

To cite text:

Brown Dewhurst, Emma (2021), "The Absence of Sexual Difference in the Theology of Maximus the Confessor", *Philosophy and Society* 32 (2): 204–225.

Emma Brown Dewhurst

THE ABSENCE OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE IN THE THEOLOGY OF MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

ABSTRACT

There has been much attention devoted in the last decade and especially in the last few years to Maximus the Confessor's beliefs concerning sexual difference and its removal. The most important text on this topic is *Ambiguuum 41*. There has been mixed reception of this text, with some scholars advocating that Maximus believes that sexual difference was absent from original human nature and will return to such a state in the eschaton; and other scholars believing that this should be read as a metaphorical absence. This article re-evaluates the text in question and argues that the former position should be maintained. It goes some way to bring together current scholarship on the text and to answers questions that arise from the opposing reading.

KEYWORDS

Ambiguuum 41, body, Byzantine theology, Byzantine philosophy, eschatology, gender, Maximus the Confessor, protology, sex

In the works of St Maximus the Confessor, and in particular in his *Ambiguuum 41*, we find the proposition that, in the reconciliation of the cosmos to God, sexual differences between human beings will be removed. Maximus tells us that the cosmos is recapitulated in Christ, in whom there is no male and female, and consequently a part of what it means to become like God is to overcome sexual difference. Maximus' claim seems to refer to a bodily change, since he writes that God might have originally intended for human beings to reproduce in a different way, had the Fall not required the introduction of sexed parts to human bodies. There is some division in Maximus scholarship however, about whether Maximus really believed that humans were bodily changed as a result of the Fall, and will change again to be sexless in the next life. Some scholarly interpretations prefer to read Maximus as metaphorical at this point in the text, and referring to future change in humans as a state of mind that is beyond the need for a gender division, rather than a material change to human bodies. Clarification on Maximus belief concerning sex here is especially important since Maximus' theology is influential in contemporary theological

ethics, and elucidating his position will feed into contemporary discussions of sex and gender in theology.

In this paper, I argue that Maximus should be read as adhering to the belief that human bodies became sexed in connection to the Fall, and that the sexed parts of the human body will be removed in the life to come. I begin by presenting Maximus in his own words on this topic, briefly discussing the three parts of *Ambiguum 41* that cover the removal of sexual distinction. Following this, I build on the work done by Cameron Partridge, Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska, and Sotiris Mitralaxis to explain the main arguments in favour of believing the removal of sexual difference to be a bodily occurrence. I close the paper by addressing the main opposing arguments and answer their objections or demonstrate why the propositions raised are not incompatible with the proposed bodily reading.

Whilst the central Maximian text of this paper is *Ambiguum 41*, reference is made to some of Maximus' wider corpus, with notable attention also given to *Ambiguum 42*. My main interlocutors committed to material bodily change are Partridge's 2008 doctoral thesis on the topic, Kochańczyk-Bonińska's 2017 chapter interrogating the philosophy of sex in Maximus, and Mitralaxis's 2017 paper inspecting the Greek in *Amb. 41* more closely. On the other side, favouring a metaphorical reading, are Adam Cooper, who's book *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor* (2005) touches on this issue, with his 2013 chapter *Saint Maximus on the Mystery of Marriage and the Body: A Reconsideration* returning to it more fully, and Doru Costache's paper *Living above Gender* (2013) which treats with this topic specifically.

1. Maximus' *Ambiguum 41* on Sexual Difference

Maximus' *Ambiguum 41* is a text exploring Gregory of Nazianzus' phrase "the natures are innovated, and God becomes man". In the text, Maximus explains the cosmos in terms of five divisions (διαίρεσις) between natures (φύσις). These five divisions of nature are 1) uncreated and created, then created is then split into 2) intelligible and sensible, sensible is then split into 3) heaven and earth, earth is then split into 4) paradise and inhabited world, and finally humanity is split into 5) male and female (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 102–103). It should be noted already at this point, that whilst each stage comes out of its preceding stage, the fifth division breaks with this pattern, with its subject not being the inhabited world (οἰκουμένη) but humans (ἄνθρωπος) (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 102–105).

Humans have a special place within this order, fulfilling role of mediator. For Maximus, humans were introduced last among beings to act as a bond mediating between the extremes of these divisions. By forming a unity between the extremities of the cosmos and living virtuously, humans gather all of creation to God. At this point in the text, Maximus makes his first of three remarks specifically about the division of humanity into male and female. Humanity reaches the pinnacle of ascent

by making of their own division a beginning of the unity which gathers up all things to God their Author, and proceeding by order and rank through the mean terms, they might reach the limit of the sublime ascent that comes about through the union of all things in God, in whom there is no division (διαίρεσις), completely shaking off from nature (πάντη τῆς φύσεως ἐκτιναζάμενος), by means of a supremely dispassionate condition of divine virtue, the property of male and female (τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ ἄρσεν ιδιότητα), which in no way was linked to the original principle (προηγούμενον λόγον) of the divine plan concerning human generation, so that they might be shown forth as, and become solely a human being according to the divine plan, not divided by the designation of male and female (according to the principle by which they formerly came into being), nor divided into parts that now appear around them, thanks to the perfect union, as I said, with their own principle, according to which they exist. (Maximus 2014b, *Amb 41*: 105–107)¹

Of particular importance in this section, is the claim that the property of male and female is in no way linked to the *logos* of humanity. The *logoi* are the divine predeterminations, according to which all things were made.² They are the divine structuring of the universe, and, insofar as they belong to God's will, they are of God but concern creatures. If we live in accordance with our *logos*, we live according to God's plan for us, which is, through Christ, to become in full communion with God in the promise of *theosis*.³ In saying that the property of male and female is in no way linked to the original *logos* of human nature, Maximus claims that male and female characteristics were never intended to be a part of human nature.

Next in *Ambiguuum 41*, Maximus goes through each of the divisions, talking about how humanity brings each together, unifying them and gathering them to God. He then says that humanity has failed to move in the natural way just

1 I use Conostas's (2014) English translation, but for clarity, I have replaced the pronouns 'he' with 'they' when referring to actions that the human person is doing. The subject of this section is ὁ ἄνθρωπος. In all future quotations that use this translation, I have replaced masculine pronouns and references to 'man' in a generic capacity with gender neutral pronouns and the term 'humanity', in order to leave it clear in the English when Maximus is and is not referring to men and humanity in general.

2 Maximus describes the *logoi* as 'predeterminations' (προορισμός) and 'divine wills' (θεῖα θελήματα), terms he borrows from Ps-Dionysius (Maximus 2014a, *Amb. 7*: 106.24–26). We can think of the *logoi* as akin in a way to blueprints – divine sketches in the mind of God, that, in and of themselves, have no reality, and yet represent the fullest potential of the subject they concern. They are both divine intention that can be realised, and representative of the relationship between Creator and creation, since to fulfil one's *logos* is to choose to live in accordance with divine will. Christ, as *the Logos* is the one who gathers the *logoi*, so to move in accordance with one's *logos* is draw close to Christ, like moving along the radius of a circle, toward Christ who is its centre point. On this last point especially see Maximus 2014a, *Amb. 7*: 101–102. Circle and radii analogy also to be found in Maximus 1931, *Myst.*, Ch.1. in Cantarella 1931: 122–214.; Maximus 1865a, *Cap. Theol.* PG 90 1125D–1128A II.4. The circle and radii analogy as a larger tool for unpacking Maximus' *logoi* theology was the subject of the following: Cvetković 2016: 265–279.

