THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF
MAXIMUS THE CONFESSION

Edited by
PAULINE ALLEN
and
BRONWEN NEIL

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
CONTENTS

List of Illustrations .................................................. xvii
List of Abbreviations .................................................. xix
List of Contributors .................................................. xxvii

PART I HISTORICAL SETTING

1. Life and Times of Maximus the Confessor
   Pauline Allen .................................................. 3

2. A New Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor
   Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth ......................... 19

3. Byzantium in the Seventh Century
   Walter E. Kagii .................................................. 84

4. Maximus, a Cautious Neo-Chalcedonian
   Cyril Hovorun .................................................. 106

PART II THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

5. Classical Philosophical Influences: Aristotle and Platonism
   Marius Portaru .................................................. 127

6. The Foundation of Origenist Metaphysics
   Pascal Mueller-Jourdan ........................................ 149

7. The Ascetic Tradition
   Marcus Plested .................................................. 164

8. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor
   Ysabel De Andia .................................................. 177
I. CONTENTS

9. Mindset (γνώμη) in John Chrysostom 194
   Raymond J. Laird

10. Augustine on the Will 212
    Johannes Börjesson

11. Divine Providence and the Gnomic Will before Maximus 235
    Bronwen Neil

PART III WORKS AND THOUGHT

12. Exegesis of Scripture 253
    Paul M. Blowers

13. Maximus the Confessor’s Use of Literary Genres 274
    Peter Van Deun

14. Passions, Ascesis, and the Virtues 287
    Demetrios Batherellos

15. Christocentric Cosmology 307
    Torstein T. Tollefesen

16. Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor 322
    Andreas Andropoulos

17. The Mode of Deification 341
    Jean-Claude Larchet

18. Spiritual Anthropology in Ausbuaum 7 360
    Adam G. Cooper

19. Mapping Reality within the Experience of Holiness 378
    Doru Costache

    George C. Berthold

21. Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation 414
    Thomas Cattoi

PART IV RECEPTION

22. The Georgian Tradition on Maximus the Confessor 439
    Lela Khoperia

23. Maximus’ Heritage in Russia and Ukraine 460
    Grigory Benevich

24. The Impact of Maximus the Confessor on John Scottus Eriugena 480
    Catherine Kavanagh

25. Maximus the Confessor’s Influence and Reception in Byzantine and Modern Orthodoxy 500
    Andrew Louth

26. The Theology of the Will 516
    Ian A. McFarland

27. Maximus and Modern Psychology 533
    Michael Bakker

28. Maximus the Confessor and Ecumenism 548
    A. Edward Siecienski

29. Reception of Maximian Thought in the Modern Era 564
    Joshua Lollar

General Index 581
Index of Ancient Persons 595
Index of Modern Persons 599
Index of Biblical Citations 609
CHAPTER 27

MAXIMUS AND MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

MICHAEL BAKKER

Psychology as a science started to develop in the West when Maximus was still relatively unknown. There are some analogies that are worth exploring, even though there is no evidence of any significant influence of his thinking on modern psychology. In this chapter the following two parallels will be treated: (1) that between Maximus’ ascetic teachings and cognitive therapy and (2) that between his view of the soul and depth psychology.

By way of introduction, let us turn to Maximus’ letter to George the prefect of the province of Africa, the first of his epistles according to the numbering of the PG. After comparing his friend to nothing less than the sun, Maximus remarks that virtue is a matter of intention (γυνεον) rather than rank, and imitation of God a matter of disposition (διαθεσις) rather than dignity (Επ. 1, PG 91. 364A). He also contrasts the blessed ones like prefect George, in whom the firm love for God has taken root in the depth of their souls, with those who prefer material things, whose disposition (διαθεσις) is not fixed but is subject to change (PG 91. 364B–365A). He then writes the following: ‘Nothing of what exists, my blessed master, can divert you from the good and deifying habit (Εδεικε) that accompanies your intention (γυνεον) on your way towards God’ (PG 91. 365B).

We encounter here three keywords in Maximus’ vocabulary—διαθεσις, Εδεικε, and γυνεον—which often occur together in his oeuvre. The first of them, διαθεσις, can be translated in a straightforward manner as ‘disposition’. The second, Εδεικε, is a noun derived from the Greek word ‘to have’ (like its Latin counterpart habitus), indicating an acquired state or pattern of behaviour. The third term, γυνεον, has even more shades of meaning (opinion, choice, disposition of willing) in addition to the translation ‘intention’; in fact, this is the word that Maximus used to differentiate the deliberative ‘gnomic will’ from the stable ‘natural will’ (as part of his intellectual battle with the monothelite heresy).

In cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), one encounters a similar stress on habits or behavioural patterns with which are connected opinions and automatic thoughts.
In his letter Maximus also mentions the ‘depth of the soul’ (PG 91. 385C) and the ‘hidden part of the heart’ (PG 91. 380B). These are notions one finds in other parts of his writings as well and they suggest a parallel with depth psychology. The name of this type of psychology suggests a realm below, and is often associated with the notion of the unconscious, and the sexual and aggressive drives of a human being. The name that comes to mind in this context is of course that of psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who is often associated with the term ‘subconscious’, although he himself preferred ‘unconscious’. In his topology of the soul he positions the drives in the id, below the ego. The spatial metaphor is taken up by Kallistos Ware, who criticizes Freudian psychoanalysis for guiding us ‘not to the “ladder that leads to the kingdom”, but to the staircase that goes down to a dank and snake-infested cellar’ (Ware 1996: 56). The term ‘unconscious’, however, leaves room for a realm above; in fact, this was proposed by the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–93), who discerned within the unconscious a ‘supraconscious’. This is the ‘room upstairs, where superior powers are stored and function, ready to flood the conscious life and even the subconscious, with their cleansing power, when we offer them the [right] conditions’ (Stăniloae 2002: 98). Although he does not refer to it, Stăniloae, as a student of Maximus, must have read the Confessor’s response to the question of his friend Thalassius about the upper room where the Last Supper was held. Typically, Maximus gives this room a deeper sense: it is ‘the large and spacious understanding (bídon) and the familiarity with knowledge (ýgwn) embellished with divine visions of mystical and ineffable doctrines’ (Q. Thal. i, Laga–Steel 1980: 59). So there appears to be a hidden part of the heart below and above.

Using the spatial metaphor we could say that, along the horizontal axis, we will compare Maximus’ practical advice on handling thoughts and developing good habits with a modern cognitive (behavioural) therapist’s down-to-earth treatment of behavioural problems. Since it will not be possible to give an in-depth description of CBT, I will use as main reference for this type of psychotherapy, Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck’s Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds (Trader 2011; reviewed in Bakker 2012). Because over the last thirty years there has appeared an abundance of treatment outcome studies demonstrating CBT’s efficacy for most forms of psychopathology including anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, schizophrenia, personality disorders and more’ (Boswell et al. 2011: 107), this form of short-term psychotherapy is widely applied nowadays and preferred by insurance companies. Classical psychoanalysis, as developed by Freud, on the other hand, involves many sessions over a longer period and is less and less applied. This is not necessarily the case for other schools of depth psychology that we will look at, when we explore the vertical axis. In general, the psychodynamic approach (another name for depth psychology) has less empirical support than CBT, because, ‘[h]istorically, psychodynamic research focussed primarily upon the intensive study of individual patients (i.e., the case study) instead of large-scale trials’ (Boswell et al. 2011: 103).

Before tracing the background of Maximus’ psychology, which precedes the sections dealing with the two parallels, we have to look at the methodological difficulty of comparing thinkers who lived in different ages and under totally different circumstances. While for modern humanity the devil is perhaps merely a figure of speech, Maximus interprets King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in Jeremiah 34 (LXX = TM Jer. 27) as the devil (Q. Thal. 26, Laga–Steel 1980: 173). Moreover, he speaks about him as a real person, who has an intention (γιάν) in line with sinners who willingly abandon God to pursue pleasure (Laga–Steel 1980: 175); God allows him and his demons to tempt us, as he did with Job. ‘The demons either tempt us themselves or arm against us those who have no fear of the Lord. They tempt us themselves when we withdraw from human society, as they tempted the Lord in the desert’ (Car. 2. 13, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 94; Palmer et al. 1981: 67). Maximus interprets the helpers given by God to the king of Babylon as demons who attack humans according to their specialization in evil (Q. Thal. 26, Laga–Steel 1980: 181). Elsewhere, he lists the three main thoughts (λογισμοί) of ‘gluttony, avarice, and self-esteem’ (Car. 3. 56, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 170; Palmer et al. 1981: 92). From these are born, respectively, unchastity, greed, and pride. ‘All the rest—the thoughts of anger, resentment, rancor, listlessness, envy, back-biting, and so on—are consequent upon one of these three. These passions (năth), then, tie the intellect (voć) to material things and drag it down to earth. ‘The terms ‘thoughts’ (λογισμοί) and ‘intellect’ (voć), and the linking of demons to specific passions, remind one of Evagrius Pontus, to whom Maximus owes many of his psychological insights. In Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity, Brakke says the following:

