

**Toward a Theology of Consciousness: Unity and
Participation in Maximus the Confessor**

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Abstract: *This dissertation explores potential alignments between contemporary debates regarding the nature of consciousness and concepts found in the mystical theology of Maximus the Confessor. As physicalism, dualism, and idealism have encountered challenges explaining consciousness, perspectives like panpsychism and cosmopsychism have reemerged, positing that elementary particles or the whole cosmos have mental properties. However, panpsychism struggles to account for the combination of complex minds from basic microphenomenal building blocks. Cosmopsychism offers a solution by grounding consciousness in universal consciousness but encounters the decombination problem of deriving individual perspectives. Plotinus' cosmopsychism sees individual intellects as aspects of a universal Intellect but fails to integrate unity and multiplicity fully. Maximus adapted Neoplatonic metaphysics to a Christian vision centred on the Divine Logos containing the logoi or divine ideas defining each creature. This allows individual subjective perspectives grounded in universal consciousness to be unified in the Logos. Human and divine realms are unified through deification, resolving the decombination problem. Maximus transforms Plotinus' emanative ontology into a dynamic progression towards consummation in perichoretic union between Creator and of universal and particular. While not explicitly cosmopsychist, Maximus' thought suggests alignments between cosmopsychism and Christianity through the Logos metaphysic, providing metaphysical models compatible with notions of universal consciousness and unique creaturely perspectives grounded in God.*

1. Introduction

Of the traditional models of consciousness, two are often repulsive to Christians, while the one remaining option is so fraught with difficulties that it has struggled to be taken seriously by philosophers for over half a century. Physicalism, the belief that physical laws can explain everything, contradicts Christian belief in asserting that the mind is no more than a mechanical product of the material brain. Physicalism denies the existence of an immaterial soul and undermines the possibility of an afterlife. It also precludes free will since neurological processes would entirely determine our thoughts and actions. Similarly, idealism, the belief that the external world is an illusion, is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of creation, which holds that God created a real, objective physical universe. If the world is but a subjective experience in consciousness, then God's act of creation is meaningless. This leaves dualism as a Hobson's choice for Christians. Dualism is appealing for several reasons. It accommodates the concept of an immortal, non-physical soul and offers a framework for the existence of free will, it allows for the existence of God as a spiritual being that transcends the material realm, and it permits the idea that humans are created in God's image. However, dualism faces challenges in explaining mind-brain interaction, as well as offering evidence for the existence of souls.

None of the three traditional models of consciousness offer a satisfactory response to the challenge of explaining why and how physical processes in the brain give rise to subjective first-person experiences, otherwise known as the Hard Problem of consciousness. Since the 1990s, this has been the most perplexing question in

philosophy of mind. The seemingly insoluble difficulties of the Hard Problem have led philosophers to cast their net more broadly towards alternative frameworks, such as panpsychism and cosmopsychism, which posit consciousness as a fundamental property of the universe. Panpsychism offers an intuitive solution by asserting that elementary particles have mental properties, but combining these to form complex minds poses problems. In response, Philosophers such as Philip Goff are beginning to advance cosmopsychist arguments, which ground subjectivity in universal consciousness to address issues facing physicalism, dualism and idealism. There is, then, a need to explore the theological and moral implications of this revived model.

Cosmopsychism has, itself, struggled to derive the multiplicity of distinct first-person perspectives from a single cosmic consciousness. One possible solution, offered by Mira Albahari, bifurcates consciousness into contentless universal awareness and particularised focal points. While bifurcation solves the one-and-the-many problem, it comes with an impersonal absolute and a loss of individual identity at a higher level of intellect, which many Christians would find an unappealing solution. A more congenial solution may be found in the cosmopsychist model offered by Plotinus as a means to integrate unity and multiplicity through an ontology stratifying consciousness across being. Much Neoplatonic ontology was successfully synthesised with Christian theology in the early church by Saint Maximus the Confessor, and although he did not consider Plotinus' cosmopsychism, we may detect a foundational amenability to this model of consciousness in Christianity with the enhancement of consciousness being grounded, indivisibly and unconfusedly, in the Divine Logos.

In many ways, a Plotinian stratified cosmopsychism within a Maximian hierarchical frame may offer a promising philosophical model for Christians seeking to understand consciousness in relation to both God and the world. Indeed, it warrants deeper exploration as a middle path between reductive physicalism and anti-realist idealism. It accommodates the existence of universal and individual souls, harmonising with Christian belief regarding the unity of the Divine and the distinct personhood of humans. It also roots consciousness and subjectivity fundamentally within the Divine itself, while maintaining the reality and significance of the created world; and it permits the acknowledgement of varying degrees of mentality across different beings, unlike panpsychism, which indiscriminately attributes subjectivity to all material constituents.

Both Plotinus and Maximus address philosophical problems of deriving multiplicity from unity in explanations of consciousness, and there is an unmistakable and persistent imprint of Neoplatonism in the mystical theology of Maximus the Confessor. Though not directly familiar with Plotinus' *Enneads*, Maximus absorbed key elements of his emanative cosmology through intermediaries like Dionysius, Clement and Cyril, creatively adapting them to align with orthodox belief. His personalisation of the Neoplatonic principles in the incarnate Logos grounds both cosmic unity and individual diversity, while his Logoi doctrine affirms the Logos as the unified source containing each creature's divine principles, in which all creation participates. By transforming Plotinian metaphysics into a dynamic progression toward deification, Maximus allows the unification process between divine and human realms to actualise the purpose of creation. Like Plotinus, Maximus integrates unity and plurality through mystical apprehension of first principles with discursive thought, giving way to intuited

oneness through the contemplation of metaphysical origins. Man interrelates creation's diversity as mediator, engaging its logoi or principles. Knowledge of God ultimately transcends finite epistemology confined to subject-object distinctions. This suggests an interconnectedness aligning all consciousness to the divine Logos. Embodied creatures achieve mystical union with the Logos through cooperation between divine grace and human will. At the same time, the Church's sacramental life facilitates this alignment of human and divine consciousness. Maximus' vision integrates philosophy and spirituality, framing theosis as the consummate interpenetration of universal and particular.

The cosmopsychist model offered by Plotinus may provide a means to integrate unity and multiplicity through an ontology stratifying consciousness across being. Maximus goes beyond this, synthesising Neoplatonic metaphysics and Christian theology to give a compelling cosmological framework founded in a loving God. Maximus developed a sophisticated cosmology, the exploration of which promises to map some alignments between contemporary debates and ancient wisdom in a Christian context. This essay seeks to uncover, within a patristic framework, an understanding of the relationship between consciousness and reality in such a way that might be fruitful to contemporary debates in the philosophy of mind. A Christian cosmopsychism has a rich potential to illuminate the core tenets of the faith. It resonates with scriptural calls to love one's neighbour as oneself, as all consciousness is fundamentally interconnected. This profound unity underscores the need for ecological awareness, as panpsychist thinkers have noted. But most saliently, a cosmopsychist metaphysics foregrounds the doctrines of theosis and incarnation. Our consciousness finds its source and destiny in reunion with the divine consciousness

from whence it originated. God reaches out through Christ to reconcile mankind to himself, fulfilling the ultimate purpose for which humanity was created. As mediator between realms, mankind is called to draw the entire cosmos into deeper communion with the divine. Through synergy between God's grace and man's ascent, creation moves towards its telos of perfect reintegration in perichoretic union. Plotinus and Maximus offer conceptual resources to integrate multiplicity and unity of consciousness in a cosmopsychist paradigm compatible with Christian convictions regarding the nature of God, the world, and human identity. This essay represents an initial foray into the promising dialogue between Christian thought and an emergent philosophy of mind. Further enquiry along these lines may yield fresh metaphysical insights to unite spiritual truth with an expanding understanding of consciousness and reality.

2. Theories of Consciousness

The nature of consciousness is amongst philosophy's most challenging and complex problems, and it looks some way off being solved. Physicalism and idealism have encountered problems explaining consciousness, so alternative perspectives like panpsychism have emerged. Physicalism, the idea that brains cause consciousness, has been the prevailing doctrine throughout the twentieth century. This idea holds that mental properties can be reduced to physical properties and that consciousness is a product of the brain's physical processes. Physicalism entails that the only fundamental facts are fundamental physical facts¹. All other facts, including mental and experiential

¹ Gregg Rosenberg, *A Place for Consciousness: Probing the Deep Structure of the Natural World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) p.13.

facts, supervene on these. Non-physical facts, then, are nothing over and above physical facts². Ontological idealists reject physicalism. They hold that consciousness is irreducible to physical properties or processes; the subjective, phenomenal nature of experience cannot be objectively explained. Physical objects may be known only through sensory perception, and perception is a product of minds, not physical processes in the brain. So, most idealists hold that physical properties must be reducible to mental properties³. Reality is a form of thought⁴. However, both physicalism and idealism seem counter-intuitive. In denying thought and matter, neither captures the essential unity of experience. In people's everyday goings about, the physical and mental seem fundamental, real and distinct, and this is probably true for physicalists and idealists alike. Indeed, in everyday life, people routinely identify with a sort of homespun, folk psychology dualism: 'physical and mental properties are fundamental characteristics of reality⁵.'

For dualists, the mind and body are two distinct substances. Both states are irreducible to, but can interact with, each other, and we should not be too eager to throw out the dualistic experience of being mind and body. Being human means being both physical and mental, experiencing the world through sense experience. This idea does not come without its problems, however. The task of explaining mind-body interaction remains elusive. How can non-physical substance (mind) interact with physical substance (body)? No mechanism has been suggested for how this might occur.

² Philip Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) p.56.

³ Benedikt Paul Gocke, 'Panpsychism and Panentheism', in *Panpsychism and Panentheism*, ed. by Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 2018), pp. 37–54 (p. 38).

⁴ Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, 'Idealism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Spring 2023 [Idealism \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy/Spring 2023 Edition\)](#) [accessed 13 May 2023].

⁵ Gocke, 2018 p. 39

Without such a mechanism, a parallelism would be needed for the functioning of minds and bodies, where mind and body function distinctly but do not interact. Such a system would entail an unacceptable causal overdetermination⁶. Alternatively, the mind would have to be epiphenomenal, having no impact on the world whatsoever, only seeming to. Epiphenomenalism seems a more counter-intuitive than either physicalism or idealism, making human minds irrelevant to themselves and the world beyond⁷. The distinct realms of mind and body seem intuitively plausible, but philosophically unpacking two-way causal interaction between physical and non-physical substances has proven problematic for dualists.

Given that the conventional philosophical stances of physicalism, idealism, and dualism encounter significant obstacles in attempting to resolve the enigma of consciousness as it relates to the mind-body problem, it is unsurprising that alternative perspectives, such as panpsychism, have emerged. Panpsychism posits that all matter possesses a certain level of consciousness, representing one potential solution to this complex issue; elementary physical constituents of existence have mental properties. In 1979, Nagel⁸ argued that panpsychism follows from four basic and plausible premises: First, complex organisms are material systems. Second, mental states are not physical. Third, mental states are not properties of nothing at all and not properties of souls; they are properties of organisms. Fourth, all properties arise from constituents and their interactions; properties in complex systems are not emergent. Of these four premises,

⁶ Z.J. Marczuk, 'Dennett's account of mind versus Kim's supervenience argument', *Forum Philosophicum*, 16(2) (2011), pp. 1–15.

⁷ Andrew Bailey, 'Zombies, Epiphenomenalism, and Physicalist Theories of Consciousness', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 36.4 (2006), 481-509.

⁸ Thomas Nagel, 'Panpsychism', in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 181.

substance dualism is denied on the first premise, physicalism is denied on the second, and idealism is denied on the first and third. The argument, then, is that 'if mental properties are real and unexplainable by physical complexity, then consciousness must be considered fundamental⁹. All matter, then, is conscious, having some basic level of awareness. And if mental and physical dimensions coexist within substances, consciousness can plausibly engage in causal interaction with the world in a manner harmonious with scientific and materialist principles. Nothing, however, is proven and, as Nagel notes¹⁰, any of the four premises given above may be, and are, denied by dualists, physicalists and idealists. He dismisses panpsychism as another 'mutually incompatible and hopelessly unacceptable' solution on these grounds.