3 For further discussion on 'logos' and its importance in Maximus see Louth 2010: 77–84; and Bradshaw 2013: 9–22.

described, and has instead rent divisions deep into the cosmos. Because of this, natures had to be innovated, and thus God becomes human in order to save lost humanity (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 108–109). Christ unites in himself “the natural fissures running through the general nature of the universe” (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 108–109). Maximus then describes how Christ unites each division, but this time in the reverse order, beginning with the division of male and female. This is the second place he discusses sexual difference.

To be sure, initiating the universal union of all things in Himself, beginning without our own division, He became a perfect human, having assumed from us, and for us, and consistent with us, everything that is ours, lacking in nothing, *but without sin*, for to become human He had no need of the natural process of connubial intercourse. In this way, He showed, I think, that there was perhaps another mode, foreknown by God, for the multiplication of human beings, had the first human beings kept the commandment and not *cast* themselves down to the level of irrational animals by misusing the mode of their proper powers – and so He drove out from nature the difference and division into male and female (τὴν κατὰ τὸ ἄρρεν καὶ θῆλυ διαφοράν τε καὶ διαίρεσιν τῆς φύσεως ἐξωθούμενος), a difference, as I have said, which He in no way needed in order to become human, and without which existence would perhaps have been possible. There is no need for this divisions to last *perpetually*, for in Christ Jesus, says the divine apostle, *there is neither male nor female*. (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 110–111)

Two things of particular importance should be taken away from this section. One is that Maximus mentions that God had intended a way for humans to multiply that did not require sexual distinction. This will become important in discussions concerning material changes to the human body, since one interpretation of Maximus in this *ambiguuum* is to read him as advocating a state of mind change, rather than discussing bodily change.

The second thing of importance concerns Maximus terminological choice to talk about driving out from nature both ‘division’ (διαίρεσις) and ‘difference’ (διαφορά). The relevance of the precise terminology will be returned to later, but this section stands in contrast to the previous one, where Maximus talked about the way that each division is overcome by humanity:

Then, once they had united paradise and the inhabited world through their own proper holy way of life, humanity would have fashioned a single earth, not divided (μὴ διαρουμένην) by them in the difference of its parts (μερῶν αὐτῆς διαφοράν), but rather gathered together, for to none of its parts would they be subjected. After this, having united heaven and earth through a life identical in virtue in every manner with that of the angels (as much as this is humanly possible), they would have made sensible creation absolutely identical and indivisible with itself, not in any way dividing it into places separated by distances [...]. (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 106–107)

‘Without division’ (μὴ διαρουμένος) is used throughout *Ambiguuum 41* to describe the new relation that arises from human mediation of natures. The implication here (see also Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 108–109), as well as elsewhere

in Maximus' corpus,⁴ is that the differences of its parts (μερῶν αὐτῆς διαφορὰν) are retained, but that these no longer contribute to division and instead are gathered together in unity. When explaining the relationship between particulars and the natures that are being unified, Maximus demonstrates that the relationships of all components of creation are interwoven, so that even the most lowly creature shares by its nature in higher beings. In detailing this gathering together of natures, Maximus notes "For all things that are distinguished from each other by virtue of their individual differences (ιδίως διαφοραῖς) are generically united by universal and common identities, and they are drawn together to one and the same by means of a certain generic principle of nature, like genera that are united with each other according to substance, and consequently have something one and the same and indivisible" (Maximus, *Amb. 4I*: 116–117). Maximus' understanding of universals is one in which the fullness of the individual is allowed for. Universals are a unifying factor, but not in a way that obliterates each particular that makes it up. Each particular, though different, fully partakes of and *is* an instance of its universal. A lateral understanding of universals and commitment to the integrity of the particular is vital to Maximus' thought.⁵ Individual difference is thus not jeopardized by the kind of unity Maximus is talking about, and the term *διαφορά* is chosen here and in many places elsewhere to illustrate these retained differences.

The terminology Maximus uses for his five divisions follows the language and logic of the Chalcedonian Definition. Relying on what has sometimes been termed 'Chalcedonian Logic',⁶ we see the unity of Christ's singular personhood and the distinctness of his divine and human natures mirrored in all creation and how it relates to God. Without attempting to systematise a strict terminological distinction between the terms 'division' (*διαίρεσις*) and 'difference' (*διαφορά*), one can see the Chalcedonian Definition and Christ's bringing

4 Eg. Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 10*: 310–311: "[...] the harmonious conjunction of extremes through intermediaries (which comes about without any damage to them resulting from their polarity); the agreement of the parts with wholes, and the comprehensive unity of wholes with parts; and the clear distinction of the parts from one another in accordance with their individuating differences; as well as their unconfused union [...] the principle of each nature remains inviolate, without being confused with or confusing any other nature".

5 See further on this Tollefsen 2015: 70–92.

6 Maximus often discusses things in terms of their unity (*ἔνωσις*) and difference (*διαφορά*), the language used by the Council of Chalcedon to describe the unity of Christ's person and the retained distinction of his two natures. Christ is often at the heart of Maximus' meaning when he uses 'unity and distinction' as a theme in his theology. Von Balthasar first proposed that the Chalcedonian Formula underlay Maximus' work in a particularly important fashion in 1941, and the analysis was further developed by Thunberg twenty years later. The term later came under criticism by Törönen, who argued that the logic predated Chalcedon and that Maximus made use of older sources where union and distinction is also an important concept. Nevertheless, it is clear that Maximus intended us to think of Christ's union of natures, especially when it comes to *Amb. 4I* where it is in Christ that the created and uncreated are brought together and creation restored. See von Balthasar 1941: 193; Thunberg 1965: 9; Törönen 2007.

together of God and humanity echoed in Maximus' Christological account of the cosmos. Whilst heaven and earth, for example, remain distinct so that the unique identity of each is retained, in Christ they are no longer split apart but are brought together in his person.

The final division into male and female has a special place within this cosmological account, since humans are mediators in whom the cosmos is gathered to God. Maximus calls humans a "workshop containing all things" (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 104–105). The final division within humanity into male and female exists within this Christological context, but, whilst it shares similarities with other divisions, it also features some important differences arising from the special place that humanity itself occupies within the cosmos. The language in this last division breaks the mould of previous divisions, and we see both division (*διαίρεσις*) and difference (*διαφορά*), being removed, implying that no distinction between male and female will remain in human nature. I return to this in the next section.

The third mention of sexual difference comes after Maximus' demonstration of Christ recapitulating the natures, where Maximus returns to summarise Christ's activity again.

Thus He united, first of all, ourselves in Himself through removal of the difference (*διαφορᾶς*) between male and female, and instead of men and women, in whom this mode of division is especially evident, He showed us as properly and truly to be simply human beings, thoroughly formed according to Him, bearing His image intact and completely unadulterated, touched in no way by any marks of corruption. (Maximus, *Amb. 41*: 114–115)

Maximus again chooses to make use of difference (*διαφορᾶς*) here when talking about the removal of male and female. Also important is the association of removing male and female with a human body not bearing the marks of corruption. As will be elaborated further, for Maximus, identifiers of sex are tied to the Fall and markers of fallen humanity that he anticipates being removed.