[To read Evagrius’s demonology as an ancient and highly perceptive anticipation of modern psychology, as tempting as that might be, would be to attribute to Evagrius notions of repression, sublimation, and unconscious motives that he did not have. Still, we may understand that his strategies of naming thoughts, identifying the demons, and observing and analysing their methods gave monks a vocabulary and set of strategies that enabled them, in our terms, to talk about their feelings and to analyse them from a distance.]

(Brakke 2006: 77)

Repression as the blocking of painful memories, such as sexual abuse during childhood, is a modern notion that seems indeed not to be part of Maximus’ psychology. In that sense his world differs much from that after Freud, who was described in 1939 by W. H. Auden thus: ‘to us he is no more a person (now but a whole climate of opinion / under whom we conduct our different lives’ (Auden 1976: 217). Were Maximus alive today, he would probably not dismiss a patient’s struggle with demons as a mere metaphor or hallucination, as a post-Kantian psychologist might be inclined to do, but take it seriously as a real assault by the devil and pray for ‘an angel sent by God’ (Q. Thal. 52, Laga–Steel 1980: 425) to dispel the attacks. Maximus would probably find it odd that a curer of souls is anxious not to move beyond the frontiers of the phenomena into the noetic realm, a ‘hidden world’ (Ep. 1, PG 91. 385C) perceived by the nous, the spiritual or intuitive intellect (voć), rather than the logos or discursive reason (λογισμός). (I return to the psychic instruments voć and...
In the next section.) Actually, Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), father of another school of depth psychology (analytical psychology), saw the death of metaphysics precipitated by Emmanuel Kant (1724–1804) as a reason to move from futile speculation about objects outside our human experience to one's self (Bakker 2012: 82). Moreover, Nicolas (2011) shows that even the Weltanschauung of two men living in the same age and on the same continent—Carl Jung and Nikolai Berdyaev—may differ sharply. Since a human being with his or her thoughts, feelings, and longings basically functions the same as 1,400 years ago, it seems worthwhile to compare Maximus' analysis to that of modern psychologists.

**Epistemological, Anthropological, and Mystagogical Background**

The introduction has shown that psychology is closely bound up with epistemology and anthropology. In this section we will attempt to draw with rough strokes the intellectual and spiritual habitat of Maximus and identify his sources.

As the first source for Maximus' psychology, his own experience must be mentioned. The Centuries on Love reveal an intimate knowledge about the workings of the human soul born from intense training (ἀνέργεια) in praxis and contemplation (θεωρία). In his Mystagogy, he refers to the things 'mystically contemplated' by his unamed spiritual elder (γεγούν, Myst. Prol., Bouclignon 2011: 4), but it is obvious that he is intimately acquainted with his subject. In Q. Thal. 60 he speaks with authority about two types of knowledge of which the latter is gained by experience:

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 (νοηματική), and lacking in the kind of experiential perception (ανέργεια) 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 participation by grace.


Bradshaw quotes this passage to illustrate how Maximus interprets Ps-Dionysius the Areopagite, 'the all-holy and truly divine interpreter' (Myst. Prol., Bouclignon 2011: 4), who in his Mystical Theology sees the ascent of Moses up Mt. Sinai as the movement into the 'darkness of unknowing' (Theol. Myst. 1. 3, Heil-Ritter 1991: 144). So for Maximus the 'truly authentic knowledge' is beyond concepts and knowing; this mystical knowledge is therefore not subject to objective scientific scrutiny. Concerning the 'split between scientific and religious knowledge,' Hardy observes:

As a source of knowledge, mysticism is of course in opposition to the scientific mode—the empirical, testable, provable knowledge which is the currency of the modern Western world. Freud, Jung and Assagioli (the founder of the school of psychosynthesis), all medical doctors, trained in the scientific method, had to maintain the validity of their work against such opposition as that of Karl Popper and the criticism of 'closed systems' theory, and still are hardly regarded as respectable in the university system. Jung and Assagioli had the added 'disadvantage' of drawing on a spiritual awareness which they regarded as fundamental to their work.

