
ADDICTIONS AND ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

A TELL-TALE OF A RESEARCH PROJECT

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(Received 5 December 2019, revised 6 January 2020)

Abstract

In this essay I present some introductory aspects of a larger research project, dedicated to the behaviours the contemporary psychological sciences generally call addictions, viewed from the perspective of what the Christian Spiritual Tradition designates as passions. The project aims to examine the conception of passion and, more generally, the conception of human behaviour, in the Byzantine theologian Saint Maximus the Confessor. I address here the premises of the research, I formulate some of its main questions, and I examine one of them, namely the role played by the natural faculties as powers of love as desire in our self-determining movement or behaviour, either towards fulfilment, or to failure through the passions.

Keywords: addiction, passion, human, behaviour, Maximus the Confessor

1. Introduction

This essay belongs to a larger research project, dedicated to those behaviours the contemporary psychological sciences generally call *addictions*, while the Christian Spiritual Tradition designates as *passions* [1-4]. More specifically, it is an attempt to read each other's conceptualizations of those behaviours, with the hope of facilitating a better understanding of both notions, and a better collaboration between medical and psychotherapeutic professionals and professionals from the Christian spiritual-pastoral field, for the benefit of the people who suffer from addictions. According to this author, the broader traditional Christian category including the behaviours designated today by addictions is that of passion, and this is the main premise of this project. In order to validate or invalidate it, the project intends to examine the conception of passion and, more generally, the conception of human behaviour, in Saint Maximus the Confessor, one of the most remarkable representatives of Byzantine theology [5-7]. In the following paragraphs, I firstly present the premises of the research, namely that addictions may be understood as passions, and that in order to unravel the Maximian notion of passion it is worth studying his larger concept of human behaviour. Then I formulate some relevant issues, and I examine one of them, namely the role played by the natural faculties in the conduct of behaviour.

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My claim is that the faculties are specifically powers of love, which in its turn is meant as having an attractive, desire-ness character, and that it is this love's attraction which is actualized in our self-determining movement or behaviour, either towards fulfilment, or to failure through the passions. In this sense, the orientations and actualisation of the faculties as powers of love are the tell-tales of the whole Maximian story about human destiny, from being to everlasting being, and by consequence of this entire research project. Instead of conclusions, I suggest the path for the research to follow, by analysing the various realisations of the faculties according to their fine, usually tripartite, structure, unfolded throughout the different existential and moral regimes of the human behaviour.

2. Premises of the research

In this project I do not claim to present *the very thought* of Saint Maximus, but only a series of interpretations, partly inspired by the current scientific conceptualization of addictions and oriented to their therapeutic applications. The main concern is for a theoretical model of human behaviour, capable of giving us at the same time an understanding of the main characteristic features of addictions as passions and the plausible means of overcoming them [2, 4]. For this purpose, I start from the hypothesis that what the sciences call addiction can be described by what Tradition and Saint Maximus, as a representative, call passion, a premise which, in its turn, stands or falls with the acceptance that within both conceptualizations the subjective phenomenon considered central is the same, namely the disturbance of *the capacity for self-determination precisely through a certain exercise of it* [8, 9]. The idea that sins and passions are a disorder of the human will is a ubiquitous conception in the Christian patristic Tradition, evidently at the origin of the moral conception of addictions as vices and of the corresponding moral blame, precisely those which the conception of addictions as disease, starting with the AA movement and up to the current neurological paradigm sought to remove [10, 11]. Less noted and exploited is the fact that the same Patristic Tradition, especially the Eastern one, interprets sins and, particularly the passions precisely as diseases, while Christ appears as the doctor *par excellence* (of course, not only of souls, but also of bodies, a most important aspect in the perspective of addiction as a brain disease) [12].

Saint Maximus illustrates this traditional vision remarkably. For example, when reading in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 41 (hereafter, *QT*) in the woman with bloodshed healed by Christ (Matthew 9.20-22) the situation of any person whose fallen nature and soul suffer from passions as from a haemorrhage that exhausts her powers received for the realization of the virtues: "The woman with the flow of blood is likewise nature and the soul, which, on account of the passions, allows the power that had been given to it for the generation of works and words of righteousness to flow outward toward matter" [13]. (Ἡ δὲ αἰμόρρους ὡσαύτως ἢ φύσις ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, τὴν δοθεῖσαν αὐτῇ πρὸς γένεσιν ἔργων δικαιοσύνης καὶ λόγων τοῖς πάθεσι πρὸς τὴν ὕλην διααρρέουσα δύναμιν.) [14]

The disease is often invoked, either directly or by analogy, when talking about passions, interesting, especially in relation to those specific to the intellect, I mean ignorance, vain glory and pride, but also in general, when talking about the healing of passions. More often, however, he qualifies evil, sins, and passions through expressions such as ‘willing’ or ‘voluntary’. A typical expression: “the ways of voluntary passions” (τοῖς τῶν ἐκουσίων παθῶν τρόποις, *QT* 26 [15]), in a text in which, again typical, he highlights the massive role of the devil in the occurrence and spread of evil in the people’s lives.