Arguments in Favour of Reading the Removal of Bodily Sexual Distinction

I have laid out the three places in *Ambiguum 41* where Maximus discusses the division of humanity into male and female, and the removal of these differences as human nature is restored through Christ. I drew attention to three components in particular: the choice to include both division and difference when discussing the removal of sexual difference; the choice to talk about the *logos* of human nature; and the mention of an alternative method of human reproduction along with the association of sexual difference with corruption. I next develop these observations with reference to existing literature and indicate why Maximus should be considered to be talking about the removal of sexual differences from the human body.

2a. Division and Difference

As mentioned earlier, the language of division and difference is different when it comes to division of male and female. I highlighted that Maximus echoes the Chalcedonian Formula in *Amb. 41*, choosing to use difference (διαφορά) to refer to identity, which is retained, and division (διαίρεσις) as a kind of enmity and separation, which is removed. Maximus' description of the removal of both difference and division in sexual distinction was the topic of Sotiris Mitralaxis' paper, *Rethinking the Problem of Sexual Difference in Ambiguum 41*. Mitralaxis' paper adheres to a close reading of the *Amb. 41*, in part credited to a collective contribution by a number prominent Maximian scholars who attended a workshop on the text in 2016.⁷ Mitralaxis points out that in this text sexual difference is 'shaken out', 'driven out', and 'removed'. In his analysis of the language of *Amb. 41*, Mitralaxis concludes that "There is a distinction in Maximian thought between difference and division, in which certain differences will be eschatologically retained, but not as divisions. It is crucial to see that this is not what Maximus proposes here concerning the transcendence of sexual difference in Christ and, by extension, the eschatological state of humanity: it the *difference*, διαφορά, itself that is removed, not merely the division" (Mitralaxis 2017: 142). Some previous scholarship (E.g. Cooper 2005: 157; 211) has maintained that the division between male and female is no different to that of the other divisions, and hence the logic of distinction remaining whilst division is removed has been carried over into analyses of this division. Mitralaxis' analysis opens the door for reinterpreting the choice to read this division the same way as the other divisions.

Partridge meanwhile focusses on the peculiarity of the division into male and female itself, which alone is not a neat subdivision of the previous divisions of nature, as the others are (Partridge 2008: 133). Partridge points out that "Maximus is setting humans apart as distinctive within the created order. Further, Maximus is also distinguishing sexual difference from other kinds of difference" (Partridge 2008: 133). Humans as mediators through whom the cosmos has been broken and through whom it will be mediated to unity, have split themselves apart in the Fall in a way that is unique. In falling away from a more angelic kind of life, humans now reproduce in a manner akin to animals, hence the requirement for human bodies to exhibit male and female distinctions. I return to this shortly, but Partridge's point that the division into male and female itself is different in these other capacities from the other divisions, is one of cosmological importance. Indeed, Partridge says, "as I read Maximus, the purgation of sexual difference is an essential, if exceedingly challenging, part of both the 'geometry' and the reconciling trajectory of his thought, attention to which can illuminate the relationship of asceticism and synthesis within his thought as a whole" (Partridge 2008: 121).

⁷ See Mitralaxis 2017: 140, ff9. The other scholars contributing to the close reading of the *Amb. 41* passages in question were Torstein Tollefsen, Sebastian Mateiescu, Vladimir Cvetković, Christophe Erismann, and Susumu Tanaba.

Similarly, at least on the topic this particular division, Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska writes that she “cannot agree with the suggestions that it is only a linguistic difference and Maximus claims that only the division will be dismissed but there will still be some kind of distinction between man and woman. The entire *Difficulty 41* should have been aborted in order to make this theory convincing” (Kochańczyk-Bonińska 2017: 237). Kochańczyk-Bonińska, drawing on Partridge, likewise also notes the different place that humans occupy within the created order, indicating that this is the starting place for understanding the markedly different way Maximus considers the division into male and female (Kochańczyk-Bonińska 2017: 233).

2b. Sexual Difference and Logos

In the first passage on sexual difference in *Amb. 41*, Maximus talks about male and female not being a part of humanity’s *logos*. I briefly discussed what a *logos* was within Maximus’ cosmology and highlighted some of the implications of such a statement. I expand upon those here. Reiterating that the claim that sexual difference has no part of a divine plan, is to claim that it was never how humanity was intended to be, and nor will it be a feature of perfected humanity in *theosis*. Contained in an understanding of *logos* is an understanding of how we relate to God as humans. When Maximus writes “the property of male and female (τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ ἄρσεν ἰδιότητα), which in no way was linked to the original principle (προηγούμενον λόγον) of the divine plan concerning human generation [...]”, he informs us that male and female were not an intended feature of human reproduction, human nature, or the way that humans relate to God.

Mitralaxis notes that Maximus “not only asserts that sexual difference itself (and not only sexual division or reproduction) will not endure the eschata, thus beyond standard interpretations of *Gal 3:28*, but he also goes on to assert that the differentiation between male and female is not even a part of humanity’s *logos* of nature [...]” (Mitralaxis 2017: 144).⁸ Mitralaxis considers a number of possible readings of how *logos* is interacting with the shaking off of sexual difference, and draws attention also to the absence of the property of male and female, so that Maximus seems to be expressing a bodily difference and not only the absence of sexual reproduction at the level of the *logos* of humanity. This means, he writes, that it is “not only in an eschatological perspective, but a past reality pertaining to humanity’s coming into being”. Following this, Mitralaxis asks: “Does the property of sexual difference exist at the level of *nature* (as (1) and the other passages would indicate), but not at the level of *logos of nature*, and if yes, how?” (Mitralaxis 2017: 143–144).

An answer to where exactly sexual difference exists if not in the *logos* is posited by Partridge. On identifying that something different occurs in this last division within humanity itself, Partridge suggested that, if sexual difference

⁸ The absence of male and female from the *logos* of humanity is also discussed by Partridge 2008: 135.

is not considered part of human *logos* by Maximus, then it must instead be a ‘mode’ of human existence (*tropos*). Rather than following the Christological pattern of person and natures, the shaking off of male and female better fits the type of removal found in the restitution of human will in Maximus, Partridge suggests. For Maximus, when humanity fell, the human will became composite of *gnome* (γνώμη) and *proairesis* (προαίρεσις), habitual deliberation and free choice respectively. *Gnome* and *proairesis* are modes of willing⁹ – part of the process by which humans choose to act, with *gnome* being associated with a deliberation and an inclination that arises from repeated habitual choices, and *proairesis* being the free choice to then act on the decision that has arisen from *gnome*.¹⁰ Fallen humans no longer act by using their single, natural faculty of will (θέλημα φυσική), but instead have different, fallen modes of willing, that involve deliberation and doubt over what the right thing to do is, and how one should act. As Blowers puts it, “Rational creatures must *learn* authentic freedom by conforming their personal choice (προαίρεσις) and ‘inclination’ (γνώμη) to the ‘natural will’ (θέλημα φυσική) and ‘appetency’ (ὄρεξις) for God with which God endowed them [...]” (Blowers 2016: 121). The indecision (or rather deliberation over what is right) represented in these *tropoi* is a feature of fallen human will. Maximus, in his later works on the will, says that in Christ they are not present, and instead there is a whole natural human will (alongside a divine will). In the course of the deifying process, there eventually will be no “intentional divergence” (γνωμικὴν διαφορὰν) or differentiation between these human *tropoi* of will, and instead only a single *logos* will be observed.¹¹

In typifying sexual distinction in a similar way, Partridge sets it within Maximus’ larger understanding of human faculties divided as a consequence of the Fall. The division of the wills, like the division into the sexes, is not evil in itself, but introduced as a result of human distraction from God (Partridge 2008: 196).¹² Since sexual difference is absent from human *logos* and will be completely removed, both in difference and division, we can see it better typifying an instance of a change introduced into *tropos* that is anticipated to be removed from humanity eschatologically. Rather than being an outlier to the kind of Chalcedonian logic present in the rest of the divisions, Partridge’s suggestion explains Maximus’ linguistic choice to talk of this division in a different manner, as a conscious depiction of how the Fall has affected humanity in a markedly different way – fitting given that humanity was the cause of the Fall and are the mediators who through Christ will bring creation back to unity. The fact that the kinds of divisions and differences introduced into humanity are different to those found elsewhere in earth or in heaven, fits with Maximus’

9 The terminology Maximus uses develops in his work as his position on the will develops. For a discussion on the ambiguity of *gnome* as *tropos*, see Blowers 2016: 123–124.

