

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
69 (4), pp. 28-43, 2016

Addictions and Orthodox Spirituality. Towards a Model of Human Behavior*

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Abstract

Part of a broader research devoted to understanding the phenomenon of addiction in terms of the Eastern Patristic notion of passion, this paper aims to argue the relevance of identifying a Patristic model of human behavior, in this case, by investigating the work of St. Maximus the Confessor and outlining some possible paths to follow in this regard. The main part of the paper explores St. Maximus' idea of three major realities, God, the nature, and the world, that lead or attract human matters and therefore model human behaviour.

Keywords

Addiction, passions, human behavior, determinants, attraction, Orthodox Spirituality, St. Maximus the Confessor

The term addiction denotes a series of behavioral disorders with significant personal and social costs.¹ From the secular perspective, it is an increasing public health issue. From a pastoral perspective, it is a serious spiritual problem that threatens salvation. This paper is part of a broader research devoted to understanding this phenomenon in terms of the East-

* Acknowledgements: Project financed from Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu research grants LBUS-IRG-2015-0

¹ See, Lucy Gell et al. (eds.), *What Determines Harm from Addictive Substances and Behaviours?*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

ern Patristic notion of passion and immediately aims to argue the relevance of identifying a Patristic model of human behavior, in this case, by investigating the work of St. Maximus the Confessor and outlining some possible paths to follow in this regard. Such an approach is plausible to contribute to deepening by comparison the concepts of addiction and passion, and, in a broader horizon, to facilitate the understanding of the Patristic doctrine on human action viewed from the models of behavior developed by contemporary psi-sciences, as well as their mutual evaluation. Particularly, it may be helpful to clarify some issues in the thought of one of the Eastern Fathers most studied today.²

I. A window to the human behavioral landscape

As widespread, the concept of addiction proves to be so unequivocal and controversial.³ One of the most interesting recent developments in the field, illustrating this situation, is the investigation of the relationship between substance use disorders and those related with other excessive behaviors, commonly called “behavioral addictions” just to be distinguished from the first ones.⁴ The latest edition of DSM includes for the first time gambling in the section now called “Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders” and evokes the possibility that online games are also to be assigned here.⁵ An important role within the debates among those who appreciate more

² Such as the still confusing and controversial issue relating to the Maximian concept of *gnome*. Although I hope that my errors in understanding the original thought of St. Maxim are not fatal, I have no pretension to expose his *very* thinking. My approach is an interpretation in the sense of the stated purpose, which is deriving a model.

³ Anita Borch, Varpu Rantala, *Addiction: A highly successful, essentially contested concept*, “The International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research” 4.1 (2015), pp. 1-4.

⁴ See an international project dedicated to the elucidation of the concept, in J. Billeux, A. Blaszczynski, MC. Carras, J. Edman, A. Heeren, D. Kardefelt-Winther et al, *Behavioral addiction: definition open development*; <https://osf.io/q2vva/>. The terms “substance addiction” and “behavior addiction” admit the same classification, but suggest that the problem would be located differently: in substance or in behavior, although the excess or abuse of substances is a behavior. Thus we are to distinguish between “addictive behavior” and “behavior addiction”. For an alternative nomenclature, see Doug Sellman, *Behavioural health disorders rather than behavioural addictions*, “Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry” 50.8 (2016), pp. 805-806.

⁵ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th Edition, APA, 2013.

the similarities between these types of behaviors and those who emphasize their differences is the relationship between these categories and the behaviors regarded as normal. The criteria for inclusion or exclusion in the category of “behavioral addictions” are evaluated after the risk to include here too many of our current behaviors.⁶

There would be no risk of pathologizing the everyday, that is, normal life if the behavioral disorders in question would not be in a phenomenological neighborhood with it, a neighborhood whose boundary is passed over by many people – in both directions, although the direction towards addiction seems more circulated - without being able to ascertain when this occurs. The gradual installation of these disorders shows that they are not accidental events and exogenous to the person although they are manifested by specific dysfunctions of self-control. The question whether they are really disorders, that is, outside the subjective control, or just a special type of self-control (albeit with harmful consequences) divides the world of addictology in two camps, namely the dominant interpretation of addiction as a neurological disease, and therefore beyond control, and the interpretation as an optional style of behavior. The two approaches are not necessarily incompatible and there are significant attempts to find the middle or to bring them in a synthetic account.⁷

Most significantly for the purpose of the present study, these new perspectives prove the role the understanding of human behavior in general plays in understanding addictions. Of course, studying all forms of pathological behavior improves the knowledge of the components and functions of normal behavior. However, if heuristic gain is currently achieved by focusing on the specificity of pathology, the new approaches I mention demonstrate a gain from investigating what is common to pathology and normality precisely.