The philosopher David Chalmers argues that physics cannot explain subjective experience, so consciousness must be a fundamental property. His "naturalistic dualism" is essentially panpsychic. Nearly twenty years after Nagel's paper, he reawakened the issue, coining the Hard Problem of consciousness¹¹. Chalmers argues that since they explain only physical properties and processes, physical laws cannot explain the phenomenon of experience. Physics aims towards an objective, quantitative description of reality. However, consciousness has a qualitative focus (e.g., redness, pain, chocolateness). It is subjective, depending on a conscious being's perspective. Therefore, physics cannot explain consciousness. Chalmers proposes that the world has two aspects: physical and mental¹². These are not separate realms (so it is not

⁹ Joanna Leidenhag, *Minding Creation* (London: T&T Clark, 2022), p. 51.

¹⁰ Nagel, 2012 p.193.

¹¹ David J. Chalmers, 'The Puzzle of Conscious Experience', *Scientific American*, 273 (1995), 80-86 (p. 80).

¹² David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

dualistic in the classical sense). The world has fundamental physical properties (space-time, mass-energy, charge, spin) and fundamental rules for how these work, which together explain almost everything about the world but cannot explain experience. Chalmers suggests that experience is fundamental, like space-time or energy, existing in a physical substrate and subject to psychophysical laws. Consciousness, then, would be a ubiquitous and fundamental feature of the natural universe.

Benedikt Paul Gocke¹³ offers two arguments for why one may reasonably conclude that all basic physical entities possess mental properties. The first is the argument from the homogeneity of cosmic evolution: It is fair to assume that cosmic evolution, operating through universal laws of nature, has resulted in physical beings with complex phenomenal properties having mental properties. Science reveals the structural-physical properties of the world (shape, size, mass, charge) but not the intrinsic properties, which are accessible only through our own experiences. However, these phenomenal properties are subject to the same universal laws of nature that govern the cosmos uniformly. They are not limited to specific regions or entities. Gocke concludes that all physical entities must have phenomenal properties as part of their intrinsic nature. Therefore, all physical entities have mental properties.

The second is the argument from intrinsic natures. The physical sciences may describe the structural and relational properties of fundamental physical entities, not what they are like. Nevertheless, fundamental physical entities must have some intrinsic properties. Otherwise, they would have no basis for their dispositional properties, which

¹³ Gocke, 2018 pp. 44-49.

determine how they behave or interact with other entities. Without these, their behaviour would be entirely random, nullifying all scientific enquiries. Therefore, fundamental physical entities must have an intrinsic nature. Since this is the case, the only plausible candidate for the intrinsic nature of physical entities is phenomenal consciousness, the only intrinsic property we know of from our own experience. This is compatible with the structural and relational properties revealed by science. Therefore, fundamental physical entities have phenomenal consciousness, and some complex physical beings have mental properties composed of or derived from the phenomenal consciousness of their parts. Gocke's minimal panpsychist thesis is that 'both mental and physical properties are ontologically fundamental and, in their exemplification, factually equivalent properties of both the fundamental entities constituting reality and the higher creatures and human beings¹⁴.'

The attractiveness of panpsychism is clear. It solves several problems that have dogged other solutions to the mind-body problem. However, suppose the physical sciences can never describe the intrinsic properties of the world, as Gocke says. In that case, it is mere tautology to note that the intrinsic properties are, therefore, extra-physical or, to use its synonym, supernatural. It cannot be proven. That in itself is not a killer blow. Neither dualism nor idealism have pretensions to scientific proof, and although physicalism remains confident that future discoveries will establish themselves scientifically, with the current state of neurobiology, such confidence rests more on faith than certainty. Joanna Leidenhag¹⁵ likens philosophy of mind to a war where entrenched campaigners slug it out under their respective banners without much hope of ever

¹⁴ Gocke, 2018 p.39.

¹⁵ Leidenhag, 2022 p.49.

landing a decisive blow. Into this battle panpsychism has re-emerged with new vigour. Leidenhag predicts no final victory, but in the inevitable stalemate ahead, she believes that panpsychism has at least earned its place, being 'equally as attractive (or unattractive, depending on one's disposition) as its main metaphysical rivals.'¹⁶ As a theory, panpsychism has done enough since Nagel's essay to be taken seriously, or at least not so easily dismissed as it had been by Colin McGinn, as 'utter balderdash.'¹⁷

While panpsychism offers an intuitive solution to the mind-body problem, the existence of complex conscious minds poses a combination problem that undermines its appeal. Panpsychism appears to resolve the mind/body problem. The body does not produce the mind, nor does the mind produce the body, but rather consciousness and matter are fundamental and ubiquitous. Every physical thing has some form of consciousness at the most basic level. That is not to say that atoms and electrons enjoy the rich, inner phenomenal experience humans do, only that they have some basic experience. And yet, we know that some complex experience does exist: our own. The rich inner experience of human consciousness seems qualitatively different and more complex than the merely basic putting together of microphenomenal building blocks would allow. This presents a problem to panpsychism. We understand how complex physical structures are formed from the combination of basic physical entities. However, it is hard to see how the combination of basic private minds could compound to make one complex mind. Merely aggregating simple conscious entities does not seem sufficient to produce the unified, subjective experience of complex consciousness. That

¹⁶ Leidenhag, 2022 p.49.

¹⁷ Colin McGinn, 'Hard Questions: Comments on Galen Strawson', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 13.10-11 (2006) p. 93.

would be strong emergence for which there is no evidence in nature. This combination problem represents the biggest challenge to the viability of panpsychism as an alternative theory¹⁸. Without an adequate account of how subjective combination occurs, panpsychism struggles to address the appearance of complex minds fully. This would have to be explained.

The philosopher Philip Goff offers a potential solution to the combination problem: that all conscious minds are derivative of and unified in a single universal consciousness. This is cosmopsychism: the universe is a conscious whole of which individual conscious entities are aspects. Goff attacks the assumption that since large objects are grounded in small objects, or that 'micro-level facts logically entail what is essentially required for the reality of macro-level entities'¹⁹, large minds must therefore be grounded in micro-level minds. Since no explanation of subjective experience can be given in terms of more basic physical properties, he concludes that organic conscious states must be irreducible. And since we cannot explain subjective experience in terms of simpler conscious states, then no organic conscious state can be fundamental. The only way a state can be irreducible and fundamental is if it is an aspect of a more fundamental state. Goff concludes that if every organic conscious state is an aspect of a more fundamental state, then the only candidate for such a state is the universe itself. The universe is the simplest and most fundamental thing there is.

Goff argues that the universe has phenomenal consciousness as an irreducible property and that other conscious beings are aspects of one universal consciousness.

¹⁸ Leidenhag, 2022 p.72.

¹⁹ Goff, 2017 p.233.

This manifests itself in different ways depending on the physical structure of each being. Cosmopsychism, then, offers a way to solve the combination problem by positing a single source of consciousness that underlies all other forms of consciousness. He proposes that conscious minds are partly grounded in universal consciousness, which gives it its phenomenal character, over and above the reality of universal consciousness. Goff argues that universal consciousness, as an undifferentiated form of consciousness, grounds both the reality of consciousness and necessary logical truths like the Law of Non-Contradiction (LNC)²⁰. Our minds are partially constituted by universal consciousness, allowing us access to its logical nature and grounding our knowledge of logical truths. Universal consciousness is transcendent, existing necessarily outside space and time, grounding the relationship between logical truths and the physical world. This provides Goff with a unified explanation.

To the cosmopsychist, however, the serious problem remains of explaining how a single cosmic subject may 'fragment into a multiplicity of human points of view, and how... a plurality of individual human perspectives can manifest a single cosmic point of view.'²¹ This is the decombination problem. If the universe is a conscious subject, how do other conscious subjects exist within it as partial aspects, inseparable from the whole, and dependent on it? Goff dismisses the decombination problem as a pseudo-problem arising from the limits of human perception and imagination, arguing that cosmopsychism is coherent, even if we cannot understand how it works²². Just as a

²⁰ Philip Goff, 'Universal Consciousness as the Ground of Logic', in *Panentheism and Panpsychism: Philosophy of Religion meets Philosophy of Mind*, ed. by Godehard Brüntrup, Benedikt Paul Göcke and Ludwig Jaskolla (Paderborn: Brill | mentis, 2020), pp. 107-22 (p. 114).

²¹ Jonardon Ganeri and Itay Shani, 'What Is Cosmopsychism?', *The Monist* 105.1 (2022), 1-5 (p. 3).

²² Philip Goff, 'Panpsychism', in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, ed. by Susan Schneider and Max Velmans, 2nd edn (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), pp. 106-24 (p. 118).

four-dimensional object is not a contradictory notion even if it is beyond our imagining, so too is the idea that a conscious subject might contain other conscious subjects is not contradictory. However, we may not be able to understand how that might be. The idea is coherent and non-contradictory, conceivable in the way panpsychism is not.

Panpsychism is, according to Goff, inconceivable; We cannot imagine many conscious entities combining to form a single conscious entity because we cannot imagine how the whole can be more complex than the parts. Since cosmopsychism is conceivable, Goff believes it avoids the decombination problem.

However, Miri Albahari²³ argues cosmopsychism's problems cannot so easily be sidestepped. She identifies two specific decombination problems that cosmopsychism needs to address: the epistemic problem and the perspective problem. The epistemic problem challenges the cosmopsychist to reconcile an epistemically all-encompassing perspective of the absolute with the imperfect, ignorant perspectives of its parts. The ignorance, doubt and curiosity we experience have no place in the absolute, which contains the solution to every problem. The absolute cannot, then, have a perspective that includes all the perspectives of its parts. Goff's response to this problem is that the conscious cosmos is likely not omniscient but 'may well be "a blobby mess" to which predicates like intelligent or rational don't apply.'²⁴ Albahari suggests that this does not solve the problem. If individual subjects variously experience pain, dread or excitement to an overwhelming and pervasive degree, these are likewise experienced by the cosmic subject. However, it is unclear how each emotion can be simultaneously

²³ Miri Albahari, 'Beyond Cosmopsychism and the Great I Am: How the World might be Grounded in Universal "Advaitic" Consciousness', in *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism*, ed. by William Seager (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 119-134 (p. 121).

²⁴ Albahari, 2019 p. 122.

experienced to the same intense degree. The same is true for contradictory beliefs and identities. Consequently, the epistemic problem remains, and Goff's cosmopsychism is both unimaginable and incoherent.

The perspective problem questions whether the absolute can encompass all the perspectives of its parts. Albahari²⁵ argues that each conscious subject has a unique perspective that is only available to itself but also exists as a mental object for the conscious cosmos. These unique perspectives cannot be aspects of the unified perspective of the absolute. Therefore, the perspective of the absolute must differ from and override the perspectives of its parts. This means that the absolute cannot have experiences encompassing every perspective combined, as this would contradict the premise that all experiences have a specific perspectival character belonging to its subject. In other words, the perspective problem asks how the conscious cosmos can have a perspective that includes all the perspectives of its parts. Albahari argues that it is impossible. Each perspective has a unique character belonging only to its subject. While these perspectives are mental objects for the conscious cosmos, they are not parts of its perspective. The conscious cosmos's perspective must differ from and override the perspectives of its components. The cosmopsychist says that a conscious cosmos is the source of everything. But, as the perspective problem outlines, the conscious cosmos cannot simultaneously have every conscious experience from all perspectives. Each conscious being has its angle that only it may experience, and the absolute may not see things from all angles at once. That is a problem for the cosmopsychist, since the conscious cosmos cannot explain how and what we see.

²⁵ Albahari, 2019 p. 124.

Having reached a seeming impasse with cosmopsychism, Albahari turns to Advaita Vedanta and other mystical traditions to discover a more apt conception of universal consciousness. According to Albahari, universal consciousness is not limited to subject/object structuring, is not bound by space and time, and is humanly experienceable. From this foundation, she develops an explanation of how experience can participate in consciousness. She posits that a conscious subject has two components: witness-consciousness and focal perspective. Witness-consciousness represents the present moment. It is sentiently luminous, reflexive, intransitive, and knowledgeable. Focal perspective, on the other hand, encompasses the psychophysical and spatiotemporal parameters, at least in humans. To illustrate the concept of witness-consciousness, Albahari asks the reader to imagine a sensory deprivation tank where all perceptual input and focal perspectives are absent. The only thing that remains is pure witness-consciousness, which is the state of pure consciousness. This state is free from any objects or structures of experience and devoid of all perceptual and cognitive inputs that shape conscious awareness.