10 The terms themselves have more complex meanings than this, the full extent of which is not necessary to rehearse for the argument in question. For a more in depth description of the component phases of the will in Maximus, see Blowers 2016: 121–123; 161.

11 Maximus 1980, *Q.Thal.* 2 (CCSG 7:51); see also Blowers 2016: 121–122.

12 On this specifically in the wills, see Blowers 2016: 122–124.

larger anthropological theology. Partridge's proposal that sexual difference be considered a *tropos* of humanity then, makes for a compelling proposition,¹³ and grants us a conceptual apparatus for understanding the removal of both difference and division in a similar fashion to the total removal of distinctions between *gnomic* and *proairetic* will. "Indeed", writes Partridge, "just as Christ's virgin birth enables him to transform γέννησις, a notion of generation without 'the distinctive properties of male and female', Christ transforms the natural will in accordance with his divine will without the distinctive properties of the γνώμη and προαίρεσις" (Partridge 2008: 175–176). Partridge makes a further point that *gnome* and *prorairesis* are tied to the personhood of the individual, since they concern the way a person acts and are therefore particular to that person (Partridge 2008: 190). If one does use the fracturing and restoration of human will as a model for understanding the male and female division in *Amb. 4I*, then these personal modes of deliberation could serve as a means to understanding gender expression and ways in which people feel tied to expressing their gender and sexuality.

Whilst recognising that sexual difference for Maximus is tied to *tropos*, Kočańczyk-Bonińska expresses concern that, if personal identity is attached to sexual difference, then in what sense is the person in the eschaton human or themselves? Kočańczyk-Bonińska and Skliris propose that perhaps not all *tropoi* will be removed in the eschaton and that if sexual identity is key to someone's personal identity then it may remain in the life to come (Kočańczyk-Bonińska 2017: 237). However, I think Partridge's likening of sexual difference to human wills goes some way to answering this dilemma. In the eschaton, humanity will be transfigured and it may be concerning to think of those changes when we are used to a version of ourselves from a life lived in time and in a fallen world. How we will feel about transfiguration and what we think is essential to being human will surely change eschatologically. I believe that the way I currently think is essential to who I am and my humanity, but Maximus says that human will will change and that our current modes of thinking are the result of a division introduced in the Fall. Positing that a restoration will take away a division that might be considered typically 'human' is not a particularly controversial idea, and perhaps instead requires us to reflect on the weight of identity placed in sexual difference.

Another good answer to this dilemma is offered by Kočańczyk-Bonińska herself, who notes "Maximus stresses that this reconciliation must start with removing the distinction between man and woman. This is not connected with a negation of sexuality as such, but with an abandonment of the function related to the mode of existence which represent life after the fall" (Kočańczyk-Bonińska 2017: 237). Kočańczyk-Bonińska then says though that there seems to be confusion, because how could we be required to leave behind our gender whilst Maximus also affirms a bodily resurrection. As Kočańczyk-Bonińska also points out however, Maximus is not negating sexuality per se, so much as

13 Sexual difference as *tropos* was also explored in Skliris 2017: 50–59.

the functions of sexual difference. In fact, though avoiding the terminological distinction for chronological consistency, what we have here is tantamount to the modern distinction between gender and sex. When Kočańczyk-Bonińska asks, “If we are supposed to rise from the dead in our own transformed bodies, how can we abandon our gender?” she indeed, perhaps inadvertently, answers her own question. We are never required to leave behind our personal identity, which is what the word gender entails in modern parlance. The aspects of ‘who’ we are that we tie to sexuality are not erased. Instead, it is the body that is changed, the ‘sex’ of the body. This is still a daunting prospect, since body and soul together are one person, but as Gregory mused at length in response to Macrina in *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, what parts of my body are to be considered me, given that humans are always changing? If the human body will become perfect in the resurrection, will it really be mine?¹⁴ These concerns are ancient as much as they are modern, and Macrina’s response is both mysterious and reassuring – we will be known and we will be recognised even though the body will indeed be physically transformed.¹⁵ Inevitably, there will also be things that we think of as ‘us’ that are misplaced and will be rooted out,¹⁶ but the implication in Maximus and in Gregory and Macrina’s thought, is that physical (bodily) sexual difference is not going to be of significance to personal identity in the eschaton.¹⁷ Particularity and individual integrity are not reliant on sexual distinction in the thought of Macrina and Gregory,¹⁸ or in Maximus. This in itself has a lot of implications to unpack for what human nature is considered to consist of for Maximus, and for how he conceived of virtuous living and expression of gender in his own lifetime, and for how we as recipients interested in his thought consider these implications in our own time.

2c. Sexual Difference, Reproduction, and Corruption

The final consideration I wish to expand on concerns how sexual difference and reproduction relate to corruption. We find theological speculation in the works of Gregory of Nyssa as well as Maximus on the seemingly contradictory statements about sex and gender found in the Old and New Testament. In *Genesis* 1:27 and 5:2, God creates humans as male and female, while in the New Testament we are told we will become like Christ, that in Christ there is no male and female, and that after we are resurrected we will become like the angels (1 *Cor.* 15, *Gal.* 3:28, *Matt.* 22:23-33, *Lk.* 20:27-39 and *Mk.* 12:18-27). Maximus follows Gregory and Macrina in pondering the implications of a

14 Gregory of Nyssa 2014, *De Anima*: 108.1-7 (PG46 141AB); 106.4-107.18 (PG46 140A-141A). See also Brown Dewhurst 2020.

15 Gregory of Nyssa 2014, *De Anima*: 113.7-114.19 (PG46 148B-149B). Macrina’s position is derived from 1 *Cor.* 15:35-38 and 1 *Cor.* 15:43.