A good example is the “synthetic theory of addiction” of Robert West, a comprehensive overview and classification of many theoretical models

⁶ See, J. Billieux *et al*, *Are We Overpathologizing Everyday Life? A Tenable Blueprint for Behavioral Addiction Research*, “Journal of Behavioral Addictions” 4(3) 2015, pp. 119-123; V. Starcevic, *Behavioural addictions: A challenge for psychopathology and psychiatric nosology*, “Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry” 50.8 (2016), pp. 721-725.

⁷ For example, Brendan Dill and Richard Holton, *The addict in us all*, “Frontiers in psychiatry” 5 (2014), Art. 139, DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00139; Marc Lewis, *The biology of desire: Why addiction is not a disease*, Hachette UK, 2015.

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proposed so far, mainly by identifying the key concepts they engage.⁸ In an effort to build on their grounds his own theory of addiction, the author uses, in fact, a general theory of human behavior, with a special focus on its motivational component.⁹ Abbreviated as COM-B, this theory can be summed up in the assertion that for any behavior (B) to emerge it is necessary to merge a psychic and physical capacity of action (C), a physical and environmental opportunity to engage in action (O), as well as a motivation to do so (M). In its turn, motivation is modeled as a dynamic system of interactions between plans, responses, impulses, motives and evaluations (P-R-I-M-E), to which interactions with a complex of (internal and external, cognitive, emotional, instinctual) stimuli are added. The theory states that the motivational system is controlled by the strongest desires and needs of the moment, so that the behavior manifests the configuration the PRIME system has moment-to-moment under the influence of these determinants.¹⁰

The simplicity, generality and the explanatory value of the model advanced by Robert West can be a good choice also for the confrontation with a Patristic model of human behavior. It is one of objectives of research of the broad study.

II. Passions and addictions

Identifying contemporary addictions with Patristic passions seems a rather straight and intuitive approach. We need only to take note of the etymology of the concepts and the common denominator of the experiences these concepts denote: addictions and passions as dependence or enslavement. Both describe the repeated - though often intermittent - repetition of some actions that their author, at least for himself, from time to time and to a certain extent, is convinced are harming and intends to avoid them.¹¹

⁸ Robert West and Jamie Brown, *Theory of addiction*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013;

⁹ For an extensive treatment, see S. Michie, R. West, et al., *ABC of Behaviour Change Theories*, Silverback Publishing, 2014. Of interest for our topic is also Raymond M. Bergner, *What is behavior? And why is it not reducible to biological states of affairs?*, in "Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology" 36.1 (2016), pp. 41-55.

¹⁰ See the chapter *A synthetic theory of motivation*, in West and Brown, "Theory of addiction".

¹¹ For etymology and the manifold meaning of addiction, see Bruce Alexander, *The*

However, either dependence or addiction, the contemporary scientific concepts are built in a largely different universe than the meanings the Fathers were familiar with. The fact of describing perhaps the same phenomenon as the passions (drunkenness, for example)¹² does not provide, *eo ipso*, their similarity, much less their identity. For example, both the currently dominant medical and the Christian-Orthodox Spirituality use the concept of disease. But it is the same concept?

While for the sciences of the human psyche a disease which is called mental is interpreted as a somatic, neurological disorder,¹³ for the Christian tradition such disorder is spiritual, although its aetiopathology has a somatic component.¹⁴ If we adopt a 4-D model of the human nature, comprising somatic, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions,¹⁵ we may

globalization of addiction: A study in poverty of the spirit, Oxford University Press, 2010, here pp. 27-56. Also helpful, Adele Blankfield, *The concept of dependence*, in "International Journal of the Addictions" 22.11 (1987), pp. 1069-1081; Marilyn Clark, *Conceptualising addiction: How useful is the construct*, in "International Journal of Humanities and Social Science" 1.13 (2011), pp. 55-64; Robin Room, Matilda Hellman, and Kerstin Stenius, *Addiction: The dance between concept and terms*, in "The International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research" 4.1 (2015), pp. 27-35.