Albahari identifies this state as universal consciousness, the unmanifest foundation of all being, metaphysically antecedent to space, time, and manifestation. It is the non-dual reality underlying the diversity of experience, a single, infinite, and indivisible reality whose nature is pure consciousness. It transcends the distinction between subject and object, self and other, and is known as *nirvaikalpa samadhi* in Advaita Vedanta - the objectless and subjectless mode of consciousness. This, she proposes, as a possible ground of all being. She proceeds to explore how non-dual consciousness might be the grounding of the spatio-temporal, psychophysical world.

She proposes that mind-independent objects are 'complex arrays of sensory and cognitive imagery.'²⁶ These images frame the perspective of each subject but emanate from the universal consciousness, which does not have a perspective or a sense of self but is pure awareness: a dreamer that generates multiple dreams but is unaffected by them. Each being partakes in the timeless absolute awareness while seeing and being seen by others in its own way. How it does this depends on its own dispositions and the dispositions of others, showing itself as a finite centre among other finite centres.

Albahari's cosmopsychism is a philosophy of unity, which sees the world as a single, interconnected whole, and it affirms the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings. The universal consciousness of the absolute is the ground of all reality and it is the source of our awareness. However, it still raises the question of how universal consciousness can give rise to diverse perspectives without losing unity and purity. How can it be both the source and the object of experience? Albahari's problem has been encountered before. Her notion of a universal, transcendent consciousness, experienced by human beings in a state of pure awareness, is strikingly similar to the picture of the universe that Plotinus (206-267/70 AD) described in the *Enneads*. The extent to which Indian philosophy and religion influenced Plotinus has been much debated²⁷. A.H. Armstrong²⁸, notes that Plotinus shares several commonalities with Eastern philosophy: both affirm a non-dual reality as one infinite, all-creating principle of being and consciousness; both hold that the intelligible world, the domain of pure being and thought, is without limit and boundary; and both stress the significance of

²⁶ Albahari, 2019 p. 126.

²⁷ Swami Ashokananda, *The Influence of Indian Thought on the Thought of the West* (Almora: Advaita Ashram, 1931), p.28.

²⁸ A. H. Armstrong, 'Plotinus and India', *The Classical Quarterly*, 30.1 (1936), p.22.

non-rationalist and mystical experience for attaining wisdom. Nevertheless, the distinctively Hellenic flavour to Plotinus' thought sets it very much as a continuation of Aristotle, the Stoics and especially Plato.

3. Plotinus' Cosmopsychism

Plotinus' cosmic vision provides a grounding for consciousness in a similar way to Albahari. In an attempt at reconciling the ontological differences found in Plato's concept of the first principle and Aristotle's theory of the Prime Mover, Plotinus conceived of a transcendent One beyond being that generates Intellect, which contemplates the Forms. For Plato, the first principle is unknowable, ineffable and beyond being itself; it is the source of being for other things, though transcending being²⁹. As the Good, all things in an inchoate way desire and seek this first principle. Aristotle, however, posited the Prime Mover as an actualised being of pure thought thinking itself. Plotinus' harmonisation identified Plato's utterly transcendent One or Good as the ultimate first principle. As the source of all being, the One is 'no-thing.' Its superabundant goodness gives rise to Intellect, equated with Aristotle's Prime Mover, which is present in all things as their being, intelligibility, life and other perfections. This is the first hypostasis, from which all other levels of activity emanate³⁰. In Plotinus' scheme, Intellect cannot fully apprehend the One in its absolute unity. Instead, it refracts the One into a vast multiplicity of separate intelligible Forms, which become the objects of Intellect's thought.

²⁹ Constantinos Athanasopoulos and Christoph Schneider (eds), *Divine Essence and Divine Energies: Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co Ltd, 2013), p. 32.

³⁰ Torstein Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p21.

This sees a dual model of soul, with World-Soul and individual souls aiming for identification with their higher selves and the One. Plotinus holds that the internal activity of the One is entirely simple and transcendent; even the subject-object coincidence of the self-contemplating Aristotelian God is discounted. The One is not an intellect³¹ but rather a *hypernoesis*: an awareness that transcends distinction and multiplicity, 'Before being... before Intellectual-Principle and consciousness and life³²'. These and all aspects of reality proceed from the One as external activity, which Thorstein Tollefsen³³ describes as a movement of procession and conversion. The One abides as unchanging repose of pure potentiality. However, as a transcendent mental act, it can be conceived as having potential to be an intelligible object of thinking.

This potential intellection becomes actualised as Universal Intellect, which fully contemplates the intelligible One. This is the second principle of reality: Intellect. Subsequent hypostases are generated in this way: higher soul from the Universal Intellect, lower soul from the higher soul, and nature as the lowest aspect of the lower soul. The fact that the One has external activity at all is down to the nature of actualised perfection, which radiates its excellence outwards. This overflowing from the One is, for Plotinus, unintentional, accidental and incidental activity: a necessary consequence of the One's perfection. In Christian theology, creation is an intentional act of God's will. However, this may be viewed as a nominal distinction to some extent. Both perspectives hold that God's nature radiates existence, light, and creativity outward without compromising divine simplicity. God directs his will towards himself and all other things

³¹ Tollefsen, 2012 p22.

³² Plotinus: Ennead VI.8.16.

³³ Tollefsen 2012, p.25.

in one single act. God has one act of will, and his willing of other things he subsumes under that one act of self-willing³⁴. In both cases, existence emerges spontaneously from God's abundant goodness and unity without internal change.

This emanation metaphor is central to Plotinus' 'double activity'³⁵ doctrine: *energeia*. Internal activity constitutes the essence of an entity. External activity derives from that essence, but is distinct from it. This is the case with all entities: Plotinus uses fire as an illustration. The immanent activity is the power of fire to warm: its actualised essence. Then there is a second heat, the conditioned activity in fire warming a specific object. In language, words hold latent unconditioned meanings as first activities, while conditioned meaning is constructed through a second activity of contextual usage. Tollefsen notes that Plotinus was unhappy with a model of creation that leaves a gulf between the One and everything below it, not involving the One in any continuous sense³⁶. The double activity doctrine accounts for the generation of each level of being but not how each level is ontologically dependent on the higher one. To solve this problem, Plotinus introduces the doctrine of participation. Plotinus' hierarchical metaphysics means each level of being depends on the one above for its existence and intelligibility. The intelligible principle (the One, the Intellect, or the Soul) is one, undivided, and wholly present to each lower thing to the extent that it can receive it. Lower things (bodies, souls, etc.) desire to move towards the intelligible principle and be present to it. This movement results in a mirroring of the intelligible, where they

³⁴ Rahim Acar, 'Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions', in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. by David B. Burrell and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p.136.

³⁵ Plotinus: *Ennead* V.4.2

³⁶ Tollefsen, 2012 p.26.

participate in it without changing it. Lower things receive into their constitution what they are capable of receiving from the intelligible principle and thus mirror it in their being. From this, we see the dynamic, integrated nature of Plotinus' vision³⁷. All things proceed from and are encompassed by, the One without differentiation, with the Universal Intellect holding all beings, separate but united, each containing all others in potentiality. At the level of Soul, all things become distinct from each other, until, at the edge, they are dispersed into the sensible world. The cosmos displays, then, psychological properties: life, soul and mind. Mental states of human beings and human beings themselves as individual subjects are metaphysically grounded in the cosmopsychic properties of the universe. Man participates in the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect by sharing their psychic and intellectual activities.

Plotinus' metaphysics contains an essential duality between higher intellect/soul and bodily identification, enabling his notion of voluntary self-identification through the inward turn. In the Fourth Ennead³⁸ he seems to outline the soul, comprising two parts: the World-Soul that inhabits and governs the entire cosmic system in a 'kindly presidency' through 'deedless command' and our individual souls that are charged with governing bodies 'with difficulty and struggle,' risking absorption into bodily affairs. It is a hybrid thing, as Plotinus puts it³⁹. This dual model of the self allows for essential duality between higher intellect/soul and lower bodily identification, which grounds his concept

³⁷ Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 96.

³⁸ Plotinus: Ennead IV.8.2.

³⁹ Giannis Stamatellos, 'Plotinus' Angeletics: A Neoplatonic Message Theory', in *Messages and Messengers: Angeletics as an Approach to the Phenomenology of Communication*, ed. by Rafael Capurro and John Holgate (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2011), pp. 125-34 (p. 127).

of voluntary self-identification. Pauliina Remes⁴⁰ notes that for Plotinus, human beings have the capacity for two different kinds of life, one according to their composite nature, the other according to their higher soul or intellect. This leaves room for self-identification with either the individual or the World-Soul, with the self underlying and using both modes. This is the inward turn⁴¹, a contemplative, spiritual process of directing one's focus inwards, away from physical sensations towards the intellectual perception of divine truths, resulting in mystical unification with God's light and wisdom. In this way, we come to identify ourselves not with our bodies but with soul/intellect. Remes explains the self-determining intellect is the authentic self for Plotinus, while identification with the composite being means giving in to external influences. The capacity to choose between these two identifications is key.

This is standard Platonic fare: The notion of a supreme World-Soul ruling the world, with human souls caught in bodily matters seeking higher thought, fits the common contrast between the flawed physical world and a flawless realm of Intellect. However, dualistic categories often become simplified into binary opposites. In this case, it is hard not to identify instinctively with one side: the individual soul. Thus, the World-Soul is “othered,” so to speak, becoming a place we can visit through our inward turn, something we might associate with through contemplation. Giannis Stamatellos⁴² sees Plotinus’ differentiation between lower bodily identity and higher soul/intellect selfhood as merely theoretical. Such a view of Plotinus is, however, somewhat impoverished and scarcely accurate. It leads to an essentially therapeutic reading

⁴⁰ Pauliina Remes, ‘Self-Knowledge in Plotinus: Becoming Who You Are’, in *Self-Knowledge: A History*, ed. by Ursula Renz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 78-95.

⁴¹ Remes, 2017 p.89.

⁴² Stamatellos, 2011 p. 127.

where different models of cognition are engaged through separate faculties, and the goal is one of personal self-transformation. Nicholas Banner⁴³ insists that Plotinus was indeed much concerned with self-cultivation through practical means. Nevertheless, he warns it would be wrong to interpret Plotinus' ontological commitment as simply metaphorical⁴⁴. Eric Perl⁴⁵ argues that, for Plotinus, the apprehension of truth is not merely theoretical but ontologically grounded in the unity of intellect, thought, and being. Intellect is fundamentally identified with both intellection itself and the forms it apprehends as one substantial reality.

Plotinus develops a nuanced, systematic theory of consciousness that aligns with his cosmopsychism and distributed conception of mind. He identifies multiple layers of awareness - physical, dianoetic, noetic - comprising a spectrum embedded throughout being rather than residing purely in individual entities. In his book *Plotinus on Consciousness*, D.M. Hutchinson⁴⁶ sees, in the blending of Aristotelian and Platonic ideas, the intellect and its object of thought being one and the same. Like Aristotle, the intellect is identical to that which it apprehends. Like Plato, the world of forms is a unified intelligible object. Plotinus argues that when an embodied human ascends to Intellect and contemplates the realm of forms, their cognition becomes completely unified with the intelligible structure contemplated. The human intellect and the cosmic intelligible world become cognitively identical. Through this synthesis, Plotinus arrives at his radical notion of total cognitive unity between knower and known, thinker and object

⁴³ Nicholas Banner, 'The Indeterminate Self and its Cultivation in Plotinus', in *Selfhood and the Soul: Essays on Ancient Thought and Literature in Honour of Christopher Gill*, ed. by Richard Seaford, John Wilkins and Matthew Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 169-88 (p. 170).

⁴⁴ Banner, 2017 p. 170.

⁴⁵ Eric D. Perl, *Thinking Being: Introduction to Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition*, *Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition*, 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 125.

⁴⁶ D. M. Hutchinson, *Plotinus on Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 15.

of thought. Then, the coherence of thought and truth is not just theoretical metaphor but real ontology for Plotinus.

