



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

**Arguing with the properties of Christ: the case of
"difference as in natural quality" and its critical
reception by Maximus the Confessor**

Mateiescu, Z.S.; Léonas, A.; Cvetkovic, V.

Citation

Mateiescu, Z. S. (2023). Arguing with the properties of Christ: the case of "difference as in natural quality" and its critical reception by Maximus the Confessor. In A. Léonas & V. Cvetkovic (Eds.), *Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia - Subsidia Maximiana* (pp. 127-160). Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols. doi:10.1484/M.IPM-EB.5.131020

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3570735>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Arguing with the Properties of Christ

The Case of “Difference as in Natural Quality”
and its Critical Reception by Maximus the Confessor¹

Sebastian MATEIESCU
(Leiden)

Introduction

Christological debates between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians are commonly portrayed as relying on a clash of contradictory interpretations of *hypostasis* and *physis*, two core terms of Christology. The non-Chalcedonians are traditionally seen as making no clear-cut distinction between the two notions, and as often relying on Cyril of Alexandria (376–444) in professing their synonymy. The defenders of the Council of Chalcedon (451) claim to have saved the possibility of distinguishing the divine and human natures in Christ by professing their unity in the one single hypostasis of Christ. Yet, this common portrayal does not pay attention to other crucial terms involved in the debates, such as the idea of the properties of Christ. For it is by means of posing

¹ This paper has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 843839. The paper reflects exclusively the author’s view and the European Union’s Research Executive Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein. I am indebted to Frans de Haas for a series of observations and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper and to Dirk Krausmüller, Sebastian Moldovan and two anonymous reviewers for their comments. I am also thankful to Hans van Loon who has kindly accepted to offer his critical remarks on a last version of this article. Any errors remaining are solely mine.

a peculiar difference in the properties of Christ that Severus, the famous Patriarch of Antioch (512–518) and the champion of non-Chalcedonian theology, constructs a mitigated form of dualism in Christ. Faced with the extreme forms of monophysitism posited by some of his colleagues, Severus makes a concession to dyophysite language by talking about *the difference as in natural quality* (διαφορὰ ὡς ἐν ποιότητι φυσικῇ) between the divinity and humanity in Christ. However, by denying that the properties of Christ should be ascribed to two natures in actuality after incarnation, this sort of Severan dualism soon proves to be a subtle enemy of the pro-Chalcedonian view which is committed to a duality of both the natures and their properties in Christ. In consequence, Severus' theory provoked a strong reaction from the Chalcedonian side which was also echoed in the work of Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662). The aim of this paper is to uncover some of the details of this intricate debate and to analyze the way in which Maximus constructed a critical rejoinder to Severus' theory in his *Opuscula*.

I will begin by identifying Cyril of Alexandria's anti-Eunomian theory of names, which argues that they are based on common conceptualizations, as the key background for the interpretation of "difference as in natural quality". It will turn out that the original meaning of natural quality was neither that of specific or constitutive difference nor the proprium. Rather, it designated a set of common characteristics on the basis of which common conceptualizations about the divine and human natures might be built, in a similar manner to the Stoic idea of common notions. My argument will further explore Severus' commitment to this Cyrilian idea which the Patriarch of Antioch adopted ingeniously in his Christology. In the second part of this paper, Maximus the Confessor's critical response to Severus' idea of difference as in natural quality will be carefully investigated. As a point of comparison, I shall analyze Maximus' positive attitude towards the anti-Eunomian theory of names which he inherits from Gregory of Nazianzus. However, it will be shown that Maximus finds significant limits to this theory when it freely transgresses from theology to Christology. The paper will show that in response to this, Maximus provides important metaphysical arguments for the building of an essentialist ontology according to which

human nature must be defined in terms of its essence and constitutive properties, and not only in accordance with general properties representable through common notions. Maximus' critical reception of the argument for difference as in natural quality in the *Opuscula* is consequently shown to have been conducted in the light of Maximus' ontology, which requires the affirmation of the constitutive difference of the humanity of Christ instead of its common traits.