(Hardy 1987: 110)

Dionysius is among the limited number of sources Maximus mentions by name. An important quarry for his anthropology and psychology is Nemesius of Emesa's On the Nature of Man. While Nemesius explicitly names and compares the views of Galen, Aristotle, Plato, the Stoics, and other ancient authors, Maximus tacitly quotes him in extenso (Amb. Lo. 10:44, PG 91.1196C–1197D; Louth 1996: 148–50). The frequent use of the term εἴδη (see my introduction to this chapter) seems to have been inspired by reading Aristotle himself or a work other than On the Nature of Man. Another source, besides the already-mentioned Evagrius, which Maximus does not name, are the Macarian homilies (in whatever guise Maximus knew them). 'Maximus has used the Macarian understanding of the place of the heart to balance the primacy of the intellectual found in Evagrius. This gives his anthropology a far more holistic quality. He has grounded Evagrian spirituality in the earth of a Macarian heart' (Plested 2004: 242).

The term 'heart' is perhaps even more intangible and immeasurable than the word 'soul' (ψυχή) to modern academic psychologists. Central for Maximus remains human experience; in order to describe it, he eclectically uses sources and feels free to adapt concepts if needed.

In the quotation about the two types of knowledge above, Maximus uses the word 'perception' (ἀνέργεια) in a positive sense, under the influence of the Macarian tradition it seems (see Plested 2004: 236–7). In passages dealing with ascetic praxis, however, Maximus presents ανέργεια and ανέργος (senses) mostly in a negative light: his advice, for example, is to shut the senses (μονών τής ανέργειας, Q. Thal. 49, Laga–Steel 1980: 357) when the passions revolt. Typically, Maximus' approach is not to declare the latter type of ανέργεια as bad per se, but to locate the tension between the two types at the level of intellect (νοεῖν): 'When the intellect turns its attention to the visible world, it perceives things through the medium of the senses in a way that accords with nature. And the intellect is not evil, nor is its natural capacity to form conceptual images of things, nor are the things themselves, nor are the senses, for all are the work of God.'

1 See Louth 1996: 25 on the Macarian Homilies as inspiration for the importance Maximus attributes to experience. See also Miguel 1966 on experience and Maximus' epistemology.

5 Cf. Uelman 2005: 5: 'The psychoanalytic unconscious is widely acknowledged to be a failure as a scientific theory because evidence of its major components cannot be observed, measured precisely, or manipulated easily. The theory's complexity renders it largely untestable.'
(Car. 2.15, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 96; trans. Palmer et al. 1981: 67). It all depends on the proper use (γνώμης) of the soul's natural powers and whether 'sense (αἴσθησις) is enabled by reason (κατὰ λόγον). Amb. Io. 10: 3, PG 91.1161D; Louth 1996: 103). In that case it is possible to discern the distinctly Maximian logos of Creation (see Louth 2010):

If the soul uses [γνώμης] the senses properly, discerning by means of its own faculties the manifold inner principles (λογικά) of created beings, and if it succeeds in wisely transmitting to itself the whole visible universe in which God is hidden and proclaimed in silence, then by use of its own free choice [φυσικόν] it creates a world of spiritual beauty within the understanding (διάνωσις).

(Amb. Io. 31, PG 91.1248C; trans. Cooper 2005: 59)

In Ambiguum 10 Maximus explains that intellect, reason, and sense correspond to three motions of the soul and this brings him to one of his favourite triads: that of being, well-being, and eternal being. The two ways of being at the extremes are God's alone, while the middle one (well-being) depends on 'our inclination (γνώμη) and motion (λόγος) (Amb. Io. 10: 3, PG 91.1161D–1161B; trans. Louth 1996: 100–2). Here we encounter again the term γνώμη already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. This section of the Ambiguum alludes to the mediating role played by human beings between the sensible and the intelligible Creation (that is, the fourth division of being, on which see Thunberg 1995: 39–404). This suggests an upward motion towards the soul's cause, God, with the soul 'learning by sense (αἴσθησις) from below and 'grasping by intellect (λογικά) from above (Opusc. de anima, PG 91.353D).