At all levels, Plotinus' philosophy affirms the ontological oneness of apprehension and being, mind and world, in contrast to modern dualisms. Although Plotinus does present an essential duality between higher intellect/soul and bodily identification, this does not imply a rigid binary. Hutchinson⁴⁷ rejects Remes' two-dimensional model as insufficient. He outlines the far more nuanced and systematic theory of consciousness that Plotinus develops. The self is not a monolithic entity, but stratified into different layers of consciousness: physical, dianoetic, and noetic, with various layers indicating a spectrum of consciousness embedded throughout being. This accords with Plotinus' graded conception of reality, spanning from brute matter to refined intellect. The physical self experiences sensations and emotions in the material world. The dianoetic self uses imagination and reasoning in the material world. The noetic self contemplates the intelligible world, connecting us to the Intellect, the first hypostasis after the One, which is the realm of pure being and pure intellect. Through the noetic self, we gain direct knowledge of the One, out of which everything in the universe proceeds by 'emanation, overflow or shining forth⁴⁸.' The One is not conscious of itself or anything else but is the cause of all consciousness. This manifests first at the level of Intellect, whose contemplation of the One generates the Forms.

Unlike Albahari, Plotinus identifies universal consciousness, not with the One, but with Intellect, which is also the source of the Soul. It is through the Soul that the

⁴⁷ Hutchinson, 2018 p. 6.

⁴⁸ Davison, 2020 p. 95.

multiplicity of conscious beings emanate, becoming more and more differentiated. Consciousness then is pervasive and widely distributed within a cosmopsychic paradigm where the realm of intellect stands 'in a model-image relation to all forms of life and thought, from Soul down to plants'⁴⁹ Consciousness is not a property of individual beings, but refracted from the realm of pure being, through the cosmos as a whole. Plotinus argues Intellect intuitively grasps the totality of Forms simultaneously and collectively in actuality. This unifies multiplicity in a nuanced, stratified ontology of mind with multiple levels comprising a spectrum of awareness permeating through reality. Importantly, Plotinus does not see these psychic layers as wholly separate entities, but rather as a gradual unfolding of consciousness. Lower selves remain divided and diversified by bodily influence. However, the noetic self and World-Soul constitute a fundamental unity. Multiplicity also exists within the cosmic consciousness.

Nevertheless, a constant and underlying oneness persists undiminished, with unity or division depending on the soul's relation to the One. Through this hierarchical cosmopsychism, Plotinus integrates nuanced layers of consciousness with an ultimate unity. The soul is stratified yet integrally conjoined, multifaceted but profoundly one. Individual souls and the World Soul are unified in their similar form and equal participation in Soul's activities like instantiating logoi⁵⁰. Plotinus rejects the notion that individual souls are separate parts constituting the World Soul. The World Soul is in no way partitioned into distinct constituent souls since that would reduce it to an abstract concept rather than real unified being. Rather, each soul potentially contains the wholeness of the World Soul, which remains an undiminished totality present in each

⁴⁹ Hutchinson, 2018 p. 3.

⁵⁰ Plotinus: Ennead IV.3.2.

soul. Furthermore, individual souls cannot be quantitative parts of the World Soul, since souls are immaterial essences not divided into magnitudes. Nor are they parts like propositions, but rather each soul wholly reflects the World Soul. That souls are individuated is, in Hutchinson's view, down to their unique perspectives on the intelligible world: 'Having this perspective individuates us from other parts (intellects and Forms), and from the whole (Intellect)⁵¹.' But the whole World Soul remains undifferentiated, with the parts related to one another and the whole. Plotinus compares this to theorems belonging to a unified science.

Through this hierarchy of awareness, Plotinus provides a compelling cosmopsychist resolution to the decombination problem that aligns with his stratification and distribution of consciousness. In the ninth tractate of his fourth Ennead, Plotinus unfolds his theory of consciousness in explicitly cosmopsychic terms, arguing that all souls are derived from and ultimately identical with the soul of the All. He writes: 'Now if my soul and your soul come from the soul of the All, and that soul is one, these souls also must be one. But if the soul of the All and my soul come from one soul, again, all souls are one⁵².' Plotinus, like Philip Goff, sees individual conscious entities as being aspects of a conscious whole, with the whole remaining 'undiminished by differentiation into parts⁵³.' But, like Albahari, he too encounters the decombination problem: how can individual souls have distinct experiences and identities if they are essentially one? He writes: 'It would be absurd if my soul and anyone else's souls were one soul for if I perceived anything, another would have to perceive it too... and in general we should

⁵¹ Hutchinson, 2018 p. 25.

⁵² Plotinus: Ennead VI.1.5.

⁵³ Hutchinson, 2018 p21.

have to have the same experiences as each other and as the All⁵⁴.' Plotinus resolves this problem through his hierarchy of consciousness, linking selfhood and mental processes to unity or multiplicity with the One. He argues that the unity of the soul does not imply a negation of multiplicity, noting that many things happen in our bodies that we do not perceive. The noetic self, identical to the Intellect, is a unity, contemplating the intelligible realm and the One. It is aware of all the lower levels of consciousness, but the lower selves are unaware of their higher selves. The lower levels – the dianoetic self and physical self – are more divided and multiplicitous, and are influenced by the body and the physical world. Consciousness, then, is distributed according to function and need: rational (indivisible and transcendent), irrational (divided and sensible) and vegetative (creative and productive). Plotinus thus offers an elegant cosmopsychist model that handles the epistemic and perspective problem by showing how souls can be both one and many, depending on their psychic level and relation to the One.

4. Neoplatonism in the Mystical Theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor

Plotinus heavily influenced early Christian thought, and his cosmology shows clearly in the work of Saint Maximus the Confessor (580-662 ad). While Plotinus' cosmology provides an early precedent for grounding consciousness in a unitary source, his emanative ontology lacks the reciprocity and personal dimension of Christian conceptions of God. Plotinus's reformulation of Platonism within the Neoplatonist framework shaped the development of Christian thought in its 'emphatic

⁵⁴ Plotinus: Ennead VI.1.5.

religious dimension⁵⁵.’ It is unlikely that Maximus, although well-read, was familiar with Plotinus⁵⁶ since, by the 7th century, pagan Neoplatonism itself had little direct influence as a school of thought⁵⁷. However, the central tenets of Neoplatonic thought would have permeated the Christian philosophical tradition Maximus engaged with. His understanding of Plotinus would most likely have been filtered through Dionysius the Areopagite (whom he read closely⁵⁸), Clement, and Cyril of Alexandria⁵⁹, so his arguments were probably set against Christian characterisations of texts rather than the texts themselves. For Maximus, theology’s task was to ‘clarify the way and method of ascent to union with Christ⁶⁰.’ In Plotinus, the way and method was sketched out in a way that was adaptable to his ends, bending the ideas to a Christian perspective centred on the Logos as the ground of being. Thus, Maximus was able to reconfigure Plotinus’ cosmology into a dynamic movement oriented toward consummation in perichoretic union between Creator and creatures.

As McGuckin points out, Maximus was a ‘master synthesist⁶¹’ who was able to review the entire scriptures and the works of the Church Fathers before him. Maximus could adapt Neoplatonic notions such that the core of Plotinus’ cosmic schema would preserve its basic contours. There was no great uprooting of Neoplatonic ontology, for

⁵⁵ Terry L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 74.

⁵⁶ Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 17.

⁵⁷ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 47.

⁵⁸ Michael Treschow, Willemien Otten, and Walter Hannam, eds., *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev’d Dr Robert D. Crouse* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 197.

⁵⁹ Tollefsen, 2008. p. 47.

⁶⁰ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Eastern Orthodox Church: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 117.

⁶¹ McGuckin, 2020 p. 117.

instance, but rather a series of adaptations. Balthasar notes that Maximus' project of clearing Proclean and Plotinian influence from Pseudo-Dionysius was removing questionable points 'with unquestionable discretion'⁶². Maximus' cosmic schema indeed maintains more than structural vestiges of Neoplatonism. Tollefsen takes pains to state that Maximus' exemplarist doctrine be considered Christian, rather than Platonic⁶³, and this is a fair point. However, he demonstrates that Plotinus held views that contributed to Christianity. Jordan Daniel Wood⁶⁴ warns Christian thinkers against making 'facile' dismissals or crude contrasts when exploring resonances between Plotinus and Maximus on issues like the Logos-logoi relation. Since Our present aim is a thoughtful exploration of how current cosmopsychist proposals might find sympathy in a Christian context, we shall proceed cautiously, with an open mind. But it seems that, despite likely mediated access, the imprint of Plotinus' ontology remains structurally intact in Maximus, with its cosmopsychist dimensions implicitly sustained.

Plato's conception of formless unity into a principle wholly outside Being prepared the way for Christian notions of God's absolute transcendence. Plotinus' aspiration to achieve mystical union between the human soul and the One contributed to Christianity's mystical tradition⁶⁵. Incorporating the religious dimension into Neoplatonism by Plotinus' teachings and reported spiritual experiences helped bring philosophy and mystical praxis into alignment. His account of the soul's descent into embodiment resonated with Christian beliefs about the soul's fallen state. At the same

⁶² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. by Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), p. 60.

⁶³ Tollefsen, 2008. p. 22.

⁶⁴ Jordan Daniel Wood, 'Creation is Incarnation: The Metaphysical Peculiarity of the Logoi in Maximus Confessor', *Modern Theology*, 34.1 (2018), 82-102.

⁶⁵ Givens, 2009 p. 73.

time, his attempt to reconcile this with free will and destiny presaged Christian debates on the interrelation of divine foreknowledge and human freedom⁶⁶. The synthesis of core Platonic elements with emerging Christian thought across a range of theological domains appears clearly and typically Neoplatonic. For Maximus, the Divine Logos designed and made the visible and invisible words 'to be the medium of revelation of God's love and communion⁶⁷,' Plotinus conceived of the soul's mystical ascent as a circular movement back to the One. However, Maximus reimagined this as a dynamic movement oriented toward consummation between Creator and creatures. His theology charts a pathway of ascent that leads beyond detached contemplation of unity to a profound communion of love.

Tollefsen⁶⁸ warns against assuming that early Christians lifted Neoplatonism wholesale to apply to their vision. Nevertheless, the Neoplatonic basis for Maximus' ontology is clear, albeit adapted with significant adjustments to align with Christian theology. The hierarchical structure persists, but the emanative process becomes personalised by grounding the logoi in a particularity of creaturely perspective, not by necessity, but by voluntary communion between God and creatures. His appropriation of Plotinus' stratified psyche now integrates universal and particular consciousness in the Divine Logos, grounding creaturely perspectives in loving relation. The Logos contains the creative principles or divine ideas (logoi) that define the essence of each created thing⁶⁹. The multiplicity derives from unity: the Logos serves as unitary source,

⁶⁶ Givens, 2009 p. 74.

⁶⁷ McGuckin, 2020, p. 118.

⁶⁸ Tollefsen, 2008. pp. 21-63.

⁶⁹ Tollefsen, 2015. p. 313.

and the logoi comprise the pluralised expressions of the divine mind⁷⁰. Maximus clearly outlines this in his Seventh Ambigua. The One Logos is 'many logoi, indivisibly distinguished amid the differences of created things⁷¹' prior to their genesis. The logoi, then, are 'the divine principles⁷² of creatures, which is to say, 'everything that receives its becoming from God⁷³.' These principles are not to be thought of as mere blueprints, but as God's dynamic, creative intentions, containing the causal power for each creature to come into being and fulfil its purpose. Infinitely transcendent, the One is 'manifested and multiplied in all things... He recapitulates all things in Himself⁷⁴,' extending into the many logoi in creation through procession, illuminating all things from within through the divine Logos in whom all logoi pre-exist and find their source, ground, and telos. Just as the Logos grounds created things, it also grounds each consciousness or perspective, conferring its unique viewpoint. There is no pre-existence of individual substances and things, in their diversity, before their generated substantial manifestation. Rather, the process of generation brings Being into reality from the common substrate of creation⁷⁵. At the same time, the universal relations of things reflect the transcendent order as 'permanently present in God in the form of logoi⁷⁶.' This incorporation of all things 'whether by intellect, by reason, by sensation, by vital motion or by some essential faculty or habitual fitness⁷⁷' in the Logos counts for consciousness as well as insensible

⁷⁰ Edward Rommen, *Being the Church: An Eastern Orthodox Understanding of Church Growth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), p.28.