Setting the Scene

The famous Council of Chalcedon (451), which was supposed to clarify and settle the tumultuous theological debates of its time by aligning them in agreement with the tradition of the Church, ended up in the provocation of a long-standing split in the Church and the erecting of two antagonistic theologies.² Already before but also during the Council, Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria (412–444), was celebrated as an unparalleled theological authority. The extraordinary emphasis he put on the unity of Christ often became the standard against which the soundness of theology was measured. This had a considerable impact upon the reception of the Christological dualism professed by the Antiochene and Western theologies, whose credo could eventually find no room in the Chalcedonian Creed except in a Cyrilian language.³ Yet, the final draft of the Creed contains a tiny fragment which in content and form looks like an insertion made under pressure from the Chalcedonian dyophysites: “the difference of the natures being in no way destroyed by the union, but

² For a recent account of some of the subtleties posed by the theological debates issuing from Chalcedon, see the recent contributions in S. MATEIESCU & G. F. CĂLIAN, “Lost for Words: Theological and Philosophical Vocabulary in the Aftermath of Chalcedon”, *Review of Ecumenical Studies* (RES), 11 (2019), pp. 333–520, The Institute for Ecumenical Research, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, available online at <https://sciendo.com/issue/RESS/11/3>.

³ For such an interpretation, see R. PRICE, “Introduction”, in *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon. Volume One*, trans. by R. PRICE and M. GADDIS (Liverpool, 2005), pp. 56–75. The analysis below of the Cyrilian influence on the Creed is indebted to this work. For other details, see also A. GRILLMEIER & T. HAINTHALER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part. 2, London, 2005.

rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved".⁴ However, it is not easy to establish whether the dyophysite emphasis of this passage lies mostly in the need to discriminate the natures according to their properties or in the declaration of their integrity, as saved in the preservation of their corresponding properties in Christ. We shall see that Maximus will devote considerable attention to arguing for the latter, in support of which he will devise a sophisticated ontology of essences and properties. But to the Miaphysites, a strict ontological dualism in Christ was to conjure the spectre of Nestorius, whose theology had been repudiated by Cyril precisely because its dualism would amount to a division of Christ.⁵ This is why it is reasonable to say that in order to make all this acceptable to the strict Cyrilians, the addition was dressed up in Cyrilian language, as the phrase "the difference of the natures being in no way destroyed by the union" seems to be following closely Cyril of Alexandria's *Second Letter to Nestorius*.⁶ Furthermore, by suggesting that the natures must come together in one person and one hypostasis, the phrase ends in a similarly Cyrilian picture that seems to profess the subordination of the natures and their properties to Christ as their subject.⁷ While this blend of duality and single-subject language may speak of the concessions made by the Cyrilian, respectively the Western part in the Council, it has nevertheless provoked further debates and controversies after the Council that were never resolved. Among other repercussions, it worked to shift the problem into a debate on Cyril's dualism concerning

⁴ *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, Volume Two, trans. by R. PRICE & M. GADDIS, p. 204.

⁵ I use the term "Miaphysite" in contrast with "Monophysite" to denote the anti-Chalcedonian theology that did not profess solely a "one nature Christology" without qualification with respect to any duality in Christ. I believe Severus' idea of a duality of properties is the refined expression of this nuanced Miaphysitism which tries to avoid a confusion or blending together of the natures of Christ.

⁶ "Not implying that the difference between the natures was abolished through their union", in Cyril of Alexandria, "Second letter to Nestorius" 3, 5–10, in *Cyril of Alexandria, Select letters*, ed. and trans. by L. R. WICKHAM, Oxford, 1983, p. 7.

⁷ "It is one Christ and Son coming from them", in Cyril, *Select letters*, 3, 5–10, p. 7.

the properties of Christ. In the hands of Severus, a very dedicated and close reader of Cyril, this all became an opportunity to concoct an ingenious combination of the basic Cyrilian idea of one Christ with a duality of properties applicable to his divinity and humanity. The intended goal of this middle path between strict Christological dualism and Monophysitism was a minimalist Christology with regard to the ontology of the natures of Christ by grounding duality in the properties themselves and unity in the one nature/hypostasis of Christ.

Acknowledging the Difference as in Natural Quality

As documented in the now classic studies of Joseph Lebon, the newly forming Miaphysite theology after Chalcedon does not reject the duality of natures, divine and human, from which (*ek*) the union was made, but it does obstinately insist on the absolute unity of Jesus Christ after the Incarnation.⁸ In the light of this, to assent to any duality *after* union was to become identical with a dividing of Christ in two, and thus to become an heir to Nestorianism. Severus shows a strong commitment to this view, which nevertheless he starts to qualify as he advances in theological authority. One such remarkable example is found in Severus' exchange with a certain Sergius, a little-known theologian who was attracted to an extreme form of monophysitism.⁹ As a strict anti-Chalcedonian monophysite, Sergius is concerned to deny not only the possibility of differentiating between the two natures after incarnation, but also the possibility of differentiating between their properties.¹⁰ However, this idea was qualified by a local synod which converted Sergius' refusal to talk about two properties into an interdiction on speaking of two *divided* properties after the Incarnation. Sergius complains to Severus about his difficulty in understanding

⁸ See J. LEBON, "La Christologie du monophysisme Syrien", in *Konzil von Chalcedon, 3 vols*, ed. by A. GRILLMEIER and H. BACHT, Würzburg, 1951, pp. 425–580.