16 Gregory of Nyssa 2014, *De Anima*: 73.17-74.1.

17 Gregory of Nyssa 2014, *De Anima*: 113.12-114.7 (PG46 148C-149A).

18 For discussion of this relating to Gregory and Macrina see Brown Dewhurst 2020: 453; 460-461.

genderless humanity for both protological and eschatological theology.¹⁹ *Gal.* 3:28, in particular, informs Maximus' language in the sections in *Amb. 41* where Maximus is talking about division between male and female: "there is no need for this division to last perpetually, for in Christ Jesus, says the divine apostle, there is neither male nor female" (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 110–111; citing *Gal.* 3:28). The difference between male and female at the very least seems to encapsulate²⁰ the reproductive parts of the human body and is seen as linked to the curse of childbirth when Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden.²¹ The material and bodily nature of reproduction and childbirth after the Fall, are particularly stressed as indicators of corruption. For Maximus, sexual difference was either introduced because of the Fall, or possibly because God foresaw and anticipated the Fall, giving humans reproductive organs in lieu of knowledge that they would need them.²² Maximus does specify however that God perhaps originally intended for humans to reproduce in some other, non-sexual way.²³ This non-sexual way of procreating Maximus refers to is thus either a pre-lapsarian ability that humans had, or a theoretical way that was intended (according to *logos*) but never actualised. Gregory, from whom Maximus heavily draws here, goes into more detail on this potential other mode of reproducing. For Gregory, this form of reproducing was more spiritual, and must have been similar to how the angels in their multitudes reproduce (Gregory of Nyssa 1863, *De Hominis*: PG44 189A). Whatever the possible alternative, this form of reproduction became closed to humanity in connection to the Fall. Both sexual reproduction and sexual difference in humanity are tied to corruption and the Fall. This also explains sexual difference as a division in need of healing

19 See for example Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima*: 113.12–114.7 (PG46 148C–149A). Cadanhead argues that Gregory is inconsistent on whether he believes humans will have no sexual organs in the eschaton, though Gregory does hold to an original creation (without sexual organs) and a 'second' paradisaic creation (with sexual organs). Cadanhead 2018: 96–104.

20 As noted earlier, Mitralaxis points out that all difference between male and female will be removed, not just a ceasing of reproduction. Partridge writes that it is better to think of sexual difference as behaviours as well as physicalities collected together under the term sexual difference, for both Maximus and Gregory. Partridge 2008: 27.

21 This is expounded upon further in Maximus 1982, *Q.Dub.*: CCSG 10, 3–170.

22 Maximus 2014a, *Amb. 8*: 142–145. With regards to a sexual difference being granted with foreknowledge of the Fall, Maximus follows Gregory of Nyssa in proposing that it may have been the case that humans were intended to be made without sexual differences, but that, anticipating the Fall, God made humans with sexual differences so that they could still procreate. Maximus is much more ambiguous than Gregory on whether he accepts this as a possible proposal however. Misuse of the senses, for example, is simultaneous with the Fall, and sexual difference is not explicitly excluded from this, whilst bodily reproduction is explicitly linked to the Fall. cf. Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 42*: 129; Maximus 1990, *Q.Thal.*: 61.8–21 (CCSG 22.85); Gregory of Nyssa 1863, *De Hominis*: PG44 189 BC. It should also be noted that, even in a reading that favours sexual difference being introduced in lieu of the Fall, it is not human bodies that are being associated with sin, but sexual difference.

23 Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 110.7.6–11.

in Christ – it is one of the divisions introduced by the rupture humans created when we turned away from God. It should be noted though, that sexual difference was introduced not because it itself is sinful, but as a way to rectify a problem created by sin.²⁴ Human reproduction was necessary; a more intelligible, angelic way of reproducing became closed to humanity in the Fall; and hence an alternative more bodily way of reproducing was introduced (at some point).

Maximus elucidates further on this in *Amb. 42*, where he writes that Christ “freed us from the bonds of birth and the law of reproduction”.²⁵ The law of reproduction in this case refers to a particularly bodily and material kind of reproduction, that Maximus likens to being “in a manner directly akin to that of plants and irrational animals”.²⁶ He asserts that humans have become orientated towards a much more bodily reliance on survival after the Fall. A balance between soul and body, where soul was the head of the body, has been usurped, and instead we are tied to sufferings of the flesh. The demands of the body occupy all our attention, drawing us away from a more spiritual way of life orientated toward God. It is not that we anticipate leaving the body behind, Maximus clarifies, since we have always been body and soul simultaneously,²⁷ but that before the Fall it was the soul that held pride of place and not the body. We have developed a propensity towards the passions as a result of the Fall,²⁸ meaning we have become orientated towards bodily things. One of the changes that we have undergone is a change in how we reproduce: reproduction has become a more bodily and less spiritual process.²⁹ Maximus explains that a spiritual birth is restored to us by Christ in baptism.³⁰ It is clear, however,

24 See further on this: Partridge 2008: 147–152.

25 Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 42*: 132.6.12–15. (Constas (trans.), *On Difficulties Vol 2*, 133).

26 Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 42*: 132.6.15–17. (Constas (trans.), *On Difficulties Vol 2*, 133).

27 This is an important anti-Origenist position that, amongst other places, is dealt with in detail in Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 42*: 136.9–142.12. Cf. Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 45*: 194.3.12–17.

28 Maximus notes that one of the things Christ takes on when he assumes human nature is “the capacity and indeed the propensity for all the passions” – passions that the human body took on as a result of the Fall, (Maximus 2014a, *Amb. 8*: 142.214–15) (Constas (trans.), *On Difficulties Vol I*, 143). Cf. Maximus 2014b, *Amb 45*: 196.4.

29 Cooper explains the way that this fallen ‘second’ type of birth is found in Maximus in a chapter of his book. Ultimately, Cooper believes that this does not correspond to a change in the physicality of humans, though his argumentation on bodily birth and its connection to Adam and sin is still useful for our purposes here (Cooper 2005: 212–218). Cooper does not identify a difference between the last division between male and female and the other divisions in *Amb. 41*. This leads him to claim that it is unlikely that Maximus intended to describe the doing away of genitalia, since differences in the other divisions will be united but distinctions will remain, so that there will be no “elimination of their distinct characteristics” (Cooper 2005: 211). In light of the difference Mitralaxis points out between this last division and the others in *Amb. 41* however, it seems prudent to question Cooper’s conclusion here. Cooper’s analysis of spiritual birth (*genesis*) and bodily birth (*gennesis*) nevertheless remains useful however, as does his contributions expanding on Larchet and ancestral guilt (Cooper 2005: 215–217).

30 Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 42*: 182.32–40.

that the more spiritual form of reproduction Maximus envisioned in original creation is different from baptism, in the same way that transfiguration in the eschaton is different from baptismal rebirth. Maximus links the original human nature, absent of sex and sexually reproductive abilities as we understand them today, to this eschatological transformation. In the same way then that baptism and the new life on earth it precipitates prefigure the eschatological resurrection and new life in a new earth, so does a baptismal, spiritual reproduction prefigure a spiritual, eschatological reproduction that will be restored to us. The body without sexual difference then, is considered by Maximus to be a state we have fallen from, and that will eventually be restored to us.

Partridge writes that the status of the human body in the eschaton is ambiguous in Maximus's writings (Partridge 2008: 9), but Kochańczyk-Bonińska writes that, though there is an ambiguity in Maximus and every hypothesis is considered, it is clear from his writing that the division between sexes will eventually vanish³¹. Mitralaxis also sees the absence of sexual difference as both a protological and eschatological feature of human nature for Maximus (Mitralaxis 2017: 143–144). I likewise agree with Kochańczyk-Bonińska and Mitralaxis that the prelapsarian state of humanity is inescapably linked with the teleological expectation of human nature for Maximus. The reason we are given an account of how humans may have originally reproduced when Maximus is talking about Christ restoring humanity, is because human nature is being reinstated so that it can move in accordance with human *logos* as it was originally intended. The human nature that had no sexual characteristics nor reproductive distinctions is thus the one that Maximus seems to believe will be restored to us eschatologically.