⁷¹ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.lo 7*, PG 91, 1077C.

⁷² Tollefsen, 2015. p. 314.

⁷³ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.lo 7*, PG 1080A.

⁷⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.lo 7*, PG 91, 1080B.

⁷⁵ Pascal Mueller-Jourdan, 'The Foundation of Origenist Metaphysics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 159–176 (p. 160).

⁷⁶ Mueller-Jourdan, 2015 p. 160.

⁷⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.lo 7*, PG 91, 1080B.

things. These logoi express the uniqueness and particular perspective of each being and confer its individual perspective. So, the multiplicity of logoi accounts for the diversity of perspectives grounded in the identity of each creature's logos.

5. Against Circularity and Recurrence

Having established the Divine Logos as the ground of all being, Maximus diverges from pagan Neoplatonism by rejecting its circularity and supplanting it with an eschatological vision oriented toward a final rest in God, as evidenced by his critique of Origenist henad doctrine. In this Christian alternative to Neoplatonic metaphysics⁷⁸, Maximus' Christocentric cosmology grounds the entire universe in the Logos of God. Through his logoi, God is the paradigmatic, efficient and final cause of all being. A reciprocity between the One and many relates to Maximus' solution to the perspective problem: 'the One gathers everything together, the many are the one'⁷⁹. This participatory, 'cosmic drama'⁸⁰ makes Proclus' attempt to account for the individuality and differentiation of immaterial souls through henads⁸¹ redundant since they do not solve the problem of identity and particularity. Instead, Maximus argues that God creates souls and orders hierarchically through the Logos. Maximus rejects the idea of beings existing eternally⁸². The Neoplatonic circular movement of remaining, procession

⁷⁸ Torstein Tollefsen, "Christocentric Cosmology", in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. by P. Allen and B. Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 313-328 (p. 314).

⁷⁹ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.lo* 7, PG 91, 1081C.

⁸⁰ Tollefsen, 2015. p. 315.

⁸¹ Tim Riggs, "On the Absence of the Henads in the *Liber de Causis*", in *Proclus and his Legacy*, ed. by Daniil Butorac and Danielle Layne (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 289-309 (p. 290).

⁸² Tollefsen, 2008. p. 48.

and return,⁸³ is rejected and replaced with creation *ex nihilo*, followed by procession, and finally rest in God. In Ambiguum 7 and 10, Maximus asserts that "everything that in any way exists has motion⁸⁴," and "nothing moving has come to rest⁸⁵." Only the Divine Immovable, filling all, is the unmoved, transcendent Cause, "infinite and immobile... since that which is boundless has nowhere to which it might move⁸⁶." Perfect stability, therefore, resides only in God, to which all of creation is directed as a final cause. So, for Maximus, creation comes directly from God in time, preserving both divine and human freedom. By anchoring all motion and multiplicity in the singular, unified stillness of the divine Logos, Maximus integrates all perspectives within God's comprehensive vision and resolves the decombination problem. Individual logoi move freely toward their telos in accordance with God's will while remaining rooted in the divine unity. Stability is found in the eschatological culmination of all things in God, 'who are related to Him without being confused with Him⁸⁷' in a theological resolution to the philosophical dilemma of the one and the many.

Maximus' insistence on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* denies recurrence in favour of a linear cosmic narrative oriented toward eschatological consummation. Cooper⁸⁸ outlines how Maximus rejects Neoplatonic emanationism and eternity by affirming that genesis is the ontological ground for created being and movement. Only God is self-causing, uncreated, eternal, immovable, impassible, perfect and possessing

⁸³ Marius Portaru, "Classical Philosophical Influences: Aristotle and Platonism", in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 137–154 (p. 137).

⁸⁴ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 10 PG 91, 1177AB.

⁸⁵ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 7 PG 91, 1069B.

⁸⁶ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 10 pg 91 1184B.

⁸⁷ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 7 PG 91, 1077C.

⁸⁸ Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 88.

qualities of being the ultimate goal. Created beings, subject to movement, aim at God as their end. That is their 'effective activity whose goal is self-perfection⁸⁹.' Passibility is therefore not a deviation or corruption but the natural condition of contingent beings. Maximus asserts a teleological directionality by grounding the universe's being in God's free creative act rather than emanative necessity, where creation progresses toward complete communion with the divine via grace. The Later Neoplatonists, Iamblichus, and Proclus, were keen to account for their polytheistic theology⁹⁰. Their influence on Dionysius the Areopagite and Origen implied a blurring of this participatory process⁹¹ which is only vaguely suggested in Plotinus. As Balthasar points out, it implies a transient world destined to dissolve in a cycle of the godly beings' emission and retreat, expansion and contraction⁹²; rational beings would 'undergo the same changes *ad infinitum*⁹³.' Maximus grounds both the universal and particularised consciousness directly in the divine Logos, allowing unique subjective logoi to unfold teleologically while remaining unified in God's comprehensive vision. Maximus' theology grounds both universal and particularised consciousness directly in the divine Logos, integrating unity and plurality, the one and the many, through a Neoplatonic return to apophatic conception, now oriented teleologically toward divine consummation.

Neither Plotinus' emanative cosmos nor Albahari's witness-consciousness allow for a personal God in loving communion with individual creatures. Maximus grounds universal and particular consciousness directly in the divine Logos, enabling each

⁸⁹ Amb.Io 7 PG 91. 1072B.

⁹⁰ Harold Tarrant, 'Proclus and Alexandrian Philosophy', in Proclus and his Legacy, ed. by David D. Butorac and Danielle A. Layne (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), p. 34.

⁹¹ Wen, C. Y. (2017). Maximus the Confessor & the Problem of Participation. Heythrop Journal, 58(1), 4.

⁹² Balthasar, 2003 p. 61.

⁹³ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 7 PG 91, 1069A.

being's unique perspective through its logos but integrated in perichoretic unity.

Albahari's decombination problem stems from the impossibility of a single cosmic consciousness to simultaneously encompass all distinct individual perspectives. Her solution, the bifurcation of consciousness, situates universal witness-consciousness in the absolute, not particularised, focal perspectives. Plotinus grounds both in the unitary Intellect, which comprehends the totality of Forms as a unified multiplicity, and differentiation occurs across ontological strata. In making divine love and personal integrity central to his metaphysics, Maximus affirms a God who endows each being with a particular logos to guide it toward fulfilment in unity with the Creator. In Ambiguum 10, we see a strong echo of Plotinus' stratified, hierarchical consciousness grounded in a loving God, when Maximus describes the soul as having 'three general movements that converge into one: movement according to intellect, according to reason, and according to sensation⁹⁴.' He explains that the intellect circles God in simple, inexplicable contemplation, that reason aligns with innate principles of cognition, allowing the soul to acquire intelligible knowledge, that sensation engages the external, material realm impressionistically⁹⁵. Maximus does not view these psychic strata as wholly discrete but as integrated movements converging in the soul's essential inclination toward the divine Logos, in a hierarchical continuum. All things have their being from God, participating in Him in a manner proportionate to its being. He deduces from this the grounding of the intellective and rational being that 'is and is called a portion of God⁹⁶.' The Godhead is the ultimate reality with its absolute unity, simplicity and all-inclusiveness, and all things are grounded ontologically as participation in God.

⁹⁴ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 10, PG 91, 1112D.

⁹⁵ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 10, PG 91, 1113A.

⁹⁶ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 7, PG 91, 1080B.

As Marius Portaru⁹⁷ elucidates, this participation is gradual, aligning with Maximus' hierarchical model of consciousness. Maximus' stratified, hierarchical model of consciousness posits that universal and particularised consciousness are rooted directly in the divine Logos. This enables individualised logoi to express unique creaturely perspectives, yet integrated through participation in the Logos, which Portaru describes as a gradual process. This gradual participation parallels Maximus' view of a continuum of consciousness, from sensation to reason to pure intellect unified in the Logos. In lower, first degree, levels of participation there is human activity and duality between object and subject. At a higher level, human activity decreases and divine activity increases, so 'according to Maximus, man's passivity... is total⁹⁸'. The highest level is complete unity of subject and object in God, with no duality or human activity. Man is 'deified by participation in God⁹⁹'.

6. Unity and Participation

Drawing on this intuition of unity-in-plurality, Maximus develops a participatory cosmology in which the logoi of creatures derive their coherence from and reflect their grounding in the Logos, unifying individual logoi in relation to itself through mystical apprehension of first principles. This intuition is foreshadowed in Plotinus' writings on the realm of Forms. In Ennead IV, Plotinus discusses the difference between our intellect's discursive grasp of intelligibles against the immediate intuition of Intellect. He

⁹⁷ Marius Portaru, 'Gradual Participation according to St Maximus the Confessor', in *Studia Patristica* LXVIII (2013), 281-293.

⁹⁸ Portaru, 2013 p. 290.

⁹⁹ Portaru, 2013 p. 291.

denies that Intellect employs division to distinguish Forms, 'since it is all together in actuality¹⁰⁰, ' that is, actualised in their identity with Intellect. He posits that Intellect grasps the totality of its contents in actuality, without any reasoning or inference that would isolate parts from the whole, 'the soul coming to have immediate intuition of things all at once.' Plotinus makes an analogy with our perception of a face, a complex object with multiple features like eyes, nose, etc¹⁰¹. However, when one sees a face, one sees a unified perception of a complex whole, not a range of discrete features. Likewise, our multifaceted consciousness, comprising awareness, intentionality, attention, cognition, memory, sensation, metacognition, etc. are held together, grounded in and deriving coherence from the unifying Logos. D.M. Hutchinson¹⁰² argues that Plotinus must hold there to be a unifying centre, the sensitive soul present wholly in all body parts, that unifies these perceptions, allowing a face immediately to be recognised as a unified whole without stepwise reasoning. For Plotinus, contemplating intelligibles is like perceiving a face, involving multiple intellections of a complex object presented as a single unified act, immediate and without discursive inference. Such contemplation "involves a recognition that is nested in a logical hierarchy¹⁰³, 'leading one to the Forms that are logically prior or posterior to it. Intellect apprehends the Forms simultaneously and collectively, all together and all at once.

In his book *On the Ecclesiastical Mystagogy*, Maximus makes a strikingly similar point about how discursive thought cedes to intuited oneness through contemplation of first principles. Our complex consciousness exists as a unified expression of the divine

¹⁰⁰ Plotinus: *Ennead* IV.4.1.

¹⁰¹ Plotinus, *Ennead* IV.7.6.

¹⁰² Hutchinson, 2018 p. 28.

¹⁰³ Hutchinson, 2018 p. 29.

Logos. Through His power, God creates and sustains all things, defining their boundaries and maintaining the coherence of the universe, whose diverse elements are united by their relationship with God, converging into a unity. In both *Ambiguum* 7¹⁰⁴ and the *Mystagogy*¹⁰⁵, Maximus uses the example of the sun and the stars to demonstrate the continuation of individual identity and free will in God. The relationship with God 'nullifies and covers over all individual relationships that are contemplated according to the nature of each of the things that are... just as the totality itself comes into view rather than its parts and the cause of the totality itself comes into view rather than the totality¹⁰⁶.' The relationships are neither destroyed nor corrupted by this but are surpassed. In this way, the totality of the parts and the totality itself shine together, but the effects of the whole outshining the parts. So that when a part stands in relation to the whole, its quality is derived from the whole¹⁰⁷. For Maximus, the *logoi* of individual creatures derive from and reflect the one divine Logos. Contemplation leads beyond differentiating logic to a unifying intuition of the ground of being, not dissimilar to the way Plotinus saw individual intellects participating in Intellect. This vision points towards a cosmopsychist unifying relationship with God, with God binding the intelligible and sensible realms, bringing differentiation into a shared identity and movement.

¹⁰⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.lo* 7 1077A.

¹⁰⁵ Saint Maximus the Confessor, *On the Ecclesiastical Mystagogy: A Theological Vision of the Liturgy*, trans. by Peter A. Chamberas, *Popular Patristics Series*, 59 (London: SPCK Publishing, 2020), p.52.

¹⁰⁶ Maximus the Confessor, 2020 p.52.

¹⁰⁷ Maximus the Confessor, 2020 p.52.