Perception by the senses (αἴσθησις) is situated at the border between body and soul, and this takes the body to the soul. As with perception by intellect (λογικά), the term Maximus prefers to αἴσθησις and the body in general are by nature good in Maximus' view; it all depends on how we use them. 'When [the soul] joins this transformed sensual operation on the one hand with the practice of virtue on the other, the whole soul/body composite becomes an agent of divine theophany' (Cooper 2005: 59; see Amb. Io. 21, PG 91.1249C). Maximian anthropology follows Evagrius in substituting spirit (νεύσις) with intellect ( νοῦς) in Paul's trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit (see Thunberg 1995: 107–13). The fourth chapter of the Mystagogy, entitled 'How and in what manner the whole church of God symbolically represents humankind and how it is represented by him as human,' explains how we should picture the intellect as the supreme organ of the soul and thus of a human being (Myst. 4, Boudignon 2011: 41).

What then is the place of reason (λόγος)? For Maximus, reason is the soul's organ for discursive reasoning. It is subservient to the intuitive and spiritual intellect (νοῦς): 'A pure intellect sees things correctly. A trained reason puts them in order' (Car. 2.97, Palmer et al. 1981: 82). Maximus gives a more elaborate answer about the functioning of the pair in the following chapter of the Mystagogy, where he associates intellect with the contemplative power (θεωρητικόν) and reason with the active power (πράσασθηκόν) of the soul. The essences of intellect and reason need to manifest themselves progressively in, respectively, truth and goodness. The 'habit of contemplation' (θεωρητική ἐξίς) and the 'habit of action' (πράσασθηκή ἐξίς) provide stability to the soul in its progression towards deification (Myst. 4, Boudignon 2011: 20–1).

Besides its association with νοῦς and αἴσθησις, logos in its sense of reason is associated with another group of three, that of reason, anger (θυμός), and desire (ἐπιθυμία) (e.g. Q Thal. 5, Laga–Steel 1980: 65). More often Maximus refers to these psychic powers as 'desiring' (ἐπιθυμητικόν), 'incensive' (θυμικόν), and 'rational' (λογιστικόν). This tripartite division of the soul was formulated by Plato (Republic iv. 434D–441C) and on the whole accepted by the Greek Fathers (see Palmer et al. 1981: 380). The use of these natural—and therefore in Maximus' view fundamentally good—powers depends on a person's disposition: 'A soul's motivation is rightly ordered when its desiring power is subordinated to self-control, when its incensive power rejects hatred and cleaves to love, and when the power of reason, through prayer and spiritual contemplation, advances towards God' (Car. 4.15, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 206; trans. Palmer et al. 1981: 102).

Plato's tripartite soul is part of a comparison between city and soul: 'But now the city was thought to be just because three natural kinds existing in it performed each its own function, and again it was sober, brave, and wise because of certain affections (μαθήματα) and habits (ἔξίς) of these three kinds' (Republic, iv. 435B, trans. Shorey 1963: 377). Maximus uses the same metaphor when he compares Nineveh to the soul:

...the soul of each and every person to which, in its transgression, the word of God is sent preaching repentance unto life (cf. Jon 3:1–4). In turn we may interpret the king of that city, or soul, as the intellect (νοῦς) and its captains as the soul's innate faculties. The men, then, signify impassioned thoughts (λογιστικόν), the cattle movements of the desiring faculty in relation to the body, the oxen covetous functions of the incensive faculty towards material objects, and the sheep the attempts of the senses to grasp sensible objects without intelligent reflection. So too the king is the intellect that arises, as from its throne, from the habitus (ἐξίς) born of its former ignorance.


The intellect thus rules, or should rule, over its three psychic powers as a king commands his captains. Thunberg (1995: 260) discusses this arrangement in relation to the competing (and more Evagrian) set up, where the intellect is closely associated with the rational power and thus a colleague of the ἐπιθυμητικόν and the θυμικόν.

To conclude this section, I would like to point to the mystagogical habitat from within which Maximus writes. This involves offering to God the correction of transgressions 'through true worship—I mean a humble disposition (σωφροσύνη)' (Q Thal. 26, Laga–Steel 1980: 177). In its progression towards deification and mystic union,
The soul passes through the three spiritual stages described in, amongst others, the Mystagogy: ‘By means of the nave, representing the body, it proposes ethical philosophy, while by means of the sanctuary, representing the soul, it spiritually interprets natural contemplation, and by means of the intellect of the divine altar it manifests mystical theology’ (Myst. 4, Boudignon 2011: 4).