At the same time, he considers both the passions and the relationship with the devil as a bondage or ‘slavery’. Typical examples: “to liberate the soul from its evil slavery to the passions” (*QT* 54) [13, p. 339], “he is clearly the devil, who does all things secretly with the aim of subjugating human nature, and he tightens the chains of each human being by means of his sins.” (*QT* 56) [13, p. 391]. Moreover, he regards this bondage, in both perspectives, as a voluntary one, as in his *Epistula* 1: “as I willingly linked the working powers of the soul with passions, through passions” (ὡς δῆσας τοῖς πάθεσιν ἐκουσίως τὰς πρακτικὰς τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεις [16], and: “For it is with those with whom [i.e. devils] we have chosen by our bad customs to be together in this age by wilful preference, that we will of course be condemned to be, necessarily, without wanting, in the future age...” (Οἷς γάρ κατὰ τόν αἰῶνα τοῦτον διά τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἡμῶν τῶν πονηρῶν συνεῖναι κατὰ θελητόν γνωμικῶς ἐπελεξάμεθα, σύν τούτοις εἰκότως ἐξ ἀνάγκης εἶναι κατὰ τόν αἰῶνα τόν μέλλοντα καί μὴ θέλοντες κατακριθῆσόμεθα.) [16, p. 389B]

In the same letter, he uses the term *aboulia*, a rare one in his work, to characterize both volition’s activities in this life and their consequences in the future life: “... we have rejected the strength and the concentration of the virtue for the softness and dissipation of the body without measure. Where is now our pride and the boastful disposition towards all and the laziness of the body and the scattered weakness? What a lack of determination!” (καί τό τῆς ἀρετῆς στερρόν τε καί σύντονον διά τήν τῆς σαρκός ὑπερβάλλουσαν θρύψιν τε καί διάχυσιν ἀπεωσάμεθα. Ποῦ νῦν ἡμῶν ἐστίν ἡ ὑπερηφανία, καί ἡ δι’ αὐτήν ἀλαζῶν πρός πάντας διάθεσις, καί ἡ τῆς σαρκός βλακώδης καί εὐδιάχυτος θρύψις; ὦ τῆς ἀβουλίας!) [16, p. 385BC]

Are these expressions and many like them just common places - a long time Maximus was considered rather a skilled compiler - or can they tell us something more precise? A path to follow is opened by the very paradox of a behavior considered at the same time free and constrained. But does involving the will also necessarily - automatically? – mean the proof of freedom?

In *Opuscula Theologica* 15, combining Matthew 24.41 with Luke 17.34-35, Maximus interprets the character who will be left to death and in bed as “the one who is unwittingly /unwillingly in them [that is, in the grinding/debauchery of the passions] for the love of pleasure and of high standing of the soul” (ἀφίεσθαι δέ, τόν τούτοις [θρύψει παθῶν] αὐθαιρέτως ἐνισχημένον, διά τό τῆς ψυχῆς φιλήδονόν τε καί φιλομετέωρον [16, p. 156AB]. Now, how can *the incontinence of a haemorrhagic disease and the incontinence of a releasing will* be appropriate

images for one and the same thing? Or do they maybe express different phases of the same process? To gather all the Maximian terms mentioned so far, *in which way can our will become ill, and thus enslaved and self-destructing?* This is a main question of this research project.

3. A tale of faculties and love

With this aim, I try to rethink and analyse in detail Saint Maxim's conception of human behaviour, with a focus on passions as a specific pathology, systematically following the existential-moral regimes that he always evoke, in various ways, often superimposed: *protological*, *lapsarian* (with reference to Adam's fall), *post-lapsarian* - with two components: *natural* (in the sense of fallen nature), *hamartiological* (in the sense of passions), *Christological* (with reference to the person of Christ), *soteriological* - with the components: *hamartiological* (similar to the previous homonym, only that after the Baptism) and *aretological* (with reference to dispassion and the acquisition of virtues, in the three classical stages, not entirely separable), and finally the *eschatological* one.