7. The Mediating Role of Humanity: Interior Synthesis and the Logos

If we can tentatively suggest a cosmopsychist vision in Maximus, it would be in the assertion that our consciousness is not isolated or fragmented but finds its true home in the Logos, bound together with all creation. The individual distinctions that Albahari¹⁰⁸ found impossible to resolve with the universal consciousness maintain their coherence, deriving their quality from their relation to the whole. For Maximus, our consciousness both participates in and reflects the singular ground of the Logos, much as the Plotinian intellect participates in divine Intellect. Instead of becoming lost or forever isolated from the universal, the Logos/logoi doctrine demonstrates how the individual may be fully expressed within the universal. Diverse creatures are unified in relationship to the Logos, submerging differences into an overarching oneness.

Maximus shows how our particular consciousness can be fully expressed within universal consciousness by submerging differentiation into an overarching unity with the Logos. Maximus sketches the cosmos interpenetrating with divine unity - God relates as soul to body, binding creation in a shared psychic movement and existence. Our unique mental perspectives are upheld as irreducible while still converging in unity through the divine Logos in whom we live, move and have our being. The logoi define a creature's limits in 'an identity of movement and existence that is indistinguishable and without confusion¹⁰⁹.' But this diversity converges in the unifying Logos, upheld as an irreducible interpenetrating unity-in-plurality, 'for only God alone who is *all things in all* and who is boundless measure above all will be seen by the pure in their understanding.'

¹⁰⁸ Albahari, 2019 p.122.

¹⁰⁹ Maximus the Confessor, 2020 p.51.

As the ontological microcosm uniting all divisions in creation, Maximus conceives man as the mediator between realms who relates all things through interior synthesis. The divine Logos designed human nature for this mediating purpose, standing between all dualities. God made man as the best of his creatures, to stand between all divisions of being: uncreated/created, intelligible/sensible, heaven/earth, male/female, etc.¹¹⁰, and to draw them together as “a most capacious workshop containing all things¹¹¹.” Thus, man was created a mediator, joining the finite parts of creation and honouring God as the infinite one as his nature, to interiorly unite dualities and divisions between created things. Man's interior intellect connects with the divine principles or logoi underlying each particular item, allowing synthesis through contemplation of first principles. Through this synthesis, man fulfils his purpose of drawing together parts of creation by relating them to their divine sources in the Logos. Intellect creatively unites dualities and opposites at different levels corresponding to its capacity. However, man forgot his nature and put himself before his duty, forgetting God as the source and goal of creation. God, taking human form in Christ, shows man how to fulfil his duty to connect all creation. So the divine Logos may be conceived as a universal mediating between realms and uniting finite with infinite¹¹², ‘appearing in his humanity before the face of God the Father, uniting the created and the uncreated¹¹³.’

This model defines the unique purpose of mankind in mediating between the created and uncreated realms. In underlying all particular things: substances, natures,

¹¹⁰ Andrew Louth, ‘The Liturgical Mystery’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, ed. by Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 125-138 (p. 138).

¹¹¹ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 42 1305B.

¹¹² Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 17, PG P1. 1228D.

¹¹³ Louth, 2020 p. 140.

species, forms, potentials, actualities, and passivities, the Logos also mediates between them, allowing the thinking mind to connect with its object of thought. This brings about a convergence and integration of dualities so that nothing is separate from this unifying relation. According to Balthasar¹¹⁴, this unity between two extremes (the universal principle and a particular entity) arises, not through synthesis, but through a constant interpenetration and interaction between them. The living forces of intellect engage in a creative synthesis, corresponding to different levels of being and intellect: higher levels of intellect having greater capacity for synthesis. Balthasar argues that the interior nature of this process allows it to move beyond abstract notions of one and many to develop a meaningful and nuanced concept of universality with the Logos as the active mediating principle that unifies diversity through interior synthesis. The interior nature of this process allows it to move beyond abstract notions of one and many to develop a concept of universality with the Logos as the active mediating principle that unifies diversity through interior synthesis. However, knowing particulars requires a subject/object relationality. All created things stand in relationship. There is polarity and tension between subjects and objects, thinkers and thoughts, movers and things moved, etc.¹¹⁵ Through this interior process of creative synthesis, man fulfils his unique role as mediator in relating all things to their divine principles or logoi in the Logos.

Being infinite and uncreated, God transcends all relativity and synthesis between subject and object. Maximus argues that knowledge of God requires a different apprehension beyond finite knowledge and its inherent limitations. God can neither participate in relatedness, be an object of knowledge, nor know in a creaturely way.

¹¹⁴ Balthasar, 2003) p. 165-6.

¹¹⁵ Balthasar, 2003 p. 166.

'Every thought consists in those thinking and things thought, but God belongs neither to those thinking nor to things thought for he is beyond these'¹¹⁶. Since there is no relatedness between the creature as subject and God as object, knowledge of God cannot be achieved objectively but must be grasped in a manner that goes beyond regular knowledge. Because subject and object knowledge is limited, any synthesis of the two through thinking is also limited. Sense knowledge unites the subject of sensation and its object, creating an image, but the image created by the imagination goes beyond itself to a higher level of knowing. There is, then, a 'remainder'¹¹⁷: the non-identity of subject and object. This remainder persists despite their identity in forming images/thoughts, so the subject can never fully grasp the object exhaustively. Thus, God's knowledge must differ from our finite, limited knowledge that requires a distinct subject and object. Transcendental knowledge begins with this excess of object that escapes the subject's grasp. According to Balthasar, the remainder requires a kind of faith, pointing towards what lies beyond consciousness. There is an element of trust in the absolute object revealing itself. This faith is not grounded in the object but in the incomprehensible remainder that makes itself felt, propelling thought beyond what can be proved by reason. The soul, transcending all particular thoughts, objects, and thinking, finds nothing remaining to think about. It comes to rest beyond all relativities in direct apprehension of the absolute. This faith-driven quest for the absolute is praxis-oriented; it becomes self-validating in transcending rational limitations. In this 'assent of the soul,' there is a loss of independence, which Balthasar characterises in

¹¹⁶ St Maximus the Confessor, *Two Hundred Chapters On Theology*: St. Maximus the Confessor, trans. by Luis Joshua Salas (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2022), p. 107.

¹¹⁷ Balthasar, 2003 p. 167.

dynamic terms as ‘the continuing universalisation of the knowing mind until it reaches the full dimensions of the world’s idea¹¹⁸.’

Maximus uses a metaphor of food for this synthesis of knowledge¹¹⁹. In sensibles, there is unidirectional assimilation of the object's intelligible content (its logos) by the subject. And there is a sense of destruction: the sacrifice and destruction of objective independence. However, between minds consumption may not happen in the same way, since minds involve a different kind of synthesis through interpenetration. Indifferent opposition between subject and object is terminated, and a two-way interpenetrating synthesis destroys the object's independence. The knowing mind and the known mind are taken up into a shared self-consciousness through their mutual interpenetration. Through a transcendent apprehension that surpasses finite knowledge, the soul moves beyond all opposition and relativity to come to rest in the direct and unmediated experience of the divine.

It is a simple interrelationship between two minds that Balthasar considers here. However, Maximus' cosmology also implies an interconnectedness of all human consciousness through the sharing of logoi in a mutual alignment towards the divine Logos. The implication, which Balthasar does not explore, is that our meaning-sharing lives take place in a network of billions of souls, where every person engages in an interpenetrating synthesis of minds. This interconnectedness for Maximus goes beyond a simple exchange of information, as we might understand in the twenty-first century. The logoi are dynamic participations in the Logos, not mere static facts; they have an

¹¹⁸ Balthasar, 2003 p. 168.

¹¹⁹ Balthasar, 2003 p. 168-9.

energaic, experiential dimension. Sharing logoi must then be the sharing in the creative and deifying activity of the Logos. The co-consumed knowing unifies consciousness and aligns it to a common meaning. But the alignment is mutual: a co-creative synthesis, not the transmitting data, but the interweaving of logoi into a tapestry of significance that reflects the Logos. Each person uniquely contributes threads spun out of his or her own perspective. But it is in their alignment that shared meaning expands. The informational aspect enables precision and clarity, but consciousness intuitively synthesises meanings into new wholes. In this view, consciousness circulates logoi not as mere facts but as invitations to share in crafting a fuller understanding of reality as it continuously unfolds. The exchange of information serves but does not exhaust the creative alignment of consciousness with its infinite source. Maximus sees an interplay between the logoi of individual subjects and the divine Logos. This suggests a convergence of human and divine activity: human beings participating in the *energeia* of the One, which is the source and goal of all logoi. In a continuous circulation and synthesis of logoi, human consciousness aligns with and contributes to an unfolding cosmic consciousness, allowing created minds to participate in the infinite creativity of the divine Logos.

8. Deification and Man's Role in the Cosmos

The cosmic interpenetration of divine and human consciousness suggests a role and purpose for mankind. We are called to attain the unity and sharedness we can only find in alignment with the Logos. This goal is incomplete without deification, or *theosis*.

Humanity is called to achieve the unifying telos of theosis, where diverse subjects participate in shared divine life while remaining uniquely themselves. Through deification, man may be transformed in nature while retaining his essence. Importantly, as Jean-Claude Larchet¹²⁰ argues, Maximus sees deification as transforming not the logos or essential definition of human nature but the tropos - the mode, manner, or way of being; God “will be to the soul, as it were, what the soul is to the body,... so that the soul will receive immutability and the body immortality. In this way, man as a whole will be divinised, being made God by the grace of God who became man. Man will remain wholly man in soul and body, owing to his nature, but will become wholly God in soul and body owing to the grace and the splendour of the blessed glory of God¹²¹.’ This distinction matters in light of the cosmic interpenetration and circulation of logoi. The logoi represent the essential definitions that enable beings to relate meaningfully, while the tropoi represent the modes of actualising those definitions¹²². In transforming the human tropos, deification enables humanity to align its mode of existence with the divine without collapsing the distinctiveness of human nature. In this way, man gains a new mode of existence, becoming more like God and ultimately united with God in the consummate interpenetrating synthesis embodied by Christ. Maximus affirms that deification means a complete transformation whereby deified human beings, whilst remaining essentially unchanged, ecstatically transcend the limits of nature and unite with God to be ‘enveloped and penetrated by him in accordance with the divine energy which has come to them¹²³,’ effectively becoming God.

¹²⁰ Jean-Claude Larchet, ‘The Mode of Deification’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 353.

¹²¹ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 7 PG 91 1088C.

¹²² Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 42, PG 91 1341D.

¹²³ Larchet, 2015 p. 347.

This is not merely a moral or intentional change; it occurs by grace, not from human nature but from divine operation¹²⁴. This is fundamentally dependent on the deification of human nature in the person of the incarnate Word¹²⁵ through the perichoresis of the divine and human natures within Christ's hypostatic union. The two natures of Christ become profoundly altered while remaining essentially unchanged. Christ operates as a human being in a way that exceeds human nature, 'in a manner beyond man... according to a supreme union involving no change, showing that the human energy is conjoined with the divine power¹²⁶'. Christ's incarnation elevated human nature and deified it, giving humankind the potential to be deified and participate in divine life. The Word's uniting of divine and human tropoi represents the consummate interpenetrating synthesis in Balthasar's language. Human nature returns to its source through this union, taken up into transcendent divine life. Deification thus exemplifies the ultimate reintegration Balthasar saw as the teleological fulfilment of creation.

Theosis, according to Maximus, is the reciprocal process by which humanity, through willing cooperation and divine grace¹²⁷, is deified and unified with the Divine. The soul's reintegration with the divine mind, its eternal archetype and source, is strongly Neoplatonic. Human souls intrinsically yearn for this mystical reunion. 'What could be more desirable to those who are worthy of it than divinisation?' says Maximus, that 'God is united with those who have become Gods¹²⁸.' The power comes from God, but is placed in human hands: "He is God and the source of all natural and virtuous life.

¹²⁴ Larchet, 2015 p. 349.

¹²⁵ Larchet, 2015 p. 344.

¹²⁶ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Th 5, PG 91 1053D.

¹²⁷ Elena Vishnevskaya, 'Divinisation and Spiritual Progress in Maximus the Confessor', in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* Volume 1, ed. by Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2006), p. 134.

¹²⁸ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.lo 7. PG 91 1088C.

And ... in all human beings God has placed the same power that leads to salvation¹²⁹.'