¹² For an excellent treatment of the history of alcoholism as vice, mainly according to the Western tradition, see Christopher CH. Cook, *Alcohol, addiction and Christian ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 2006. Cook carefully addresses the relation between sin, vice and addiction; see pp. 17-20, and chapters 6 and 7. From an Eastern Patristic perspective, but more briefly on our issue, see his volume *The Philokalia and the inner life: On passions and prayer*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012, especially pp. 252-255. A valuable contribution, dedicated to the specific cases of the famous list of seven vices, is R. Scott Sullender, *Ancient Sins... Modern Addictions: A Fresh Look at the Seven Deadly Sins*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013. See also the contributions gathered in "European Journal of Science and Theology" 9.1 (2013), especially, Vasile, Bîrzu. *The spiritual addiction to the love of God*, pp. 47-56, and Ciprian Ioan Streza, *From addiction to virtue through being and living in Christ. A philocalic view*, pp. 57-66.

¹³ See, for example, H. Kincaid, and J. Sullivan, *Medical models of addiction*, in D. Ross, H. Kincaid, D. Spurrett, & P. Collins (Eds.), "What is addiction?" Cambridge, MA, 2010, pp. 353-376.

¹⁴ The notion of sin or vice as disease is all-present in Christian tradition and beyond. We can illustrate it with references to the author treated here, St. Maximus the Confessor. See, for example, his *Capita de caritate*, IV.46. On the somatic aspect of passions, see *Capita de caritate*, II.76, as well as *Quaestions to Thalassios*, 58, and *Ambiguum* 10.2b. The standard monograph is Jean-Claude Larchet, *Thérapeutique des maladies spirituelles*, Cerf, 1997.

¹⁵ Cf. Andrew R. Hatala, *Towards a biopsychosocial-spiritual approach in health psy-*

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consider that, at best, the two concepts of disease describe the same reality by giving heuristic and hermeneutical priority to one or another of four dimensions. The consequences of this change of perspective are far-reaching. Regarding the therapy, for example, the medical approach and the spiritual one usually seem almost antagonistic; sometimes they are accepted as complementary, rarely convergent.¹⁶ On a more general level, none of the four dimensions is invariant to changes in the conceptual universe. Therefore, the human being and his behavior - including its pathologies - will not be understood the same. This does not mean, on the other hand, that the two universes cannot communicate, perhaps with mutual benefits. What could one learn and capitalize on the other's understanding and experience? For a possible answer the translation and mutual confrontation of concepts and specific models are indispensable.

In order to pursue such a goal, my aim in this article is to identify some relevant aspects of St. Maximus' understanding of human behavior, in particular what modern psychology would call the determinants or drivers of behavior.¹⁷ It is just a preliminary, exploratory stage that requires revisit and deepening. First, it is important to briefly review the context of our topic in the overall thinking of the Byzantine Father.

chology: exploring theoretical orientations and future directions, “Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health” 15.4 (2013), pp. 256-276; B. J. Deacon, D. McKay, *The biomedical model of psychological problems: A call for critical dialogue*, in “The Behavior Therapist” 38 (2015), pp. 231-235; Fred Gifford, *The biomedical model and the biopsychosocial model in medicine*, in Miriam Solomon, Jeremy R. Simon, and Harold Kincaid (eds.), “The Routledge companion to philosophy of medicine”, Taylor & Francis, 2016, pp. 445-453.

¹⁶ See, John T. Chirban (ed.), *Sickness or sin: Spiritual discernment and differential diagnosis*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001, and Christopher Cook (ed.), *Spirituality, theology and mental health: Multidisciplinary perspectives*, Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd, 2013.

¹⁷ Talking about determinants of behavior may seem to question the Biblical and Patristic postulate of our self-determination, in the absence of which nobody could be accountable of sin, repentance, or reward. As we shall see, we find in St. Maximus both the assertion of self-determination and the existence of a series of constraints on it that predetermines, influences, supports or debilitates, as the case may be, but does not abolish it. From this point of view, the Confessor - like the whole Eastern Patristic tradition - can be considered a compatibilist.

III. Difficulties of Maximian anthropology

The anthropology of St. Maximus the Confessor is the subject of remarkable research. However, the exploration of his concept of human action remains rather scanty.¹⁸ One plain reason may be that subjective reality is notoriously difficult to investigate, as the one which is the very premise for understanding any other aspects of life. It is easy to believe that someone else - here St. Maximus - understands by action the same thing that we each understand. A second reason may be his kaleidoscopic style of thinking and writing, paying attention to multiple meanings, and making it difficult if not impossible to render in a linear or at least systematic manner his ideas on an inevitably ubiquitous issue. Almost without exception, he deals with the nature and activity of humans, considered, of course, in the light of faith in God and in relation to Him. Unlike his spiritual writings, systematization and accuracy are definitely higher in his polemical pieces, but these are narrowly related to the subject of controversy and thus more difficult to correlate with the rest of the work. This may be an explanation for the fact that, beyond reporting parallels, the exegesis hardly attempted