These regimes illustrate and detail the well-known constitutive triad of human existence: to be (*enai*), to be good or bad (*eu/pheu enai*), to be eternally good or bad (*aei eu/pheu enai*), and employ a whole series of ontological categories of human being and action: reasons or paradigms (*logoi*), being (*ousia*), nature (*phusis*), power or faculty (*dunamis*) (belonging to *enai*), movement (*kinesis*), energy or work (*energeia*), mode (*tropos*), use (*chresis*), disposition (*diathesis*), habit (*hexis*) (manifested by *eu/pheu enai*); relationship or affinity (*schesis*), activity (*praxis*), passivity (*pathos*), aptitude (*epitedeiototes*), receptivity (*dektikos*), printing (*entupoo*, *ektuposis*), attracting (*helko*), likeness (*mimesis*) (belonging to the whole triad) [17, 18]. An examination of these categories, corresponding to a comprehensive clarification of the Maximian theory of action, remains a desideratum, especially regarding the notions of power/faculty and relation [19]. Belonging to the content of nature by definition, it is the power that is exercised in a particular movement, activity or work, that is, in personal ways of realization, in a use of power 'according to nature' or abuse 'against the nature'. Notwithstanding some contrary statements of Saint Maximus himself or of some interpreters, it is not nature, but only its divine *logoi* that are immutable, as soon as there is a "corruption of nature" (*QT* 42), by which he sometimes refers only to the mortality of the body, and even a law corresponding to this corruption (*QT* 21.4: "the law of nature" [13, p. 145]), as well as a restoration of it in Christ. Thus, what can be altered or restored by exercise are precisely the powers that are the content of nature. The most relevant text in this regard is probably in *Ambiguum* (hereafter, *Amb*) 10.31.a.9: "As for Elijah, he is the image of nature, not simply because he preserved inviolate the principles of his own nature (along with the deliberative frame of mind appropriate to these principles) free from any change due to passion, but because he taught by judging, like a kind of natural law, those who make use of nature against nature. For such is nature, punishing those who undertake to violate it to the degree that they use to

live against nature, by not allowing them to acquire naturally all of nature's power, for they have been deprived of its very integrity and for this they are punished, since it is they themselves who misguidedly and mindlessly have procured this lack of existence by inclining toward nonbeing.” [20] (Τῆς δὲ φύσεως Ἠλίας, οὐ μόνον ὡς τοὺς καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀλωβήτους φυλάζας λόγους, καὶ τό ἐπ' αὐτοῖς κατὰ γνώμην φρόνημα τροπῆς τῆς ἐκ πάθους ἐλεύθερον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς ἐν κρίσει παιδεύων, οἷόν τις φυσικός νόμος, τοὺς παρά φύσιν τῇ φύσει χρωμένους. Τοιοῦτον γάρ καὶ ἡ φύσις, τοὺς αὐτὴν παραφθείρειν ἐπιχειροῦντας τοσοῦτον κολάζουσα, ὅσον τοῦ παρά φύσιν ζῆν ἐπιτηδεύουσι, τῷ μὴ ὄλην αὐτῆς φυσικῶς ἔτι κεκτηῖσθαι τῆς φύσεως τὴν δύναμιν, μειωθέντας ἤδη τῆς κατ' αὐτὴν ἀρτιότητος καὶ διὰ τοῦτο κολαζομένων, ὡς ἑαυτοῖς ἀβούλως τε καὶ ἀφρόνως διὰ τῆς πρὸς τό μὴ ὄν νεύσεως τοῦ εἶναι παρεχομένων τὴν ἔλλειψιν.) [20, vol. I, p. 262, 264]

What happens to the abused powers is of the greatest interest to our subject. In the passage just quoted, the abuse has the consequence of affecting the power, through a self-corrective natural process or mechanism. This diminution of power is also referred to in *QT* 58, where Maximus deals with the meanings of one of the main afflictions, the sadness, often produced by pain, which in turn comes from a suffering of the natural power. Thus: “Toil, moreover, is clearly a deficiency [or departure] of a natural, habitual state, and the deficiency of such a state is a passion of the natural power underlying that state. A passion of a natural power underlying a state is the mode according to which natural activity is misused, and such misuse of natural activity is the movement of the faculty [or power] toward that which is unnatural and does not exist according to nature.” [13, p. 403] (πόνος δὲ σαφῶς ἐστὶ φυσικῆς ἕξεως ἔλλειψις ἢ ὑποχώρησις· ἔλλειψις δὲ φυσικῆς ἐστὶν ἕξεως πάθος τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ὑποκειμένης τῇ ἕξει δυνάμεως· πάθος δὲ τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ὑποκειμένης τῇ ἕξει δυνάμεως ἐστὶν ὁ κατὰ τὴν παράχρησιν τῆς φυσικῆς ἐνεργείας τρόπος· παράχρησις δὲ τοῦ κατ' ἐνεργεῖαν τρόπου καθέστηκεν ἢ πρὸς τὸ μὴ πεφυκὸς κατὰ φύσιν καὶ ὑφιστάμενον τῆς δυνάμεως κίνησις) [21].