To summarise thus far, Maximus discusses the division into male and female in a different way to the rest of the divisions of creation. The difference of male and female was never intended to be a part of human *logos* or nature, and is likely better described as a *tropos* or mode of existence currently available to humanity as a consequence of the Fall. Unlike other divisions, when it comes to male and female, both the division and the difference itself are to be removed. For Maximus, this removal or 'shaking off' of male and female is both a material and spiritual occurrence. It is material in the sense that it concerns the reproductive capabilities of our bodies changing, so that we will no longer reproduce in an animalistic fashion. It is spiritual both in the sense that we must walk a virtuous path in Christ in order to overcome this division, and in the sense that whatever 'reproductive' function still remains to humans will be spiritual in nature. In fact, it is not clear that any reproduction will exist in the eschaton, but Maximus at least posits that some spiritual form of reproduction was originally intended, and it is implied that whatever those bodies would have looked like will be the ones we anticipate in the eschaton.

I next turn to briefly consider some arguments against this position that have not yet been addressed.

31 A position also held by Skliris 2017: 50–52.

Arguments against Bodily Removal of Sexual Difference

One opposing position to the above reading is that one should consider Maximus not to be talking about a bodily removing of sex, but rather as meaning that difference between genders has been metaphorically overcome. Under this reading, sexual distinction would become unimportant rather than absent.

Doru Costache, for example, prefers to talk of a “metaphorically genderless identity” (Costache 2013: 276), where what Maximus writes of the division in *Amb. 41* should instead be understood as “the perfection to which all humans are called, irrespective of gender” (Costache 2013: 289). An initial difficulty with this position is that the language in Maximus, evaluated above, seems committed to the removing of sexual difference in much stronger terms than a metaphorical reading would allow. Maximus often expresses metaphor and speculation in his writing, using tentative terms of phrase when he wishes to draw attention to this. For example, when speculating about some other way in which humans might have reproduced, Maximus interjects with the qualifier ὡς οἶμαι, meaning ‘I think’ in this context, which we find used in conjunction with a form of τυγχάνω, meaning ‘perhaps’ or ‘perchance’ here (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 110.7.6). By comparison, if we recall his language on sexual difference just a few lines later, we do not see this ambiguity presented: “and so He drove out from nature the difference and division into male and female, a difference, as I have said, which He in no way needed in order to become man, and without which existence would perhaps have been possible”.³² There is a tentative part of this phrase, but it is once more concerning that other potential form of non-sexual reproduction, not the removal sexual difference itself. Furthermore, we have other examples of Maximus’ choice to be tentative with his interpretations. The *ambigua* following this one, *Ambiguum 42*, considers a range of possible interpretations of the passage Maximus is concerned with. He muses on different possible meanings since one contemplation would not be enough to demonstrate other viable thoughts on the passage in Gregory he is expounding. When it comes to more mystical and metaphorical meanings, we also have many examples where Maximus is happy to reveal the layers of meanings in his own writing – for example in the *Mystagogia*, especially its early chapters giving cosmological interpretations and a host of alternative contemplations on the Church.³³ We also find places in the *Mystagogia* where Maximus deems the spiritual import of his subject matter to be beyond words and his text to be unworthy of talking further – the silence when it comes to Holy Eucharist itself, which leaves itself as a noticeable gap in what is otherwise a commentary and breakdown on the meaning of the full liturgy. We have, then, plenty of examples of tentative phrasing, metaphorical reading, and reverent silence on topics intended to be replete with meaning. Maximus’ discussion of male and female difference in *Amb. 41* does not seem to follow

32 Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 110.7.11–17.

33 Maximus 1931, *Myst.*: TCr. Chs. 1–7.

this pattern. The choice to read Maximus as metaphorical in his meaning here is not at all an obvious one, and thus a robust defence is needed to choose to read Maximus this way.

Drawing on *Amb. 42*, Adam Cooper suggested in his monograph on Maximus and the body that baptism is the place where division in human nature is overcome, and that this will be a spiritual death and spiritual birth, where spiritual dichotomies are overcome, not physical differences eradicated (Cooper 2005: 244–247). In locating the overcoming of the division of male and female solely in baptism however, much of the eschatological character of the overcoming of this division present in *Amb. 41* is removed. Whilst for Maximus it is true that eschatological changes are never confined to an end time and are instead lived through the present and always being worked upon, there is also something distinct about the transformation in the eschaton. Whilst baptism prefigures eschatological change so that working towards a virtuous, spiritual overcoming of gender in this life is certainly encapsulated in Maximus' thought, it does not exclude the possibility of bodily eschatological change, as was mentioned earlier. The spiritual rebirth of baptism is linked to the Incarnation by Maximus in *Amb. 42* (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 42*: 180–185), so that human spiritual rebirth is restored through Christ's bodily and spiritual rebirth. Maximus links this to bringing humanity towards its *logos* and setting humanity towards eternal well-being. Whilst prefigured in baptism, Maximus *also* talks about eternal wellbeing and *theosis* as being reached in the general resurrection, “through which humanity will be born (*γεννώσης*) into immortality” (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 42*: 184–185). There is another ‘birth’ then in the eschaton. Whilst Cooper is right to point out that baptismal, spiritual rebirth does not feature the bodily removal of sexual difference, the final birth, and, indeed, final overcoming of all divisions, has an eschatological dimension in *Amb. 41*. It seems more contiguous with Maximus thought to locate the bodily removal of sexual difference in the eschaton, rather than to consider the process, which is certainly started in baptism, to also be completed at this point.

Another argument against reading the removal of bodily sexual difference, concerns the positive way in which Maximus discusses sexed bodies. Costache notes a number of places where Maximus talks about marriage as a holy calling alongside celibacy (Costache 2013: 288).³⁴ Celibacy is here equated with or at least compared to the non-sexual vision Maximus has of humanity: since there are ways of living particular to sexed instance of humanity, it seems unlikely that Maximus would advocate for the removal of sexual difference. Costache is right to point out that sexed modes of human life are considered holy by Maximus, but this position is consistent with Partridge's reading that sexed human life is a *tropos*, a mode of living that is fallen and will be removed. Like human gnomic and proairetic wills, and, indeed, like the passions, there are

34 Cooper similarly also brings discussion of marriage as non-sinful into a discussion of whether sexual distinction is removed, see Cooper 2005: 214–215.

aspects to human life that are a consequence of the Fall but that Maximus believes can be made holy or brought into line with a holy way of living. Blowers explains that despite not being a natural faculty, *gnome* has become a “‘resource’ of the passible creature in its postlapsarian life” (Blowers 2016: 123). The gnomonic will can be trained so that humans can reach towards virtuous living. Similarly, we can see an example of fallen features of humanity put to virtuous use when Maximus discusses the way that human ‘passions’ can be directed toward God.³⁵ The passions belong to part of our fallen condition, but despite this can be orientated towards a virtuous way of living.³⁶ The existence of postlapsarian features of humanity that can be repurposed and reorientated towards God then, seems to better fit the way that sexual difference is treated by Maximus. It should also be borne in mind, as mentioned earlier, that Maximus never considers sexual difference in itself to be a sin, but only an outcome of sin. It seems that an affirmation of the holiness of marriage is thus still consistent with a belief that eventually such a relation will be removed in the eschaton, without undermining the holiness of this relation. This in turn is consistent with Scriptural claim that “in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (*Matt.* 22:30). Neither Scripturally, nor in Maximus, nor indeed in Gregory and Macrina, is there any implication of devaluing the holiness of a life lived in marriage despite a belief that human life will be transfigured to not include marriage in the life to come.