¹⁸ The monograph of reference remains, after half a century, Lars Thunberg's *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Open Court Publishing Company, 2nd ed., 1995, to which one should add José Julián Prado, *Voluntad y naturaleza: la antropología filosófica de Máximo El Confesor*, Río Cuarto, 1974; Bernardo De Angelis, *Natura, persona, libertà: l'antropologia di Massimo il Confessore*, Armando Editore, 2002, as well as a series of volumes dedicated to more specific aspects: Alberto Siclari, *Volontà e scelta in Massimo il Confessore e in Gregorio di Nissa*, Parma, 1984; Joseph P. Farrell, *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor*, St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1989; Jean-Claude, Larchet. *La Divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*, Cerf, 1996; Luigi Manca, *Il primato della volontà in Agostino e Massimo il Confessore*, Roma, 2002; Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford, 2004; Philipp Gabriel Renczes, *L'agir de Dieu et la liberté de l'homme: Recherches sur l'anthropologie théologique de saint Maxime le Confesseur*, Cerf, 2003; Antoine Lévy, *Le créé et l'incréé: Maxime le confesseur et Thomas d'Aquin*, Vrin, 2006. For an introductory presentation of the corpus with exhaustive bibliography, see Jean-Claude Larchet, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur*, 2ème éd. Paris, 2013. Two recent major contributions are Pauline Allen, and Bronwen Neil (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press, 2015, and Paul M. Blowers *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

At the same time, the examination of any subject of Maximian anthropology benefits from a well defined heuristic structure. Both the systematic appeal of St. Maximus to the triad being - morally qualified being - eternal morally qualified being in its numerous versions, and its support in the teleological character of the ontology as such (see the relation *arche* - *telos*), warrants the pursuit of research in the framework of the sequence protology - teleology - proto- and post-lapsarian hamartiology - soteriology - eschatology.²⁰ Obviously, this scheme is not the only possible and justified one. However, on one hand, St. Maximus himself abundantly uses such chains of arguments and stress their relevance for the spiritual or doctrinal interpretation of Scripture, the Fathers or the events under his scrutiny. On the other hand, the purpose of the present inquire is simply to find out and explore some pathways of Maximian thinking. By analogy, a landscape may be evidenced in its major features by scanning the surface in any direction, with the single requirement that it covers enough of the given place.

III. 1. The blueprint of a letter

Fortunately, the Confessor offers himself a possible path into the systematic examination of human action that we aim to in a brief and not quite remarked letter to the more famous priest and abbot Thalassios. There he parenthetically uses the Pauline division of the people into spiritual, natural

¹⁹ Renczes, *L'agir de Dieu...* is surely an exception. It is intriguing to note in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor* how D. Bathrellos' contribution, *Passions, Ascesis and the Virtues* (pp. 287–306), draws almost entirely on *Capita de caritate*, Ian McFarland's *The Theology of the Will* (pp. 516–32) almost only on the polemical *Opuscula* and *Disputation cum Pyrrhus*, while Michael Bakker's *Maximus and Modern Psychology* (pp. 531–547) uses really nothing from the polemical writings.

²⁰ Protology cannot be separated from teleology. For St. Maximus the beginning and the end are reciprocal and reveal their significance only together. A symmetric conjunction works between soteriology and eschatology, and the two pairs couple in the focal point of creation, history and life-everlasting, which is Jesus Christ or rather, according to St. Maximus “the mystery of Christ” (*Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 60). Therefore, not surprisingly, the relationship between Adam and the Last Adam is fundamental to the Confessor’s anthropology; see, P. Blowers, *Protology and Teleology in Maximus’ Interpretation of Human Nature, Human Fallenness, and Human Hope* in his recent volume *Maximus the Confessor...*

and carnal (according to 1 Cor 2:14- 3:3), each category being identified by specific relationships to God, to nature and to the world. The author states in opening of the letter:

“Three are, as it is well said, those [things] that lead those [matters] of man, or rather to which man moves himself by intention and disposition, according to choice: God, nature and the world. And each of them attracts him, and removes him from the other two, changing the one attracted to itself, and makes him by position what that [the leading reality] is known to be by nature, but without [removing him] from nature. For this [nature] keeps man as what it is. [...] So, as soon as man is moved inside through disposition to one of them, he changes towards that [thing] his activity as well as his name, and is called carnal or natural or spiritual.”²¹

Several aspects are to emphasize. First, the active / passive ambivalence: in the very act of choice, that is to say, of his free movement, man is led by or attracted to one of the major realities mentioned, and at the same time taken out of the attraction of the other two. Secondly, the influence these realities exert lies in a change not at the level of nature, which is immutable, but at the level of the way man dispose of his existence, that is, of the movement or the activity. Thirdly, the attracted becomes through the exercise of self-determination, what the attractive reality is by nature.