The passage is very relevant, not only for the generous lexicon of action (movement, mode, work, (ab)use, skill or habit, power), but also to highlight its stages (power - movement/use mode - habit), presented here backward, from the final stages to the initial one. The same steps would have been followed, of course with another result, in the case of a movement, use or realization ‘according to nature’ of the natural power, as suggested by the use only of the expressions denoting the ontological naturalness (*phusikes*, *kata phusin*, *pephukos*, *huphistamenon*) and its volitional negation (τὸ μὴ), as a non-fulfilment, avoiding the usual *para phusin*, which would have simply suggested a contrary action. Worth noting is also *elleipsis*, a technical term for defining evil (e.g. *QT* Prologue 64, 65; *Amb* 10.31, supra 31), and which designates a lack, deficiency or insufficiency, as opposed to excess, another form of evil (see *Amb* 10.4), and not a mere deviation.

The ambivalent reality of the use of powers appears frequently, but I only notice here, for the same way of describing evil as non-fulfilment, *QT* 40, where, interpreting the jars at the wedding in Cana of Galilee as “the natural creative

power to realize what is proper” [13, p. 230], Saint Maximus considers that it can be emptied by non-working (*apraxia* - in two ways, by excess also, not only by lack) or filled by working the good, respectively. The analogy of the natural powers bestowed to acting with a vessel is significant for the way he understands human existence and action as a form of *receptivity*, the natural use of power having as its purpose a habitual state by which someone is able to receive, to keep, and to transform herself according to the gifts of the Spirit, as shown by another instance of this analogy, that of the lamps and funnels from *QT* 63 (an interpretation in Zechariah 4.2-3; other expressions of containment, the sack and the body, we have encountered above; see also, *Amb* 10.16; 42). “Just as it is impossible for a lamp to be kept lit without oil, so too it is impossible for the light of the gifts of the Spirit to be kept lit without a stable habit, which nurtures good things by means of principles, modes, behaviours, thoughts, and proper reasoning.” [13, p. 473] (Ὡς γὰρ ἐλαίου χωρὶς ἄσβεστον διατηρηθῆναι λύχνον ἀμήχανον, οὕτως ἕξεως χωρὶς, προσφόροις καὶ λόγοις καὶ τρόποις καὶ ἦθεσι νοήμασί τε αὐτῶν καὶ λογισμοῖς τοῖς καθήκουσι τὰ καλὰ διατρεφούσης, ἄσβεστον φυλαχθῆναι τὸ φῶς τῶν χαρισμάτων ἀμήχανον.) [21, p. 168]

The immediate reference to Matthew 25 brings again the ambivalence of the activation of powers out, and the frequency of this idea throughout Saint Maximus’ work justifies us to discern a single pattern of behaviour from the passages about normal, that is virtuous functioning, as well as from passages about pathological, passionate functioning (see already [1]).

Returning to *QT* 40, this analogy is all the more significant as the natural power he specifies there is the power to love (identified by a synecdoche with the reason) the Creator (Cause) and all the other creatures. To understand the Maximian conception of passions and, in general, of human destiny, understanding behaviour as an activation, fulfilling or exhausting, of natural powers as powers of love is fundamental [22]. The whole unfolding of human destiny and, indeed, the whole theo-cosmic drama is for Saint Maximus a love story, once taken by madness, through Adam, then recovered and fulfilled through Christ, what it means that his entire work has as a red thread a cosmic theanthropology of love [23]. Two passages are exemplary in this regard. The first one is from *Amb* 7: “... our forefather Adam misused his freedom and turned instead to what was inferior, redirecting his desire from what was permissible to what had been forbidden. [...] [God] affixed the appropriate punishment alongside the irrational movement of our intellectual faculty, where it would not fail to do what was required. [...] The aim was that, by experiencing pain we might learn that we have fallen in love with what is not real, and so be taught to redirect our power to what really exists.” [20, vol. I, p. 121, 123] (ἐν δὲ τῷ προπάτορι τῷ ἐτοίμῳ πρὸς ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον ἐχρήσατο, μετενεγκὼν ἐκ τοῦ ἐπιτετραμμένου πρὸς τὸ κεκωλυμένον τὴν ορεξίν [...] τῇ παραλόγῳ κινήσει τῆς ἐν ἡμῖν νοεράς δυνάμεως παρεπομένην δεόντως τὴν τιμωρίαν παρέπηξεν, [...] ἵνα τοῦ μηδενός ἐρῶντες διὰ τοῦ πάσχειν ποτέ μαθόντες πρὸς τὸ ὄν πάλιν αὐτὴν ἐπανάγειν διδαχθῶμεν τὴν δύναμιν.) [20, vol. I, p. 120, 122]