Yet, as Ivanovic points out, this is a reciprocal process tied with incarnation: the Logos's condescension is matched by man's ascension, or 'as much as God becomes human, that much man becomes God¹³⁰.' Maximus calls this a 'beautiful exchange' that renders God man because of the divinisation of man¹³¹.' Samuel Korb¹³² here identifies the idea of universal incarnation being introduced: God becoming incarnate, not through Christ's historical incarnation, but God mystically taking on human flesh and nature through the deification of each human person. Through deification, the Creator is received anthropocentrically into creation: God 'coming to reside through humanity in all things proportionally, and that all things, separated from each other according to nature, might come to unity¹³³.' This is not to say that there is confusion in this union. God and man remain God and man, ontologically distinct and infinitely separate¹³⁴. As Tollefsen explains, for Maximus, the deified man possesses the fullness of divine grace in participation. God's activity becomes the moving force within him. His natural mode of activity becomes a divine mode, God shining through him, body and soul. In this way, deified humanity acts as a vessel for the divine essence to manifest supernaturally.

Salvation is available to all: 'In all human beings God has placed the same power that leads naturally to salvation, so that anyone who wishes is able to lay claim to divine grace¹³⁵.' In Ambiguum 48¹³⁶ Maximus reiterates God's promise to recognise his own,

¹²⁹ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 10, PG 91. 1144A.

¹³⁰ Ivanovic, 2019 p. 182.

¹³¹ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 7, PG 91. 1084C.

¹³² Samuel Korb, 'Whole God and whole man: Deification as incarnation in Maximus the Confessor', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 75.4 (2022), 310.

¹³³ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 7, PG 91. 1092C,

¹³⁴ Tollefsen, 2008. p. 214.

¹³⁵ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 10, PG 91 1144A.

¹³⁶ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 48, PG91 1361B-1364C.

responding to the insatiable longing instilled in man for a relationship with his Creator and the reciprocation that proceeds from that. Nevertheless, although deification is an act of 'divine love expressed through grace'¹³⁷, man's voluntary cooperation is also essential. 'The Word of God... always raises up those who follow Him in their practice and contemplation.' Maximus emphasises faith as integral to the process of deification. This echoes Plotinus's first Ennead¹³⁸; deification is portrayed as requiring both human preparation and divine grace. Plotinus does not allow for grace except indirectly, framing procession in terms of 'works of nature rather than works of art'¹³⁹; it is spontaneous, the One being beyond all consciousness. Nevertheless Plotinus does see a reciprocity between ourselves and the One. Turning away from attachment to the material realm prepares the soul to receive enlightenment from the divine. Plotinus figuratively depicts this process as 'flight' toward the Fatherland. This is a human act of 'fleeing'¹⁴⁰ towards 'The Father.' The soul must be receptive to the divine's beneficent nature, meaning there is a necessity for both willing human participation and divinely beneficence. The Plotinian One is 'very love'¹⁴¹. Love is the driving force of the soul's return to the One: the ultimate goal of all existence. However, this love is not a conscious act of the One¹⁴², but, what Arnou calls '*une bonte sans amour*'¹⁴³. So, where love is the desire for union with the good and the beautiful – identical with the One¹⁴⁴ – for Plotinus, the return of the soul to the One, is very much the responsibility of the

¹³⁷ Vishnevskaya, 2006 p. 137.

¹³⁸ Plotinus: Ennead I.6.8.

¹³⁹ Jean Trouillard, *La Procession plotinienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), p. 73.

¹⁴⁰ Plotinus, Ennead I.6.8.

¹⁴¹ Plotinus, Ennead VI.8.15.

¹⁴² John M. Rist, *Eros and Psyche: Studies in Plato, Plotinus, and Origen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p.76.

¹⁴³ René Arnou, *Le désir de Dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1921), p. 226.

¹⁴⁴ Plotinus, Ennead VI.9.9.

individual, and achieved through self-purification and ascent through the levels of being. In Christianity, Plotinus' reciprocal movement is almost entirely shifted towards the concept of grace, which places God's love, his unmerited favour, and his gracious descending to creation at the centre of the salvific action. Christianity teaches that God is a personal being who has saved humanity from sin and death through Jesus Christ, and who invites the soul to repent, trust in him, and follow his commandments. Salvation is ultimately a gift of grace from God.

Neoplatonism holds the transcendent source and ultimate final cause of all being in the One, who alone possesses being and impassibility. For Maximus, God is strongly identified with this conception of the One: 'impassable... unique, infinite and uncircumscribed... in no way subject to the movement of the passions¹⁴⁵'. He is not 'a first principle, nor an intermediate state, nor an end¹⁴⁶.' Instead, he encompasses all things 'in himself in every way the totality of what being is¹⁴⁷,' not in a pantheistic way, but 'insofar as he is active, but not passive¹⁴⁸.' Despite the utterness of His transcendence, Maximus insists on a reciprocal closeness between God and deified human beings: 'which makes man God on account of the deification of man, and makes God man on account of the humanisation of God¹⁴⁹.' Adam Cooper places this concept at the heart of Maximus' dynamic cosmological and anthropological ontology, which synthesises patristic theology and the Neoplatonic doctrine of participation¹⁵⁰. While Plotinus' ontology identifies a transcendent and impersonal One, Maximus' essentially

¹⁴⁵ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 7 PG 91, 1072C.

¹⁴⁶ Maximus the Confessor, 2022 p. 43.

¹⁴⁷ Maximus the Confessor, 2022 p. 47.

¹⁴⁸ Maximus the Confessor, 2022 p. 49.

¹⁴⁹ Maximus the Confessor, Amb.Io 7 PG 91, 1084C.

¹⁵⁰ Cooper, p. 74.

Neoplatonic schema overlays a personal and relational aspect while retaining God's absolute transcendence. The Logos is not merely an abstract first principle, but Christ himself who, through his incarnation, seeks reciprocal closeness with creatures made for deification. Grounding Neoplatonic metaphysics in the incarnate person of Christ allows Maximus to transform Plotinus' ontology into a dynamic, teleological movement powered by love and oriented toward theosis.

That notion that all things are destined for unification within the one consciousness is at the heart of Maximus' doctrine of deification. The One divine Logos proceeds outward to generate the multiplicity of all created beings, each unified in the One Logos, returning to the One source in a providentially guided way¹⁵¹. Each being is called upon to freely fulfil its purpose of creation 'in accordance with the logos of well-being that pre-exists in God¹⁵².' In this way, creatures come to live 'in God in accordance with the logos of eternal [well] being,' attaining everlasting union with God, their infinite source and telos. This triadic structure of being (creation), well-being (movement) and eternal well-being (rest) lays down an 'ontological structure of being, from its creation to its deification¹⁵³.' This movement, according to Maximus, establishes man as 'a "portion of God" insofar as he is God, owing to the logos of his eternal being that is in God¹⁵⁴.' Deification does not, then, occur all at once, but unfolds progressively over time.

¹⁵¹ Filip Ivanovic, *Desiring the Beautiful: The Erotic-Aesthetic Dimension of Deification in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), p. 161.

¹⁵² Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.Io 7*, PG 91, 1084B.

¹⁵³ Ivanovic, 2019 p. 161.

¹⁵⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.Io 7*, PG 91, 1084C.

Moreover, it is a process that rests on our cooperation with God, dependent on grace, but requiring voluntary effort on the creature's part. Being is given as an act of grace, but well-being requires synergy between divine grace and creaturely action before eternal well-being is the endless rest in God. For Maximus, transcendence comes through synthesising finite and infinite, particulars and universals, a pathway to deification, which aligns with the movement from being towards well-being. Eternal well-being comes through total union with God, the ultimate synthesis of creature and Creator. This does appear to open the way to a sort of universalism. David Bentley Hart agrees, stating that Maximus' 'entire system of theology seems [to him] to leave no room for any other conclusion¹⁵⁵.' Maximus' argument for creation *ex nihilo* is eschatological; creation moves towards a union with God, a goal present from the beginning, but it will only be fully realised at the end of time¹⁵⁶. Salvation is not just about the individual soul, but about the whole of creation, bringing everything back to its original unity¹⁵⁷.

While deification relies on divine grace, Maximus emphasises the critical role of human participation through proper exercise of the will, which enables the fulfilment of our telos when aligned to God. We are portions of God if, and only if, we follow wisdom and reason. To act irrationally means to act contrary to one's *logos*: to abandon God. Maximus explains that 'every rational nature is created in the image of God, but only the

¹⁵⁵ David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 66.

¹⁵⁶ Bentley Hart, 2019 p. 68.

¹⁵⁷ P. Yu. Malkov, 'Uchenie prep. Maksima Ispovednika ob obraze i podobii Bozhikh v cheloveke: sinergijnyj aspekt' ['The Teaching of St Maximus the Confessor on the Image and Likeness of God in Humans: The Synergistic Aspect'], *Vestnik PSTGU. Seriya I: Bogoslovie. Filosofiya. Religiovedenie*, 71 (2017), 11-29 (p. 15).

good and the wise are made in his likeness¹⁵⁸.’ Man may freely suppress that desire through his will. For Maximus, human will is rational and ethical, following a process of inclination, deliberation, judgment, and choice¹⁵⁹. Inclination or disposition towards something corresponds to the gnostic aspect, or mindset, as Raymond Laird¹⁶⁰ translates it, is the appetite of the will that predisposes us towards certain choices. This mindset permits deliberation about options and means. It is the faculty of choice and action, either in harmony or conflict with God, resulting in choice actualising the will. Although will is a natural faculty, ‘the personal employment of the will’ (*tropos*) determines our movement from being to well-being: the state of harmony and happiness that connects us with the eternal. By focusing on well-being, the gnostic will can avoid being corrupted by remaining united with the logos of nature – the rational and moral order implanted in human beings at creation. In the ideal state, the gnostic will seeks only real goods grounded in God. However, after the Fall, the gnostic will became corrupted and distorted by sin and started to pursue false good, introducing division and struggle within the gnostic will. Evil is not a natural substance for Maximus, but the result of an irrational choice. This choice implies free will: a capacity to act in a contrary direction, away from well-being, towards evil. As Malkov suggests, the restoration of the gnostic will coincide with its erasure once the created hypostasis becomes ‘integrated in natural virtue¹⁶¹.’

¹⁵⁸ Ivanovic, 2019 p. 166.

¹⁵⁹ Ivanovic, 2019 p. 167.

¹⁶⁰ Raymond J. Laird, ‘Mindset (γνώμη) in John Chrysostom’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 195.

¹⁶¹ Malkov, 2017 p. 15

Maximus argues that deviance cannot arise from the soul's immutable essence, but is a misdirected movement of the gnostic will: a failure to live up to the soul's natural perfection in pursuit of the Good¹⁶². Yet he maintains that the logos of human nature enables a perpetual movement towards God. Maximus makes human perfection possible by setting the distinction between man's gnostic will and his logos of nature. According to Paul M. Blowers' analysis¹⁶³ Maximus believes that all moral activity directed towards the good stems from the soul's natural will. This will, remaining intact within humans despite their deviations from the good, propels them toward God. Maximus' perspective on the eschatological stability of the soul is tightly connected to his views on its perpetual moral progress. The soul's eternal circular movement around the Divine emanates from the essence of the soul as a constitutive actuality. Therefore, Maximus contends that the final resting state (stasis) of the soul's moral journey must be accomplished in God Himself. In this way, Blowers sees Maximus as modifying Gregory of Nyssa's concept of never-ending moral progress in a 'piece of Neoplatonic logic'¹⁶⁴ by asserting that the soul's moral development culminates in a definitive and immutable stability in the Divine. Maximus reconciles the soul's endless striving toward God with an eschatological stability. The finite soul constantly strives for a state of fixed conversion to the infinite God, which cannot be reached. Nevertheless, the soul finds a state of "moving repose," fixed in its desire for God, always striving towards him, continually drawing closer to God, in a paradox of eternal progress and final rest.

¹⁶² Maximus the Confessor, Letter 6: To Jordanes (or John the Sophist, or Archbishop John), on 'The Soul is Incorporeal', *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. by J.-P. Migne, 161 vols (Paris: Migne, 1857–66), 91C-432AB (CPG 7699.6).

¹⁶³ Paul M. Blowers, 'Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of "Perpetual Progress"', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 46.2 (1992), p. 157.

¹⁶⁴ Blowers, 1992 p.164.