Although it is not directly invoked, the doctrine of moving from the image to the likeness is certain in the mind of the author, who urges the addressee to resemble Christ in avoiding retaliation and accepting suffering (see, 1 Cor 4:12-13, Heb 7:2). Extrapolating the doctrine of likeness from

²¹ Τρία, καλῶς φασιν, ὑπάρχουσι, τά τόν ἄνθρωπον ἄγοντα· μᾶλλον δέ πρός ἣ βουλήσει τε καὶ γνώμῃ κατά προαιρεσιν κινεῖται ὁ ἄνθρωπος · Θεός, καὶ φύσις, καὶ κόσμος. Καὶ τούτων ἔκαστον ἔλκον, τῶν ἄλλων δύο ἐξίστησι, πρός ἔαυτό ὀλλοιοῦν τόν ἀγόμενον · κἀκεῖνο ποιοῦν αὐτόν θέσει, ὅπερ αὐτό ὑπάρχον φύσει γνωρίζεται, πλήν μέντοι τῆς φύσεως. Ἐκείνη γάρ, τοῦθ ὅπερ ἐστί διαφυλάττει τόν ἄνθρωπον. [...] Ἄμα τοίνυν πρός τινα τούτων κινηθῆ κατά γνώμην ἐνδιαθέτως ὁ ἄνθρωπος , ἂμα πρός αὐτόν ἐκεῖνον καὶ τήν ἐνέργειαν ἡμειψε, καὶ τήν προσηγορίαν μετάβαλε, σαρκικός, ἢ ψυχικός, ἢ πνευματικός προσαγορεύμενος. *Epistula IX*, PG 91, 445C-449A. (Unless stated otherwise, the translations are mine). Where the author uses *psuchikos* I follow most of the English versions of the Pauline text in rendering “natural”, which is coherent with St Maximus’ own correspondence of this category with nature (*phusis*), not with the soul (*psuche*), a point he feels he needs to clarify at the end of the letter. Translating some Maximian psychological terms is notoriously difficult; I opted for “intention” (*boulesis*), “disposition” (*gnome*), and “choice” (*prohairesis*) according to their definitions in his *Opuscolum I ad Marinum presbyterum*.

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the relationship with God - read by St. Maximus in a Christological key²² – to the relationship with the world has already been traditional, facilitated by the classical concept of learning by imitation,²³ but we have it here generalized. Man becomes what he imitates. Thus what lead or attracts man also shapes him, and this modeling takes place through his activity (*ergon*) and can be noticed, the author continues, in the acquisition and expression of a characteristic feature (*gnorisma*), which he describes by a state and name of similarity with the model (god (*theos*), nature (*physis*) or animal (*ktēnos*)²⁴) and by an activity specific to each condition (always doing good and willingly suffer evil; always avoiding evil (both by doing and by suffering); always doing evil). It is significant that likeness is placed in the category of position, although, as we shall see, it raises problems of interpretation.

III. 2 Nature, self-determination, grace

The distinction between nature (*physis*), endowed with powers or faculties, and position (*thesis*), characterized here by motion, activity, choice and naming, is rare all over the work.²⁵ We can consider the meaning of these two categories and the relationship between them in terms of the dialectic potency (*dunamis*) - actuality (*energeia*), both of them modalities of being (*ousia*).²⁶ In another text, where the Old Testament is related to the

²² See, Élie Ayroutet, *De l'image à l'Image. Réflexions sur un concept clef de la doctrine de la divinisation de saint Maxime le Confesseur*, Rome, 2013.

²³ Alluded here: “and if the world is that who bear [the man]... it teaches him to do everything contrary to nature.”; Εἰ δέ κόσμος ἐστίν ὁ φέρων τά παρά φύσιν πάντα ποιεῖν αὐτὸν ἐκδιδάσκει. PG 91,445D. Note the verb “to bear” (*pherō*), suggesting the interpretation of nature as a vehicle; see *Ambiguum* 21, and in the text, below.

²⁴ A lexical hint to Ps 48:21 (LXX), another witness for the idea of a changeable likeness.