**The Horizontal Axis:**

**Cognitive Therapy**

In this section we will look at the parallels between Maximus’ psychology and cognitive therapy. This does not involve deep mysticism with the intellect soaring beyond matter and reasoning, but rather the disciplined application of reason to one’s own thoughts, opinions, and habits. Here one sees that Maximus and cognitive therapy mirror an ancient example: ‘modern cognitive therapy has many things in common with Stoic therapy’ (Sorabji 2000: 2).

It is part of the basic ascetical handiwork that is performed during the stages of ethical philosophy and natural contemplation mentioned in the previous section. We already saw that the soul needs its reasoning power to assess what the senses suggest to it. This process Maximus describes to Thalassius, who asks how to interpret King Hezekiah blocking off the water from the springs outside Jerusalem (2 Chr. 32: 2–4. Q Thal. 49. Laga–Steel 1980: 351). His answer is that the springs should be interpreted as the senses, which should be closed when under demonic attack (see previous section). This is, of course, a very drastic response, like literally shutting yourself in your monastic cell. Fortunately, his answer also describes how the psyche normally processes stimuli from outside. As was the case with Nineveh, the city is interpreted as the soul and the king as its spiritual intellect (νοτική). Maximus identifies the three court officials as the three psychic powers. He describes how the soul produces knowledge out of sensible and intelligible input:

> The waters from outside the city—that is, outside the soul—which formed the river flowing through the city are the concepts (νοηματα) that, in the course of natural contemplation, are conveyed from the sensible object through every one of the senses and stream into the soul. By these waters, or notions, reason (λογις) passes like a river through the city of the soul and achieves the knowledge of sensible things. (Q Thal., Laga–Steel 1990: 355–6; trans. Blowers 1997: 175)

This image implies that the king should keep watch over what enters his city, if he does not completely restrict the ‘stream of consciousness’ (to use a phrase from literary criticism). This watchfulness (νοηματα) is described repeatedly by neptic Fathers such as Maximus. It requires a rational and dispassionate attitude to detect and repel impassioned thoughts suggested by the devil. Elsewhere, however, Maximus seems to suggest that the danger is not only outside and that the king needs the impartial advice of the power of reason (λογις) to prevent him from becoming enamoured with his own thoughts. Moreover, sometimes he needs to call in an advisor from outside the city:

> Just as parents have a special affection for the children who are the fruit of their bodies, so the intellect naturally clings to its own thoughts. And just as to passionately fond parents their own children seem the most capable and most beautiful of all—though they may be the most ridiculous in every way—so to a foolish intellect its own thoughts appear the most intelligent of all, though they may be utterly degraded. The wise man does not regard his own thoughts in this way. It is precisely when he feels convinced that they are true and good he most distrusts his own judgment. He makes other wise men the judges of his own thoughts and arguments. (Car, 3. 58, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 200; trans. Palmer et al. 1981: 92)

Judgements about thoughts may be coloured by a high opinion about oneself, but also by the opinions of others and private opinions about other people and things. This truth is at the heart of cognitive therapy: ‘The basic concept in the cognitive model affirms that the way people feel and behave stems not from a situation in itself, but from the way in which they interpret or construe that situation’ (Trader 2011: 51). This suggests a parallel with Maximus’ terms ‘intention’ or ‘opinion’ (γνωσθαι) and ‘disposition’ (διαθεσθαι), because we interpret similar situations in a similar way, and because our views and attitudes tend to be surprisingly stable.

As already said in my introduction, Maximus often uses the term ‘habit’ (ἔθες) when speaking of the way people feel and behave stems not from a situation in itself, but from the way in which they interpret or construe that situation (Trader 2011: 51). This suggests a parallel with Maximus’ terms ‘intention’ or ‘opinion’ (γνωσθαι) and ‘disposition’ (διαθεσθαι), because we interpret similar situations in a similar way, and because our views and attitudes tend to be surprisingly stable.

> Assumedly, with Nineveh, the city is interpreted as the soul and the king as its spiritual intellect (νοτική). Maximus identifies the three court officials as the three psychic powers. He describes how the soul produces knowledge out of sensible and intelligible input:

7 I used this while working as a chaplain with a prisoner struggling with his alcohol addiction. I suggested he shut off his television set, instead of being bombarded with images of people drinking happily, when his demons attacked him during the long evenings in his prison cell. Using Maximus’ metaphor, I asked him who was sitting on the throne of his city, which made him think very deeply.