Another argument in favour of a metaphorical reading of Maximus on sexual difference relies on the assumption that the removal of sex is equivalent to the removal of bodies themselves. As demonstrated earlier however, reading Maximus as bodily removing sexual difference is understood to mean removing sexual parts of the body, not the body itself. Instead of focussing on this argument then, let us turn to its more convincing iteration offered by Costache. Costache argues that neither Maximus the Confessor nor Gregory of Nyssa subscribed to the human body becoming genderless or androgynous (Costache 2013: 273–274; 276), since there will never be “ontological obliteration of differences in the process of spiritual transformation, not even eschatologically” (Costache 2013: 276). Costache effectively argues that the bodily removal of sexual difference from humans is to alter human nature, and natures are never altered.

This difficulty has largely been resolved above, since it was demonstrated that Maximus does not locate sexual difference in human *logos* and thus it is not a natural faculty tied to *physis*. It should also be noted however, that

35 The link between sexual difference and the passions is also noted by Cooper, where he specifically likens the dichotomy between aggression and desire as analogous to male and female. He notes that for Maximus neither sexual differentiation nor the passions were originally created with human nature. Cooper 2005: 222. See also Maximus 1980, *Q.Thal.*: 1.5–7. CCSG 7 47.

36 Maximus 1980, *Q.Thal.*: 1. CCSG 7 47–49.

physis is not a static principle for Maximus, devoid of alternation, but rather is dynamic. To borrow Blowers' words, "nature is the theatre of the actualisation of movement" (Blowers 2016: 129).³⁷ Even if one still wishes to tie sexual difference to human natural capacity, human nature for Maximus is not a rigid fixity but "the resource out of which the hypostasis is able, through a grace that pushes out its frontiers, to move towards deification with ever new virtuosity and creativity" (Blowers 2016: 130). The claim then that the human body *cannot* change to become genderless thus seems to be negated firstly by sexual differentiation not being a feature of *logos* and hence nature, and secondly because natures in Maximus are not fixed in such a way as to never undergo any form of transformation.

A variant of this argument is also set forth in Cooper's monograph *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor*, where he notes that the only elements that necessarily need removing in Maximus' theology when it comes to sexual distinction are the actual process of physical reproduction, since it is from this process of reproduction that Maximus' concerns about the perpetuation of sin and death arise. Cooper rightly points out that carnal reproduction is introduced as a result of the Fall and those aspects of pleasure and pain as well as the process itself are associated with sin, even if blameless in and of themselves. Cooper thus argues that "the reconciliation or union between male and female does not require the abolition of physical distinctions but is primarily a matter of knowledge and will; it is a matter of recognising the single human nature common to all, male and female, and of practising the dispassionate relating to one another such recognition entails" (Cooper 2005: 222). Whilst it can certainly be agreed that the metaphysical impact of male and female distinction drives Maximus' theology here, to say that his theology does not require a reading of the physical removal of male and female seems to downplay the language Maximus chooses to use particularly in *Amb. 41*. We can see that male and female in their reproductive capacities and capabilities were distinctions created *because* of this material form of reproduction. To say that only the process and not the physical distinctions themselves will be removed, seems to draw a division between human bodies and human soul that is not reflected in *Amb. 41*. The transfiguration of human bodies that is to come alters the characteristics and capabilities that have been affected by sin and the Fall. Those who hold that Maximus follows Gregory in believing that these changes were introduced in lieu of the Fall, also agree that sexual distinction is inescapably tied to the Fall. To claim that a more accurate reading of Maximus will only remove a reproductive capacity and not genitalia themselves seems to introduce more contradictions in Maximus' thought than it resolves. If we follow the proposals above that sexual distinction is not a feature of *logos* but of *tropos* then the proposal Cooper leads us to seems to be that it is more likely that

37 See also von Balthasar 1941: 146, where nature is described as "a capacity, a plan (λόγος), a field and system of motion"; see also Loudovikos 2010: 10: "nature is an eschatological, dialogical becoming and not just a frozen 'given'."

a fallen *tropos* will be retained in the eschaton, than that the transfiguration of the human body could comprise something beyond male and female in its recapitulation to its divine *logos*. Indeed, Cooper's choice of phrase above "a matter of recognising the single human nature common to all" bear a similarity to Maximus' own choice of words, but the precise words Maximus uses in *Amb. 41* talk not of this division removal resulting in a single human nature, but "properly and truly to be simply human beings/ἀνθρώπους μόνον κυρίως τε καὶ ἀληθῶς" (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 114–115). 'Anthropos' here is the choice word for human beings, distinct from the terms Maximus uses for men (ἀνὴρ) and women (γυνή) in this line (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 114), and distinct from talking about humans in a generic capacity (ἀνθρωπότης) (Maximus 2014b, *Amb. 41*: 112) a few lines earlier. The removal of male and female so that we become 'simply human beings' seems to be talking about the removal of differences so that we are instantiated persons who no longer exhibit those differences. This discussion of nature vs person, universal vs particular, also features in the final opposing argument I wish to consider.

Finally then, Cooper suggests that one can consider discussion of a sexless humanity as referring to human nature as a whole, where the overcoming of sexual difference is a favouring of humanity in its universal capacity over its particular capacity.³⁸ Cooper is understandably then sceptical of a position that would read humanity as somehow more perfect in this universal capacity, and discusses the need to love particular iterations of humanity as well as that genderless universal (Cooper 2013: 200, 219). It would seem remiss however to characterise Maximus as talking about overcoming particulars when discussing the removal of sexual difference. As established earlier, all the divisions of nature in *Amb. 41* preserve the identity and integrity of particulars and do not favour loving them only in a generic capacity. Cooper draws on chapter II.30 from *Centuries on Love (CL)*, where a person who has perfected love pays no attention to the difference between male and female and instead turns their attention to a single human nature where all are regarded equally. *CL* II.30 ends with a quotation from Paul in *Gal. 3:28* on the overcoming of all divisions between humans in the love of Christ. However, this 'paying no attention' to gender in *CL* refers to the virtuous way in which humans are asked to live in this life, rather than describing a protological or eschatological overcoming of division as is the focus of *Amb. 41*. Whilst it is true that elsewhere Maximus wants to point out that we should love one another despite differences (Maximus 1865b, *De Char. II.30*. PG90 993B) (a love that has particularity and is never just directed at an anonymous, universal human nature), that does not seem to be the case in *Amb. 41*. As was clarified above, the language of removal is particularly strong in this *ambiguum* and does not carry the same 'overlooking' implication that the *Centuries on Love* do when Maximus implores fellow ascetics to love after Christ's fashion, without discrimination. *Amb. 41* is cosmological in its outlook and all its divisions feature something stronger

38 We see an early version of this argument outlined in Cooper 2005: 222.

than an overlooking of difference, but the final division between the sexes in particular seems characterised by a strong language that advocates the complete removal of both division and difference.

Furthermore, the argument that Maximus must be talking about universals when he talks of removing sexual difference rather than particularised bodies, does not seem consistent in the face of Maximus choice to talk about bodily reproduction. Maximus is talking about the way that particulars will be altered, to the point where they will not have the same reproductive capabilities due to the removal of their sexed characteristics. This does not seem like a dismissal of particular existence at all, but rather particular transfiguration. As has been established, Maximus tells us that personhood is never abolished as we enter into closer communion with God (Maximus 2014a, *Amb.* 7: 88.12.1–90.12.4), so we must ask what *is* it that is being abolished, and thus concede that sexual difference itself is abolished and is something that can be isolated from human personhood without jeopardising it.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to inspect again the text of *Ambiguum 41* and to interrogate what precisely Maximus seems to think is occurring in the division between male and female. The text has received much attention over the last ten years, and it has been the intention of this article to bring this scholarship together in order to give a more comprehensive overview of Maximus' position.