²⁵ The distinction comes from the classical period, in connection with the nature of language, considered to be conventional, not natural, and widen by the Stoics in the field of ethics, by replacing *nomos* with *thesis* in the antinomy with *physis*. Generally, therefore, it designates what depends on choice, and not imposed by nature. In a passage similar to the one discussed here, the Confessor states about deification by grace: “this makes by position the lovers of good, what He will appear to be by nature”; τοῦτο θέσει ποιήσαντος τούς ἐραστάς τῶν καλῶν, ὅπερ αὐτός ύπάρχων φύσει δειχθήσεται.” *Opusculum I, ad Marinum presbyterum*, PG 91,33D. According to the context of the passage deification is neither in the capacity of nature, nor in the activity of the saints, but in God’s choice.

²⁶ The triad being – potency – activity is mentioned in the same *Opusculum*, just above

practical activity, and the New to the contemplative one, the Confessor distinguishes between the “movement by position” (*kata ten thesei kinesin*) and the “habit of grace” (*kata ten hexin tes charitos*)²⁷ which let us to recognize here the triad nature - activity / motion / choice - grace, which is parallel to existence - qualified existence - eternal qualified existence, and to give to *thesei* in the quoted texts a meaning synonymous to the triad’s mean terms, characteristic of human self-determination. It is by this set of terms that we can outline the concept of human behavior or action in St. Maximus the Confessor.²⁸

It is worth mentioning the ambiguity of the expression “the habit of grace”, considering that habit (*hexis*) also belongs to the category of self-determination and the Confessor’s clear and repeated statement that grace is not in continuity with the realities created and cannot be acquired by humans through the exercise of their natural powers.²⁹ However, the ambiguity is heuristic, as shown in just another passage, where *thesei* is placed on the same plane with the *charis* in receiving God’s name and quality.³⁰ If *thesei* designates here self-determination then both the grace of God and the activity of man are *sine qua non* for acquiring likeness as deification, which also suggests that the ambivalence of the opening phrase – “those that lead the matters of man, or rather to which man moves himself” – is not a rhetorical turn, but expresses precisely the two sides of one and the

the text already quoted: “The activity holds on power, while the power holds on being”; Εχεται οὖν ή μέν πρᾶξις, δυνάμεως· ή δέ δύναμις, οὐσίας. PG 91,33B. See, also *Ambiguum* 37.

²⁷ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 63; PG 90,677D.

²⁸ To “activity” (*energeia*), “motion” (*kinesis*), “choice” (*prohairesis*), “disposition” (*gnome*), we should add “use” (*chresis*), and “mode” (*tropos*), as in the expression “mode of being” (*tropos tes huparxeos*).

²⁹ See, also *Ambiguum* 20, a fragment of which will be quoted below.

³⁰ “... so that they also can be and be called gods by position according to the grace”; Ωστε καὶ αὐτοὺς δύνασθαι εἶναι τε καὶ καλεῖσθαι θέσει κατὰ τὴν χάριν θεούς, *Mystagogia* 21, PG . The Romanian translator, Fr. Dumitru Staniloaie, opts here for “by the activity of will”, in contraposition with the English translator, G.C. Berthold, who gives “by adoption”; see, , George C. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor. Selected Writings*, Paulist Press, 1985, p. 215. In Berthold’s version *thesei* and *kata ten charin* would simply be in apposition, yet the Confessor does mention in the same context the human contribution by “worthily” (*axios*). I find the former option more comprehensive.

same reality: in his becoming as being endowed with the capacity of self-determination, man not only exercises his natural powers, but is subject to powers exercised on him by the three entities identified, namely God, nature and the world. In this case, according to St. Maximus human behavior and action are determined not only by their ontological components - powers, faculties, capabilities -, not only by the functional structure in which all of these are actualized, but also by the interactions with these major driving forces. As it is clear from the whole of the letter, a lifestyle corresponds to each of the drivers, not just a circumstantial behavior, so we are dealing with three categories of human development designated by different names, but this does not preclude the determinant role of these drivers in any behavior.

III.3. Relation and attraction

Maybe we capture better this role if we note first that all the terms designating human self-determination can be included in the category of relation (*schesis*). All creatures are in relationship with their Creator as their cause and final purpose and, as such, are ontologically in motion.³¹ Moreover, man is created as a middle being, at the interface between the constituent divisions of creation, and having as task their synthesis, which implies natural, ontological relations with them.³² In this perspective, activity, motion or self-determination, in a word, human behavior is understood as a relationship or interaction with different realities, either transcendent (God) or immanent (with itself or other creatures).