Another passage, in which the power of love is diverted not to what is not real, but to itself, and which Christ converts by restoring love in Him and for Him, from the famous *Epistula 2*: „In this way the works of the devil were dissolved, and nature restored to its pure powers, and by again bringing about union with him and of human beings with one another, God renewed the power of love, the adversary of self-love. This self-love is, and is known to be, the first sin, the first progeny of the devil and the mother of the passions that come after it. He to whom it is granted to be worthy of God through love does away with it, and together with it the whole host of wickedness, which has no other foundation or cause of existence than self-love.” [24] (ἵνα καταλύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου, καὶ τῇ φύσει ἀχράντους ἀποδοῦς τὰς δυνάμεις, πάλιν τῆς πρὸς αὐτόν συναφείας, καὶ ἀλλήλους τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀνακαινίσῃ τῆς ἀγάπης τὴν δύναμιν, τὴν τῆς φιλαυτίας ἀντίπαλον· τῆς πρώτης ἁμαρτίας, καὶ πρώτου γεννήματος τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ παθῶν τῶν μετ’ αὐτὴν μητρὸς καὶ οὔσης καὶ γινωσκομένης· ἦν δι’ ἀγάπης ἀφανίσας ὁ ἑαυτὸν Θεοῦ παρασχόμενος ἄξιον, συνηφάνισεν αὐτῇ καὶ πάντα τὸν τῆς κακίας ὄχλον, βάσιν ἄλλην ἢ αἰτίαν τοῦ εἶναι μετὰ ταύτην οὐκ ἔχοντα.) [16, p. 397C]

According to this perspective, the general objective of this project - the deduction of the human behavioural model - is equivalent to read the dynamics of love in each of the existential-moral regimes listed above [1].

4. Orientation and movement

I will further discuss only some aspects of the project that concern the narrower objective, which is the understanding of the passions as behavioural pathology, which practically means to cover the heuristic path to the Christological stage. The starting point, common to both objectives, is, of course, represented by the ontological premises of the Maximian anthropology, in other words the original constitution of the human being, which includes, but does not reduce to a description of the protological condition. As I have already argued elsewhere, I consider that the most important aspect of this constitution according to Saint Maximus is its *ontologically oriented* character, the fact of being created by the Creator *from-towards* Him, as both the Cause and the Purpose of our existence - and of the whole creation, in fact [3].

But what is this *orientation*? Could it just be a launch into existence that simply reaches the term in virtue of divine will and providence? However, if the orientation of being is not the same with its completion, then orientation may be precisely the power the nature disposes of for the purpose of finalizing or fulfilling the existence and whose realization involves human movement, work or action. In other words, we have not only to support our existence, but also to engage it through movement or action. At the same time, just as our existence is never a bare given, but a gift of a Giver, so too, our movement is never by virtue of an autogenous power, but by a power received and purpose-oriented from-towards the Cause, as Maximus states, in *Amb 10.36*: “...no motion is without beginning, since it is not without a cause. For its beginning is that which set it in

motion, and its cause is the end that calls it and attracts it, and toward which it is also moved.” [20, vol. I, p. 287] (Πᾶσα δὲ κίνησις οὐκ ἄναρχος, ἐπειδὴ οὐδὲ ἀναίτιος. Ἀρχὴν γὰρ ἔχει τὸ κινεῖν, καὶ αἰτίαν ἔχει τὸ καλοῦν τε καὶ ἔλκον πρὸς ὃ καὶ κινεῖται τέλος.) [20, vol. I, p. 286]

Therefore, our movement or action is at the same time the expression of a launching cause and a purpose that exerts an attraction on us, but these ontological determinations by no means abolish the role of our own self-determination, as stated at the end of the same *Amb* 10: “... for in Him pre-exist the principles of all good things, as if from an ever-flowing spring, in a single, simple, unified embrace, and they draw to Him all those who rightly and naturally use the powers that have been given to them for this very purpose.” [20, vol. I, p. 343] (ἐν ᾧ πάντων οἱ λόγοι τῶν ἀγαθῶν, ὥσπερ πηγῆ ἀειβλύστω, προῦφεστικάσι τε κατὰ μίαν, ἀπλῆν καὶ ἐνιαίαν τῶν πάντων περιοχὴν, καὶ πρὸς ὃν ἔλκουσι πάντας τοὺς καλῶς καὶ κατὰ φύσιν ταῖς ἐπὶ τούτῳ δοθείσαις χρωμένους δυνάμεσι.) [20, vol. I, p. 342]

How can a movement which is imposed, oriented and attracted, which is neither autogenous nor autonomous, be self-determination? We can guess an answer in yet another passage from *Amb* 23, in which our movement power is designated as one of love and, more suggestively, as a desire. “The Divine is moved to the extent that it creates an inner condition of desire and love among beings capable of receiving them, and it moves insofar as it naturally attracts the yearning of those who are being moved to it.” [20, vol. II, p. 7] (κινεῖται μὲν ὡς σχέσιν ἐμποιοῦν ἐνδιάθετον ἔρωτος καὶ ἀγάπης τοῖς τούτων δεκτικοῖς, κινεῖ δὲ ὡς ἐλκτικὸν φύσει τῆς τῶν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ κινούμενων ἐφέσεως.) [20, vol. II, p. 6]

We can understand that to the ontological orientation, through the launch and attraction operated by the Creator, corresponds to the level of the creature the power of love which, in turn, appears as a power of desire, of being attracted to something. To be noted, this desire-attraction is a reality, not just a mere possibility; she exercises herself on us, we are drawn through her. At the same time, however, it is not irresistible. By virtue of her nature and powers, in accordance with the constitutive divine *logoi*, love as a movement or action that realizes love as a power consists in *pursuing* the orientation-attraction towards fulfilling the desire for the Creator.