It has been argued that Maximus holds that the division of humanity into male and female is a feature added to humans as a consequence of the Fall. The division differs from the other divisions in *Amb. 41* in a number of ways, with the language of removing difference and division setting it apart from the Chalcedonian pattern found in the other divisions. Looking more broadly at Maximus' system of thought, it seems the best way to characterise male and female characteristics is to consider them to belong to *tropos* or mode of existence, introduced to fallen human nature, as humans would otherwise lack a capacity to reproduce, since spiritual reproduction had been closed off as a result of the Fall. Whilst this *tropos* is not blameworthy and can be set to good and holy use in this life, its removal is anticipated in the eschaton, as humans will no longer have need of bodily reproduction or those bodily features added in order for physical reproduction to be possible. A number of arguments opposing this reading were considered, and some explorations and answers to the issues they posed were addressed. It is thus the conclusion of this paper that it is more contiguous with the thought of Maximus the Confessor to maintain that he believed that sexual difference and division would be bodily removed from human beings in the eschaton.

References

Primary Sources

- Gregory of Nyssa (1863), *De Hominis Officio*, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Graecae*, vol. 44, Paris: Garnier fratres, pp. 123–257.
- . (2014), *De Anima et Resurrectione*, in Andreas Spira (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, vol. 3, pars 3, Leiden: Brill.
- Maximus the Confessor (1865a), *Capita theologica et oeconomica (=Cap. Theol)*, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 90, Paris: Garnier fratres, 1083–1174.
- . (1865b), *Centuriae de charitate*, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 90, Paris: 959–1080.
- . (1931), *Mystagogia (=Myst.)*, in Raffaele Cantarella (ed.), *Massimo Confessore. La mistagogia ed altri scritti*, Florence: Testi Cristiani.
- . (1980), *Quaestiones ad Thalassium I: Quaestiones I-LV (=Q.Thal)*, Carl Laga & Carlos Steel (eds.), *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 7*, Turnhout: Brepols.
- . (1990), *Quaestiones ad Thalassium II: Quaestiones LVI-LXV (=Q.Thal)*, Carl Laga & Carlos Steel (eds.), *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 22*, Turnhout: Brepols.
- . (1982), *Quaestiones et Dubia (=Q.Dub)*, in J. H. Declerck (ed.), *Maximi confessoris quaestiones et Dubia. Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca*, vol. 10, Turnhout: Brepols.
- . (2014a), *Ambigua 1–22 (=Amb.)*, in Nicholas Conostas, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 1, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 29, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . (2014b), *Ambigua 23–71 (=Amb.)*, in Nicholas Conostas (ed. and transl.), *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 2, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 29, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Secondary Sources

- Blowers, Paul (2016), *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, Oxford: OUP.
- Bradshaw, David (2013), “The *Logoi* of Beings in Greek Patristic Thought”, in John Chryssavgis, Bruce V. Foltz (eds.), *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature and Creation*, Fordham: Fordham University Press, pp. 9–22.
- Brown Dewhurst, E. (2020), “On the Soul and the Cyberpunk Future: St Macrina, St Gregory of Nyssa and Contemporary Mind/Body Dualism”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 33 (4): 443–462.
- Cadenhead, Raphael A. (2018), *The Body and Desire: Gregory of Nyssa’s Ascetical Theology*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Costache, Doru (2013), “Living above Gender: Insights from Maximus the Confessor”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21 (2): 261–290.
- Cooper, Adam (2005), *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified*, Oxford: OUP.
- . (2013), “Saint Maximus on the mystery of Marriage and the Body: a Reconsideration”, in Maxim Vasiljević (ed.), *Knowing the Purpose of Creation Through the Resurrection*, Belgrade: Sebastian Press, pp. 195–221.
- Cvetković, Vladimir (2016), “Maximus the Confessor’s Geometrical Analogies Applied to the Relationship between Christ and Creation”, in George Dion Dragas, Pavel Pavlov, Stoyan Tanev (eds.), *Orthodox Theology and the Sciences*, Sofia: Sofia University Press, Columbia MO: New Rome Press, pp. 277–291.

- Kochańczyk-Bonińska, Karolina (2017), "Chapter 14: The Philosophical Basis of Maximus' Concept of Sexes: The Reasons and Purposes of the Distinction between Man and Woman", in Sotiris Mitralaxis, Georgios Steiris, Marcin Podbielski, Sebastian Lalla (eds.), *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher*, Oregon: Cascade Books, pp. 229–238.
- Loudovikos, Nikolaos (2010), *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, Elizabeth Theokritoff (transl.), Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press.
- Louth, Andrew (2010), "St Maximos' Doctrine of the *logoi* of Creation", in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 48, Leuven: Peeters Publishers, pp. 77–84.
- Mitralaxis, Sotiris (2017), "Rethinking the Problem of Sexual Difference in *Ambiguum 4P*", *Analogia* 2 (1): 139–144.
- Partridge, Cameron Elliot (2008), *Transfiguring Sexual Difference in Maximus the Confessor*, PhD diss., Harvard Divinity School.
- Skliris, Dionysios (2017), "The Ontology of Mode in the Thought of Maximus the Confessor and its Consequences for a Theory of Gender", in Sotiris Mitralaxis (ed.), *Mustard Seeds in the Public Square: Between and Beyond Theology, Philosophy, and Society*, Delaware: Vernon Press, pp. 39–60.
- Thunberg, Lars (1965), *Microcosm and Mediator*, Copenhagen: C.W.K. Gleerup Lund.
- Tollefsen, Torstein T. (2015), "The Concept of the Universal in the Philosophy of St Maximus", in Antoine Levy, Pauli Annala, Olli Hallamaa, Tuomo Lankila (eds.), *The Architecture of the Cosmos. St. Maximus the Confessor. New Perspectives*, Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, pp. 70–92.
- Törönen, Melchisedec (2007), *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs (1941), *Kosmische Liturgie: Maximus der Bekenner*, Freiburg i. B.: Herder.

Ema Braun Djuherst

Odsustvo polne razlike u teologiji Maksima Ispovednika

Apstrakt:

U posljednjoj deceniji, a posebno u posljednjih nekoliko godina, posvećeno je mnogo pažnje stavovima Maksima Ispovednika u pogledu polnih razlika i njihovog uklanjanja. Najvažniji tekst na ovu temu je *Nedoumica (Ambiguum) 41*. Različita je recepcija ovog teksta, jer neki naučnici stoje na stanovištu da Maksim veruje da polne razlike nisu postojale u izvornoj ljudskoj prirodi i da će se u takvo stanje vratiti na eshatonu, dok drugi naučnici koji veruju da ovo treba čitati kao metaforično odsustvo. Ovaj članak preispituje dotični tekst i tvrdi da bi trebalo zadržati prethodni stav, uzimajući u obzir sva relevantna istraživanja teksta i odgovarajući na pitanja koja proizlaze iz suprotstavljenih čitanja.

Ključne reči: *Nedoumica (Ambiguum) 41*; telo, vizantijska teologija, vizantijska filozofija, eshatologija, rod, Maksim Ispovednik, protologija, pol