In a suggestive passage, arguing that grace transcends both the created being and its natural relationship with God, the Confessor affirms that all names express either being, or relation, or grace or damnation. Here the relation holds the place of the activity within the triad being -activity - grace mentioned above. Along with some examples of names for relations (like “good man” or “wicked man”), the author provides a formal definition, which proves an understanding of relation in terms of action or behavior: “the category of relation, in setting forth the way something is somehow related to something else in the case of diametrical opposites, rightly names it on the basis of what characterizes its freely chosen, ha-

³¹ See, *Ambiguum* 7.

³² See, *Ambiguum* 41.

bitual state".³³ The similarity of the whole passage with the ideas in the beginning of letter discussed is obvious.

Second, of note is the attractive, erotic character of human relationships. The Creator attracts ontologically. But precisely because of this erotic ontology that makes nature and all its powers to be created and oriented *from-towards* the Creator, any other relationship, with himself and any other creature, manifests this ontology and engage man's desire to be and to be fulfilled.³⁴ Any other relationship in fact derives from the original attraction – both the normal that reveal and serve that attraction, and the pathological ones that parasitize, alter and divert it. In this sense, we can say that it is not only the Creator that exerts an attraction *on* humans, but also any reality they enter into relations with because of their attraction *to*. In the case of the letter quoted, St. Maximus explicitly refers to nature and the world. It is in this meaning that I call them attractors.³⁵

III.4. Attracting dynamics

The relationship between the three attractors is also relevant to us. The author asserts an incompatibility between them, in the sense that the action

³³ τό γάρ πρός τί πως ἔχειν τῶν ἐκ διαμέτρου τοῖς ἐναντίοις διειλημμένων ἔκαστον ἡ σχέσις παριστῶσα δικαίως ἐξ ὧν ἔχει τήν προαιρετικήν ἔξιν ἐνδιάθετον προσαγορεύει, PG 91,1237A. Nicholas Constas' translation, except for "relation" instead of "condition" for *schesis*; cf. Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, The Ambigua*, Nicholas Constas (ed. and trans.), Harvard University Press, 2014, vol. I, pp. 408-409. *Schesis*, *echein*, and *hexis*, all have the same ancestral root, "to hold" (*apud* <https://irc.la.utexas.edu/lex/master/1661>).

³⁴ See the end of *Ambiguum* 10: "for in Him preexist the principles of all good things, as if from an ever-flowing spring, in a single, simple, unified embrace, and they draw to Him all those who rightly and naturally use the powers that have been given to them for this very purpose"; ἐν ᾧ πάντων οἱ λόγοι τῶν ἀγαθῶν, ὥσπερ πηγῇ ἀειβλύστῳ, προϊψεστήκασι τε κατά μίαν, ἀπλῆν καὶ ἐνιαίαν τῶν πάντων περιοχήν, καὶ πρός ὅν ἔλκουσι πάντας τούς καλῶς καὶ κατά φύσιν ταῖς ἐπὶ τούτῳ δοθείσαις χρωμένους δυνάμεσι. Ibidem, p. 342-343. I have argued the erotic character of human nature and powers in S. Moldovan, *Addictions and Orthodox Spirituality. A Focus on Ontological Passivity*, to be published in "Revista Teologica" (2016).

³⁵ It is a terminology borrowed from the theory of dynamical systems. A wider use of this theory for the interpretation and illustration of Maximian anthropology - as outlined in a former paper (*Addictions as passions. Ancient wisdom for modern issues*, in "Journal of Modern Foreign Psychology" 3.1 (2014), pp. 125-138) - is the subject of a work in preparation. West and Brown also briefly consider the relevance of "chaos theory" in modelling the motivational system; *Theory of addiction*, pp. 222-225.