Activating a power means, in fact, more than pursuing an orientation-attraction; it means *training* it in both senses of the word, as an *engagement* and as a *reinforcement*, or re-capacitation. This is what the quoted passage from *QT* 58 calls the power’s *habit* or acquisition, a central notion in the Maximian psychology of the volitional act, on which I will return immediately [25]. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish at least three aspects or phases of a power: capacity, activity and habit. In the terminology of love: attraction as a latent desire, desire exerted in the movement towards the one desired and love as a habit of desire. And the three phases follow one another in a circular way, considering that the habit is a trained capacity through activity. An ambivalent training, of course, either in the negative sense, as a weakening or diminishing capacity, as we have already seen above, or in a positive sense, as a reinforced one, as stated in

Ad Marinum presbyterum: “Either it is reinforced the reason according to nature through good use, or it is reinforced the mode against the nature through bad use. The first one becomes the announcer of the choice according to the nature, the second one, the announcer of the choice contrary to the nature.” (ἢ ὁ κατὰ φύσιν αὐτῷ διὰ τῆς εὐχρηστίας ὑφίσταται λόγος, ἢ ὁ παρά φύσιν διὰ τῆς ἀχρηστίας παρυφίσταται τρόπος· ὁ μὲν, τῆς κατὰ φύσιν· ὁ δέ, τῆς παρά φύσιν προαιρέσεως γινόμενος ἄγγελος.) [16, p. 29A]

This raises the question of the relation between capacity and habit, since they are, of course, not identical. It is enough to observe now that if the natural capacity has an orientation towards a unique, indelible purpose, the habit can receive, by the actual realization of the power, a different orientation. It is precisely by this *dis-orientation* that the abuse of power leads, involuntarily and corrective, to its diminution, weakening, suffering or passion, for that matter.

This also rises another question: if the Creator exercises a constitutive power over us, if He creates an attraction to Himself, if He activates such a desire in us, how can this be disoriented, in the first place? The simple answer, that as soon as in addition to the Creator as the ontologically desirable reality, there are other realities, the creatures - or the creature, as such -, to which our desire can be directed, cannot be fully satisfactory until we clarify how something else than the Creator can attract us. Desire and attraction cannot be understood separately, but if the original attraction to the Creator can only be indelible, how can the desire be activated to something else? If there is *another* attraction, what is its nature? Could it be a genuine one or just a misleading appearance, for example, just a false projection of desire? When Saint Maximus repeats that, apart from the Creator, we love the nothing or, equivalently, that evil has no ontological consistency, it belongs to no natural category (e.g. *QT* Prologue), it seems to offer us the second option. However, there are places where he treats the alternative attraction as a *sui generis* reality, such as, for example, in *Epistula* 9, in which he discusses, in fact, three types of attractions or drives, exercised by three attractors, namely God, human nature, and the fallen world. “Three are, as it is well said, those [things] that lead those [matters] of man, or rather to which man moves himself by intention and disposition, according to the choice: God, nature and the world. And each of them attracts him, and removes him from the other two, changing the one attracted to itself, and makes him by position what that [the leading reality] is known to be by nature, but without [removing him] from nature.” (Τρία, καλῶς φασιν, ὑπάρχουσι, τὰ τόν ἄνθρωπον ἄγοντα· μᾶλλον δέ πρὸς ἃ βουλήσει τε καὶ γνώμη κατὰ προαίρεσιν κινεῖται ὁ ἄνθρωπος· Θεός, καὶ φύσις, καὶ κόσμος. Καὶ τούτων ἕκαστον ἔλκον, τῶν ἄλλων δύο ἐξίστησι, πρὸς ἑαυτὸ ἀλλοιοῦν τόν ἀγόμενον· κάκεῖνο ποιοῦν αὐτόν θέσει, ὅπερ αὐτὸ ὑπάρχον φύσει γνωρίζεται, πλὴν μέντοι τῆς φύσεως.) [16, p. 445C]

Leaving the details on account of another study [2], it should be noted here that although nature and the world are not entirely independent of the Creator, the two can somehow ‘substitute’ Him in our relationship with them, as all the attractions in question involve an exclusive movement towards one of the respective attractors. And the movement, says Saint Maximus here, means a

change of the very self: “Therefore, as soon as man is inwardly moved by his own disposition to one of these, he has changed to that his activity and his name also, calling himself carnal or natural or spiritual.” (Ἄμα τοίνυν πρὸς τινα τούτων κινηθῆ κατά γνώμην ἐνδιαθέτως ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἅμα πρὸς αὐτόν ἐκεῖνον καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἤμειψε, καὶ τὴν προσηγορίαν μετέβαλε, σαρκικός, ἢ ψυχικός, ἢ πνευματικός προσαγορευόμενος.) [16, p. 448A]