8 Cf. the full title of the *Philokalia*, in which Maximus takes up more space than any of the other authors in this collection.

9 Aristotle, in whose *Nicomachean Ethics* habit plays an important role, says in the fourth book of his *Metaphysics* that one of the senses of ἔθες is διαθεσθαι (Ross 1958: vol. 1, 1022b).
unconscious is, to most laypeople and those in the arts and the humanities, the only unconscious,' Uleman (2005: 4) compared its 'primary metaphor of a hydraulic system with various fluid (drives, energy) seeking discharge (pleasure) and being channelled or blocked by defenses or sublimations' to the metaphor of a computer associated with the 'cognitive unconscious.' The latter concept of the unconscious was introduced in 1987 in an essay by Kihlstrom describing:

[Uleman 2005: 5]

How then to adjust faulty ('maladaptive') thinking and habits? The answer of cognitive therapy is to become aware of your trains of thought by a cold analysis as if you were a computer programme:

How conscious of a hidden opinion and its accompanying thoughts and feelings comes about when a client forces him- or herself—or rather is forced by the therapist—to analyse hidden inner processes. The most important step in becoming conscious of one's 'schemata' is probably the decision to go into therapy, that is, the realization that one needs help.

Consciousness of a hidden opinion and its accompanying thoughts and feelings comes about when a client forces him- or herself—or rather is forced by the therapist—to analyse hidden inner processes. The most important step in becoming conscious of one's 'schemata' is probably the decision to go into therapy, that is, the realization that one needs help.

The Greek word that comes closest to being an equivalent of consciousness is to my mind οὐσία τῆς ἑυδοκίας, related to the term αὐθαυτής discussed above. Galen, Aristotle, and Nemesius use it in a medical context (suffering from a μαθήματος, and Plotinus in the sense of self-awareness. The attacks of demons and the suffering from involuntary (δικοῦ) misfortunes lead according to Maximus to the result of belonging to the third and final spiritual stage, that of mystical theology.

Let us start this section with an example of consciousness (ουσία τῆς ἑυδοκίας) that is the result of an experience belonging to the third and final spiritual stage, that of mystical theology:

When the intellect is ravished through love by divine knowledge and stands outside the realm of created beings, it becomes aware of God's infinity. It is then, according to Isaiah, that a sense of amazement makes it conscious of its own lowliness and in all sincerity it repeats the prophet's words:


The psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–70) would probably identify this as a 'peak experience.' He, along with William James (1842–1910) and the already mentioned Roberto Assagioli, were pioneers of what is now called transpersonal psychology (Rowan 2005: 27–47). The ideas of Maslow, such as his 'hierarchy of needs,' have been criticized for their lack of scientific rigour. Why then do his and other more 'esoteric' theories appeal to the modern human being, who tries to be a rational creature?

To my mind, this apparent schizophrenia stems from a deep desire not to be irrational but rather to be 'hyperrational,' to use the favourite prefix hyper (beyond) of Ps-Dionysius the Areopagite. Mystical theology, the 'darkness of unknowing,' beyond reason (λόγος) and even intellect ( νοῦς), beckons. It seems natural to associate this 'darkness of unknowing' with the 'supraconscious' mentioned in my introduction. Assagioli also calls it the 'superconscious' or 'higher unconscious.' From this region we receive our higher intuitions and inspirations—artistic, philosophical or scientific, ethical 'imperatives' and urges to humanitarian and heroic action (Assagioli 1980: 77). Using the term 'heart' of the Macarian tradition, also used by Maximus instead of νοῦς (see Q. Thal. 5, Laga-Steel 1980: 65), the modern γέραπ Καλλιστό Ware gives the following description:

The heart includes what we today tend to describe as 'the unconscious.' The heart, that is to say, includes those aspects of myself which I do not as yet understand, the potentialities within myself of which I am at present largely unaware ... we may say that the heart is open both below and above, to the abyss of the subconscious below; above, to the abyss of mystical supraconscious, below to the forces of evil above, to the Divine Light.