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of one excludes others.³⁶ At first sight, the meaning is clear: each of the three regimes of life generated by the corresponding active-attractive relationship makes impossible the other two. However, can the relationship with God invalidate the purpose of a human nature which He Himself created? Also, why would the relationship with the world (*kosmos*) be so bad, since the world is also the work of the Creator? And even stranger seems to be the idea that, attracted by and moving to the nature, man does not change his nature, but is made like it! Obviously, between the three entities there is also a positive ontological relation the ignorance of which in order to avoid the massive tautology, we can assume that he has in mind, without saying it, two meanings of the concept of nature, namely the nature as an original reality, as designed, created and placed by God between Him and the world, and nature as a fallen reality, subjected to the experience of good and evil. Similarly, the world means both the original universe (more likely, the sensible one) and the universe affected by the fall. Elsewhere, in his *Quaestiones* to the same Thalassios, he designates by *kosmos* the universe of pathological human interactions generated by the “pleasure-loving relationship of choice”.³⁷ Therefore, we deal with two levels, the level of nature (*phusei*), as inalienable given, and the level of position (*thesei*) or relationship, as self-determination, both in relation to his own nature and with the world, both of which are, in turn, understood both ontologically and historically. A double level also plays in the relationship with God, who is, on the one hand, the creator of the human being and the rest of creation, on the other, the one who gives the grace of those who pursue the relationship with Him. In this case, we can understand the statement the author makes in our letter that man does not participate by choice neither in God nor in the world,³⁸ in that his place between them (read here in ontological terms, or *phusei*) is a given, not a choice, although man participates in both exactly by choice, as we have seen above, in terms of becoming, or *thesei*.³⁹

³⁶ See above, “... removes him from the other two”; τῶν ἄλλων δύο ἐξίστησι.

³⁷ κατὰ τὴν τῆς γνώμης φιλήδονον σχέσιν. *Quaestiones ad Thallarium*, 65; PG 90,740D.

³⁸ “If the one that attracts man is nature, it shows him being by nature what he is in himself. For being in the midst of God and the world, man do not participate in neither of these by choice”; Εἰ δέ φύσις ἐστίν ἡ ἀγούσα τὸν ἄνθρωπον, καθ’ ἔαντόν ὅντα, φύσει τὸν ἄνθρωπον διαδείκνυσι· μέσον Θεοῦ καὶ κόσμου τυγχάνουσα· ώς οὐδετέρου τούτων κατά γνώμην μετέχοντα. PG 91,445CD.

³⁹ Of course, according to different modes of participation, the first according to the

If this interpretation is correct, then man is simultaneously in the field of influence of these attractors. With the aim to bestow him the grace, God offers as an advance to man his nature, which is as a part, surely special, of the created world. In this perspective, we should perhaps consider nature and the world not really as attractors, but rather means or vehicles or potentiators of the ontological attraction and movement to God. It is their disorientation and diversion from Him and His purpose what alters and transforms them into parasitic attractors, although with different features and functions: in the case of created nature as a providential consequence of the fall, so involuntary for man; in the case of the world as a universe of relationships, as voluntary manifestations, both individual and collective, of the pathologies which St. Maximus and the Tradition called passions, which maintain, deepen and transmit the fall.

IV. Perspectives

The broader research project aims at detailing three aspects of human behavior: the components (natural powers), the structure (the functional links between these powers in the context of their actualization) and the functions or dynamics of their manifestation. For the components, a closer clarification of their meaning, and the relation between potency / capacity and ambivalent, normal or pathological, actualization is required. By virtue of their use “according to nature” or “against nature”, powers are strengthened or, on the contrary, altered. That means not only variability, but also plasticity, a capacity to be modified through interaction with the realities which they relate. St. Maximus writings abound in notions such as imprinting, modeling, forming or configuring the powers of soul and body under the impact of their mutual interaction and those with God, the intelligible and the sensible universe. The capability of a power is a natural tautology. Her receptivity is given by pathetic ontology. Being plastic can be understood as a combination of both and seems more difficult to notice, but it is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the Maximian con-

grace, the second to the sin. It is also noteworthy that the human being is in an ambivalent relation to the fallen world: on the one hand, he inherits the fallen nature, so it is a given; on the other hand, he personally contributes by self-determination to perpetuation or augmentation of its wickedness.

Regarding the structure of human action, it is possible to capitalize on the seemingly trivial fact that the same powers are involved in both normal and pathological behavior. Of course, the same power, but not the same manners to operate with the powers. The interesting issue here is not only how the powers are both plastic and invariant upon actualization but also how their integrated, co-operative mechanism seems to be the same. The structure of passions - as a diachronic development – has already been investigated and elucidated, thoroughly sometimes, but it has been unnoticed the obvious thing that passions are behaviors and therefore behind them must lay the generic structure of human behavior. The relationship between normal and pathological, which I mentioned at the beginning of this essay as a significant problem for the understanding of addictions, is here.

Finally, with regard to dynamics, it can be shown that within the three regimes analyzed here in the context of the Ninth Letter, we can actually recognize and detail five general behaviors: protologic, lapsarian, hamartilogic, damning and restorative. How these are defined, in what relationships are involved, and whose regime the passions belong more precisely to, is the theme of another paper.