5. Self-determination and experience

The change takes place through and during the movement or activity as an exercise of power and is ascertained in the acquisition and manifestation of a characteristic trait (*gnorisma*), described both by a resemblance to the respective attractor and by an activity specific to each condition, both designated by a generic name, inspired by the Pauline passage 1 Corinthians 15.44-49, which Maxim comments on without explicitly saying it.

If we return to the specific of the constitutive power of love as a desire, we see that the change of self-results from the orientation of the desire towards a certain object. We have here not only the inherent change produced by the shift from latent capacity to exercise, but also one in which the exercise of power depends specifically on the relationship (*schesis*) or the interaction with its object, precisely because it is a desire. Not every desire is the same, even if the mechanism of its exercise - attraction, followed by engaging and training - can be similar. Maximus says that as soon as the exercise of the desire begins, the change appears, but, on the one hand, each activity has several phases, as we have seen above, and on the other hand, the modelling role of the attractors would be in this case minimal, at the initial moment of one or the other of the possible orientations. In order to realize the relevance of power training as a habit or re-capacitation, as well as the significance of substituting one object of desire with another, the possibility of which we have inquired, it is necessary to identify another aspect of the manifestation of power, that is that of the *experience* (*peira*) that desire makes in relation to its object. Not only does the orientation of desire differ, but also its eventual fulfilment, whether authentic or not. What Maxim says in *Epistula* 9 only *en passant* – namely, that attracting or driving the man in its relationship “by deception”, the world “teaches him to do everything contrary to nature”; it is obvious that in each of these relations humans learn something, and learning is another name of the habit - it states clearly in *QT* 61: “God, who fashioned human nature, [...] devised for this nature a certain capacity for intelligible pleasure, whereby human beings would be able to enjoy God ineffably. This capacity -I mean the intellect’s natural desire for God...” [13, p. 434] (Ὁ τὴν φύσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων δημιουργήσας θεὸς [...] δυνάμιν τινα κατὰ νοῦν αὐτῇ πρὸς ἡδονήν, καθ’ ἣν ἀρρήτως ἀπολαβεῖν αὐτοῦ δυνήσεται, ἐνετεκτῆνατο. Ταύτην δὲ τὴν δύναμιν – λέγω δὲ τὴν κατὰ φύσιν τοῦ νοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἔφεσιν...) [21, p. 94]

Pleasure appears as a state of fulfilment of the power of attraction to the Creator. In *Amb 7* we find another, more detailed description of this fulfilment, as a state that comprises three forms: pleasure, as the fulfilment of activity; suffering, as an ecstatic or receptive power; joy, as a pure and unchangeable state. “This state, which is brought about by the contemplation of God and the enjoyment of the gladness that follows it, has rightly been described as pleasure, passion, and joy. It is called pleasure, insofar as it is the consummation of all natural strivings (for this is the meaning of pleasure). It is called passion, insofar as it is an ecstatic power, elevating the passive recipient to the state of an active agent, as in the examples given above of air permeated by light, and iron suffused with fire. [...] It is, finally, called joy, for it encounters nothing opposed to it, neither in the past, nor in the future.” [20, p. 113, 115] (Διό καί ἡδονήν καί πείσιν καί χαράν καλῶς ὠνόμασαν τήν τοιαύτην κατάστασιν, τήν τῇ θείᾳ κατανοήσει καί τῇ ἐπομένῃ αὐτῇ τῆς εὐφροσύνης ἀπολαύσει, ἡδονήν μὲν, ὡς τέλος οὔσαν τῶν κατά φύσιν ἐνεργειῶν (οὕτω γάρ τήν ἡδονήν ὀρίζονται), πείσιν δέ ὡς ἐκστατικὴν δύναμιν, πρὸς τό ποιῶν τό πάσχον ἐνάγουσαν, κατά τήν ἀποδοθεῖσαν τοῦ ἀέρος πρὸς τό φῶς καί τοῦ πυρός πρὸς τόν σίδηρον παραδειγματικὴν αἰτίαν [...] χαράν δέ ὡς μηδέν ἔχουσαν ἀντικείμενον μήτε παρελθόν μήτε μέλλον.) [20, p. 112, 114]