[cited in Nicolaus 2011: 24]

If we combine this with Maximus' interpretation of the Last Supper's upper room, also mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, we end up with a house with a cellar and an attic as a metaphor for the soul with, respectively, its lower and higher unconscious.
While Ware has a negative view of the cellular, Sténiloae, in a typically Maximian fashion, does not regard the lower unconscious as evil by nature. The energies below, however, need to be balanced by the forces of the 'upper room of the soul'. By calling them 'psychic energies of desire and anger' he makes a tacit reference to the ἑπιθυμίαιν or ἑπιθυμίων (Sténiloae 2002: 100).

Ware referred to the subconscious and superconscious within human beings as abysses. Similarly, Maximus compares the abyss of the intellect (voēc) to the abyss of God in Amb. I 71, where he explains a passage from Gregory Nazianzen quoting Psalm 42: 8 (LXX = TM 42: 7) ('Abys calls to abyss in the noise of your cataracts'):

Every intellect (voēc), because of its invisible nature and the depth and multitude of its thoughts, is to be compared to an abyss, since it passes beyond the ordered array of the phenomena and comes to the place of intelligible reality. Or again, when in faith by the vehemence of its movement it passes beyond what is fitting, and comes to rest in itself, in every way fixed and unmoved, because it has passed beyond everything, then it necessarily calls upon the divine wisdom, which to the understanding is really and truly the unfathomable abyss.


While there is no equivalent for the psychoanalytic unconscious in Maximus, one might see a parallel in ignorance. On the one hand, it is clearly a sin: 'The darkness of ignorance and the unimaginable depth of evil have come over human nature like an abyss, and the mountains of error—meaning "the spirits of wickedness" (Eph. 6: 12)—have rooted themselves on it.' (Q. Thal. 64, Laga–Steel 1990: 193; Blowers–Wilken 2003: 148). On the other hand, we have the darkness of unknowing which Maximus associates with the latest stage of spiritual life, mystical theology.

**MAXIMUS IN DIALOGUE WITH MODERN PSYCHOLOGY**

Imagine if Maximus the Confessor were to visit our present world and age. At first, he would undoubtedly be in awe of the technological progress, the advances in medicine, etc. He would probably avidly read handbooks of neuropsychology, cognitive therapy, and the behavioural sciences, the successors of Nemesius' On the Nature of Man, and draw from them useful insights and techniques. His basic view of the human being's inner cosmos and his place in the macro-cosmos, however, would probably stay the same. Becoming more acquainted with the modern human being, he would probably be appalled by the little spiritual progress made, the addictions and depressions, despite all the affluence available. As Paul did on the Areopagus, he would perhaps try to adapt his language to appeal to an audience not well versed in the Old and New Testaments, blind to symbolism, and ignorant of his mystagogical habitat. His pedagogical style, however, would probably also stay the same, attempting to draw the other into the mystery of the logos of Creation. Rather than Maximus descending into polemics as with the deposed patriarch Pyrrhus, I imagine him more than willing to address questions and engage in a dialogue with modern psychology. Many topics remain to be explored: his teaching about the human will, the personal logos of a human being and how to discern it, and his lists of ἀγαθοὶ ὁμοίαι in relation to the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association 2013), to name but a few.

**SUGGESTED READING**

A fundamental work on Maximian psychology remains Thunberg 1995. The various schools of modern psychology have produced a plethora of books. Browsing through DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association 2013) gives an impression of psychopathology according to a coalition of mental health professionals, insurers, and the pharmaceutical industry. Hardy 1987 is recommended as a guide to a type of psychology that has a more holistic view of human beings that is more compatible with Maximus' teachings. Cooper 2005, Nicolas 2011, Trader 2011, Chirban 2012, and Bakker 2013 are examples of attempts to bring modern psychology into dialogue with the church Fathers.

**REFERENCES**

Primary Sources

Aristotle, Metaphysica
Maximus, Ambigua ad Iohannem (Difficult Passages Addressed to John)
PG 91. 1061A–1061G; Louth 1996.
Maximus, Capita de caritate (Centuries on Love)
Maximus, Mystagogia (Mystagogy)
Maximus, Quaestiones ad Thalassium (Questions Addressed to Thalassium)

Philokalia

Plato, Republic
Ps-Dionysius, De mystica theologa

---

10 For a similar thought experiment involving Plato, see Assagioli 2002: 3–4.
Secondary Sources


Bakker, M. (2012), 'Three Recently Published Dialogues between Eastern Orthodox Theology and Western Psychology', *Sobornost* 34/1: 80–91.