For Maximus, humanity's original state of integrity exemplifies the order that was fractured by the Fall and the introduction of inauthentic autonomy. Restoration, through willing alignment with the Divine Logos, is the return to authentic freedom and spiritual delight that was, in Marin Bugiulescu's words, 'the real mode of existence, reason, conscience and freedom, increasingly centred on the divine¹⁶⁵.' This primal state was essentially theonomy: man was created in the image of God, 'in ontological definition, the state was good¹⁶⁶.' Primordial sin introduced corruption, sin and mortality and resulted in humanity's fettering by passion, derailing its trajectory towards divine communion, supplanting theonomy with autonomy as the human condition. Maximus argues that through divine grace and the Holy Spirit, human free will can voluntarily subject itself to God's will. This willing surrender of our free will leads to a union with God, whereby we become "God by divinisation ¹⁶⁷" and delight more in God's will than our own. Man's innate potential for self-directed motion involves essential movement of the will according to reason. This rational movement requires free will: the ability to choose. So, willing must be part of man's essential nature. This being the case, humans must naturally incline to will according to the divine Logos.

Maximus states that as we participate in God through contemplation of his infinite beauty, our willful movements cease as we find ultimate rest and satisfaction in him, 'In so far as we are able we will participate without being restricted.. all our actions and every sublime thought will tend eagerly towards that end¹⁶⁸.' Freedom, then, is to align

¹⁶⁵ Marin Bugiulescu, 'The Consequences of the Sin at the Level of Human Mind, Will and Sentiment and of Freedom and Consciousness', *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa*, 63.2 (2018), 5-18 p.4.

¹⁶⁶ Bugiulescu, 2018 p.6.

¹⁶⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.lo 7 1076C*.

¹⁶⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.lo 7 1076D*.

with God's intentions, so the human self is authentically free only insofar as it aligns with the divine will. Genuine autonomy, therefore, is really theonomy, willing and acting in accordance with God and 'sin is an illusion of existence'¹⁶⁹. As Alexandru-Corneliu Arion says, Christian freedom 'is based on the new ontology of grace, which is revealed in Christ'¹⁷⁰. It is a participated theonomy. Arion argues that humans are stamped with a guiding image of divine wisdom, meaning that human existence involves a search towards authentic existence. Autonomy, problematic human will, cuts one off from this inner divinity. Still, a will aligned with God enjoys true freedom, which is a state of knowing the good, belonging to both God and humans: the willing alignment of our logos with the divine Logos that marked our original condition of integrity before the Fall.

For Maximus, deification is located within the Church: the sacrament through which believers connect to the deifying energies of Christ in a process of theosis encompassing the entire cosmos. As John McGuckin points out, the Church may be understood, and indeed understands itself, to be 'fundamentally a mystery (*mysterion*), an energy'¹⁷¹ or sacrament of Christ's risen presence in the world through the Spirit. It is where salvation occurs through the Spirit's activity, signifying the glory of the risen Christ, his ongoing grace and presence in history. Thus it is to be understood transcendentally, only partially embodied in any historical place, not 'primarily an association of people... who align themselves with Jesus' values'¹⁷², but a transcendent reality sharing the mystical character of Christ himself. This universal conception of the

¹⁶⁹ Bugiulescu, 2018 p.9.

¹⁷⁰ Alexandru-Corneliu Arion, 'Concept of Freedom in Philosophy and in Orthodox Christian Theology', International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on the Dialogue between Sciences & Arts, Religion & Education, 3 (2019), 23-32 pp. 6-7.

¹⁷¹ McGuckin, 2020 p. 15,

¹⁷² McGuckin, 2020 p. 15.

Church aligns with Maximus' theonomy: the human will conforming to God's will reflects the restoration of humanity's authentic freedom. The communion of angels, saints and believers across time and space submit to its mysterial power, representing theosis: voluntary participation in the divine plan and alignment with the cosmic Logos. Such a grounding of universal and particularised consciousness in the Logos means that all consciousness, whether individual or collective, is ultimately rooted in God. The sacramental power of the Church facilitates the alignment of human consciousness with the divine consciousness, resulting in a mutual interpenetration of created and uncreated consciousness. For Maximus, the Church is, in Larchet's words, 'the milieu where one attains union with God, the place where deification is effected¹⁷³.' If it is in the church that salvation occurs through the Spirit's activity, that salvation is through theosis. The unity of all people in God represents the communal salvation of humanity, culminating in deified human beings ecstatically transcending finite limitations to be enveloped and penetrated by the divine energy and finding rest in eternal-being in the Divine Logos. It is a salvation that depends on individual transformation only insofar as each individual is called towards God through his innate desire to live in a loving relationship with his creator. The fulfilment of this unity resides in the theonomy that springs from the alignment with the Divine Logos of the entire church: all humanity.

The Church manifests the body of Christ through its liturgy as, in Adam Cooper's words, 'the *locus deificandi*: the place in which all creation reaches its divinely appointed goal of union with God in Christ¹⁷⁴.' Crucially, Maximus sees the eucharistic liturgy as symbolic of the spiritual life, the rituals and ceremonies revealing deeper truths about

¹⁷³ Cooper, 2005 p. 166.

¹⁷⁴ Cooper, 2005 p. 168.

the process of deification. Cooper¹⁷⁵ argues for the importance of liturgy's corporeal, communal, and spatial aspects in Maximus' thinking. Liturgical worship is the site for divinisation where we participate physically, connecting bodily experience to divine mystery. Thus, bodily participation is at the heart of the liturgy in the individual physical body and the communal body of the church¹⁷⁶. The Eucharist, as the supreme sacrament of the Church, enacts the union of the individual and the communal body with the Divine Logos, who mediates between the human and divine realms; 'Christ's priestly mediation between God and man, heaven and earth, and the Church's fulfilment of the same as his deified body¹⁷⁷.' Maximus grounds Man's spiritual ascent in the tangible actions of communal worship.

As the drama of deification approaches its culmination, the relationship between the individual and the Church, the Church and the body of Christ becomes central to Maximus' mystical theology¹⁷⁸. The symbolic parallels¹⁷⁹ between man and the Church reflect that man is also a 'mystical Church¹⁸⁰'. For Ivanovic, this represents the combination of practical philosophy (body/nave), natural contemplation (soul/sanctuary) and the mind/altar manifesting mystical theology: 'deification and life in God¹⁸¹'. Church and man image each other in their being. Andrew Louth argues these are real and 'unmistakably ontological¹⁸²' parallels, not merely imaginative ones. Liturgical ritual resonates throughout creation: 'the physical universe, human beings, and the human

¹⁷⁵ Cooper, 2005 p. 165.

¹⁷⁶ Mark Searle, 'Ritual', in Cheslyn Jones et al. (eds.), *The Study of the Liturgy*, 2nd rev. edn. (London: SPCK; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 56.

¹⁷⁷ Cooper, 2005 p. 168.

¹⁷⁸ Ivanovic, 2019 p. 202-3.

¹⁷⁹ Maximus the Confessor, 2020 p.58.

¹⁸⁰ Maximus the Confessor, 2020 p.58.

¹⁸¹ Ivanovic, 2019 p. 202-3.

¹⁸² Louth, 2020 p. 138.

soul¹⁸³.' The Church becomes image and participation of the body of Christ: both human and divine. Maximus sees Eucharist as a depiction of Christ's ascension and restoration of all things, taking place beyond the Second Coming. In the liturgy, Christ is the one 'who is coming'; his Kingdom is anticipated. Christian life does not just seek God, but God seeks and finds us and draws us into his Kingdom. Thus in Eucharist we encounter the Holy One who makes us holy, transforming us into what we receive: Christ himself. In the liturgy, we feel our way into a divine mystery that transcends time and unites us to Christ, drawing us into the restoration of all things he has accomplished. And since incarnation and deification are reciprocal, the Church is the body that brings about deification¹⁸⁴, gathering its members into communion with each other and God. Just as God unites different natures without confusing them, so the Church brings together the faithful, regardless of differences in language, race and customs¹⁸⁵, celebrating mysteries of human salvation, bringing to light the grace of adoption and making us perfect in Christ. "Making each of us who conducts himself worthily as best he can in Christ, it brings to light the grace of adoption which was given through holy baptism in the Holy Spirit and which makes us perfect in Christ¹⁸⁶." As the fundamental sacrament and institution that brings about deification, gathering all into communion, the Church manifests the body of Christ. It fulfils Maximus' vision of all creation achieving its telos of union with God.

¹⁸³ Louth, 2020 p. 136.

¹⁸⁴ Ivanovic, 2019 p. 202-3.

¹⁸⁵ Maximus the Confessor, 2020 p.53.

¹⁸⁶ Maximus the Confessor, 2020 p.96.

9. Conclusion

This dissertation arose from recent developments within contemporary debates surrounding the philosophy of mind, which have led to renewed interest in panpsychism and cosmopsychism as ways to ground consciousness in the universe. Despite its unpopularity in the philosophy of mind, mind-body dualism, where humans are understood to have a physical body and a spiritual soul, has remained the most plausible or only acceptable ontological framework for understanding consciousness for most Christians. Of the remaining established theories, physicalism denies the existence of God, spiritual souls, the resurrection of the body, and arguably free will. Idealism denies the existence of the body and the physical world, making them illusory and thus evil, which runs counter to Christian precepts. For Christians with an interest in the study of consciousness but unsatisfied with dualism, the choice seems to be between atheism or pantheism, which for many is no choice at all. Over the past two decades, panpsychism and cosmopsychism have reemerged to offer intuitive solutions to the Hard Problem of consciousness, positing that elementary particles or the whole cosmos have mental properties. These frameworks may prove to be more compatible to Christians and provide a solution to the problems that have dogged consciousness studies over the second part of the twentieth century.

Plotinus offered an early cosmopsychist model that saw individual minds as aspects of a universal consciousness. However, he struggles to derive multiplicity from unity, layering consciousness in a distributed pattern throughout the cosmos, but failing to bridge the divide between universal mind and individual minds, and falling short of

articulating how discrete subjectivity arises. Saint Maximus the Confessor adapted Neoplatonic metaphysics to a Christian vision centred on the Divine Logos as the ground of being. This allows universal and particular consciousness to be rooted directly in the Logos through the logoi or divine ideas defining each creature. The logoi allow individual subjective perspectives to be expressed within universal consciousness unified in the Logos, and provide a pathway to the unification of human and divine realms through deification or theosis. While Maximus was not explicitly a cosmopsychist, his thought shows a compatibility between cosmopsychism and Christianity. Cosmopsychism affirms both material and spiritual realms grounded in universal consciousness, unlike physicalism or idealism. The Logos metaphysic provides a theological framing of how universal and particular consciousness are related.

Moreover, deification reveals the ultimate goal of cosmopsychism: the interpenetrating unification of creature and Creator. By transforming Neoplatonic emanation into a dynamic progression toward deification, Maximus provides a profoundly meaningful vision of human purpose within an interconnected cosmos ordered by love. Through theosis, human beings find meaning and purpose as co-mediators who translate between realms by apprehending cosmic principles. Cosmopsychism would then seem to resonate with Christianity's affirmation of human significance and destiny in relation to the divine and with Christianity's affirmation of human significance and destiny in that relation.

While this study has uncovered fruitful resonances between Maximus the Confessor's theology and contemporary debates on the nature of consciousness, there remains more to be done to assess the implications of Maximus's Logos metaphysic for the decombination problem and the emergence of individuality and free will in a cosmopsychist framework. Further research could elucidate Balthasar's insights on intersubjective meaning circulation, perhaps offering an account of shared cognition between finite minds grounded in the infinite divine Mind. Such an exploration may provide metaphysical models compatible with stratified or distributed consciousness and how these might stand as metaphysical frameworks to findings in neuroscience, psychology and physics. The study of consciousness is an inherently interdisciplinary inquiry that requires openness to insights from various fields of human knowledge and discernment of the underlying first principles that guide them. In this dissertation, I have attempted to uncover some alignments between the wisdom of the past and the problems of today and to sketch some new syntheses that integrate our expanding understanding of consciousness with timeless spiritual truths. This work is a modest tilt towards a vast and complex field, and I hope it will offer some small contribution towards the rich possibilities of cosmopsychism as a framework for the philosophy of mind.

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