6. A path to follow

In summary, all these fragments highlight some essential aspects of the behavioural model we investigate for: a) the circular phases of the natural constituting power of love and its exercise as a movement, work or activity: the capacity or aptitude, the engagement, the fulfilment or experience, and the habituation, which is a re-capacitation as a training or learning by engagement and experience; b) the defining characteristics of this power: *attractiveness*, as a desire; *receptivity*, as fulfilment of desire; *plasticity*, not only as a habit through learning, but also as an imprint of certain properties specific to the desired object. All these aspects require a wider and more detailed analysis, on all the pieces of Saint Maximus’ work. Out of these, we cannot omit here the detail that, in order to orient ourselves and to exercise the power of love for the Creator, we have not only available a desire drawn by Him, but also a specific capacity to recognize Him. For Saint Maximus, the constitutive power of the nature has a finer structure, consisting of several powers, corresponding to the interacting relations not only with God, but also with herself and with the rest of creation. According to the position of human beings at the interface and interference between the intelligible and the sensible universe, we are endowed with soul and body, each containing specific powers that act synergistically. Most often Maximus invokes three categories that make up the natural generic power: intellectual, affective and sensory faculties, sometimes reduced to two categories, cognitive (mind, reason, perception) and affective (desire and vigour), both interacting with the intelligible universe, through reason, as well as with the sensible, through the senses. Obviously, all these component powers should prove the essential aspects

identified above, that is the typical phases of the manifestation and the defining characteristics. In this second point, it is not always clear whether the category of cognitive powers has an attractive character per se, or attractiveness is a characteristic of the generic power as a package of faculties, of which all the affective powers are attractive or, even more restricted, this specific belongs precisely to one of the affective powers, namely to desire. A definition of the role of these powers - here the “rational part” designates all the cognitive ones - we have, for example, in *QT* 55: “[the law of nature] uses the soul’s power of reason in order to seek and search for the Cause and the good things that pertain to the Cause; it uses the power of desire to make us long for the things we are seeking; and it uses the incentive, spirited power for safeguarding and caring affectionately for those things” [13, p. 362]. (κέχρηται γὰρ τῷ μὲν λογιστικῷ πρὸς τὴν τῆς αἰτίας καὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν αἰτίαν καλῶν ζήτησιν, τῷ ἐπιθυμητικῷ δὲ πρὸς πόθον τῶν ζητουμένων, τῷ δὲ θυμικῷ πρὸς φυλακὴν καὶ στοργήν) [14, p. 244, 246]

In a very close passage, from *QT* 54, the power of knowledge is explicitly mentioned as being subject to the same ontological causality and attraction: “To state the matter succinctly, through ‘women’ he showed that the goal of the virtues is love, which is the unfailing pleasure and indivisible union of those who participate through their longing in what is good by nature. Through ‘truth’ he signalled the limit of all knowledge and of all the things that can be known - and it is to this limit, as to the beginning and limit of all beings, that all natural movements are attracted by means of a certain general principle, for inasmuch as it is the truth, it triumphs over all things by its very nature, being the beginning and cause of beings, attracting to itself the movement of all things that have come into being.” [13, p. 338-339] (Καὶ συντόμως εἰπεῖν, διὰ μὲν τῶν γυναικῶν τὸ τέλος ἐνεδείξατο τῶν ἀρετῶν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅπερ ἐστὶ ἡ κατ' ἔφου τοῦ φύσει ἀγαθοῦ τῶν μετεχόντων ἀδιάπτωτος ἡδονὴ καὶ ἀδιαίρετος ἔνωσις, διὰ δὲ τῆς ἀληθείας τὸ πέρασ πασῶν ἐπεσήμανε τῶν γνώσεων καὶ αὐτῶν πάντων τῶν γινωσκομένων, εἰς ὅπερ, ὡς ἀρχὴν καὶ πέρασ πάντων τῶν ὄντων, αἱ κατὰ φύσιν κινήσεις γενικῶς τινὶ λόγῳ συνέλκονται, πάντα νικώσης κατὰ φύσιν, ὡς ἀληθείας, τῆς τῶν ὄντων ἀρχῆς καὶ αἰτίας, καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν συνελκούσης τῶν γεγονότων τὴν κίνησιν.) [14, p. 202, 204]

The passage - a provisional summary of what Maxim discussed before - can also be considered a summary of his vision of the relation of our constitutive powers (intellect and affectivity) attracted and exercised through knowledge and practice towards the fulfilling union with the Creator.

Thus, the human being appears as a pathetic agent, dependent on the Creator and attracted to Him, whose powers of self-determination are attractive, receptive and plastic. The present research must also examine further the ways in which our disorientation and powers towards other attractors appear and manifest themselves. Following *Epistula* 9, we will have to examine, in fact, two existential-moral regimes that arise from the failure to fulfil the desire for the Creator and the failed attempt to fulfil only with His gifts but without Himself. We will see that the passions - and the addictions, which are included - display a

double disoriented regime, not only from the Creator, but even from ‘those of Him’.

Acknowledgment

Project financed from Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu research grants LBUS-IRG-2018-04.

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