the level of nature. In neither, then, does Christ have opposition of any sort, even though he maintains in everything the natural difference between the natures from which, in which, and which the same one is.

Perhaps, however, you feel constrained by these considerations and may proceed to say that the statement "Not [68B] what I will" pertains neither to the human being understood "as we are" nor to the human being understood "as the Savior is," but instead, by way of denial, you say that

it is to be referred to the only-begotten Son's beginningless divinity, which precludes his independently willing anything contrary to the Father. If so, it follows by necessity that you are referring what was willed – namely, the declining of the cup – to the same beginningless divinity. For even if you maintain that his denial includes the negation of his independently willing anything, it does not include the exclusion of that which was willed, since it is impossible to negate simultaneously both the only-begotten Son independently willing something contrary to the Father and that which was willed. Why? Because in that case, the choice of the will common to both Father and Son would in every way be the denial of that which was willed by God – our salvation, which is something willed by God by his own nature. And if it is impossible to negate both at once, it is clear that if you decide to deny any independent willing, that you are making a claim about Father and Son's [68C] shared will and not a denial of what was willed, namely, the declining of the cup. Indeed, you will ascribe that declining to their shared beginningless divinity, to which, by way of negation, you referred the act of will.

If this idea seems execrable to you, then clearly his denial here (that is, the statement “Not what I will”) in every way excludes opposition and demonstrates the agreement of the Savior's human will with his divine will (which is also his Father's), since the whole Word became substantial with our whole nature and thereby deified it wholly. So, since he became “as we are” for our sake, he was saying, “Let not mine, but your will prevail,” to God, his own Father, in a manner appropriate to human beings. He who is by nature God has as a human being the fulfillment of the divine will as his own choice.

[68D] Therefore, let him who by nature both wills and enacts our salvation be known in both natures, from which, in which, and of which he is a hypostasis. Let it be known on the one hand that he joins the Father and the Spirit in approving the plan of salvation, and on the other that for it he “became obedient” to the Father “even unto death, death on a cross,” and that he himself accomplished through his flesh the great mystery of the divine plan for us.

End Opusculum 6

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