⁹ I. R. TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon: Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite*, Norwich, 1988.

¹⁰ See, for more details, Torrance's introduction, in TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 7 and *passim*.

the amendment, which nevertheless looks to him like a concession made to the Chalcedonian enemies. Sergius then passes the question on to Severus for further clarification. As a philosophically minded person, Sergius nevertheless includes a philosophical argument against the idea of accepting two properties in Christ: “But every property belongs to an underlying nature, and if we speak of two properties, we are obliged also to speak of two natures”.¹¹ Severus does not give a proper reply to this argument which will later also become essential to Maximus’ thought. Rather, Severus’ strategy is repeatedly to refer to Cyril’s particular understanding of the notion of property, which is, according to Severus, “that which (lies) in difference of natural quality [...] and not that (which lies) in (independent) parts”.¹² What appears evident from this and many other similar passages in Severus is that “difference as in natural quality” (διαφορὰ ὡς ἐν ποιότητι φυσικῇ) is in stark opposition to the Chalcedonians’ idea of ascribing an actual duality of properties and natures in Christ after the Incarnation. Severus’ professed synonymy between difference and division and his resistance to it is made plain in the following passage from his exchange with Sergius:

For we do not refuse to confess the difference, God forbid, but we flee from this, that we should divide the one Christ in a duality of natures after the union. For if he is divided, the properties of each one of the natures are divided at the same time with him, and what is its own will cling to each of them.¹³

“Difference as in natural quality” is thus meant to respond directly to the idea of two actual substantial properties of Christ after the union which, on Severus’ reading, would amount to a cutting of Christ into two (natures). However, Severus wants at the same time to avoid the other extreme of a strict one-nature Christology without qualification. He thus feels compelled to rebuke those like Sergius who in their anti-dyophysite zeal uphold the idea of a synthetic nature of Christ, a mixed divine-human nature that



¹¹ Sergius’ first letter to Severus in TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 144.

¹² TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 152.

¹³ Severus’ first letter to Sergius in TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, pp. 150–51.

would have just one (synthetic) natural property applicable to it.¹⁴ Severus is plain that this would lead to a *tertium quid* of the incarnation which would destroy the two natures in Christ. It is towards this goal of conserving the properties of Christ that he introduces the idea of difference as in natural quality in the first place. The picture thus completed by Severus would result in a unitary Christ, of whom the only acceptable distinction would be that of difference as in natural quality. Hence, it is important to understand the meaning of this special type of qualitative difference in order to grasp why and how a distinction according to its terms would save the unity of Christ and be free of any divisive duality.

The notion of *difference as in natural quality* (διαφορὰ ὡς ἐν ποιότητι φυσικῇ) received close attention from Joseph Lebon in section two of his extended article on the Syrian Christology.¹⁵ Here, Lebon considers the Miaphysite view regarding the conservation or destruction of the properties of Christ, and makes a good case for singling out Severus among his fellow theologians as a champion of the conservation of properties according to the difference as in natural quality. Lebon finds a perfect match between Severus' idea of natural quality and Cyril of Alexandria's notion of natural property (ἰδιότης φυσικῆ) or property according to the nature (ἰδιότης ἢ κατὰ φύσιν), on the basis of which Cyril allows for talk about "otherness" in Christ.¹⁶ This further leads Lebon to the conclusion that Severus' concept of difference as in natural quality represents the inheritance of Cyril's idea of the diversity (ἐτερότης) of the natural property in Christ.¹⁷ However, by noticing the scarcity of Cyril's use of the formula "natural quality (ποιότης φυσικῆ)" itself and the existence of other concurrent expressions by which Cyril conceptualizes the difference of the natures, Hans van Loon has recently concluded that Lebon has

¹⁴ "Therefore, do not ascribe to the folly of the Synousiasts", in Severus' first letter to Sergius in TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 149.

¹⁵ LEBON, *La Christologie*, pp. 534–52.

¹⁶ LEBON, *La Christologie*, pp. 537–39.

¹⁷ LEBON, *La Christologie*, pp. 539.

simply projected Severus' own arguments onto Cyril himself.¹⁸ Yet, for our purposes here it is important to note that, for instance, in the Letter to Acacius of Melitene, Cyril shows familiarity with the idea that "Godhead and manhood are not the same thing as in quality of nature" (ὡς ἐν ποιότητι φυσικῇ).¹⁹ By this phrase, Cyril wishes to clarify what in the previous line appears as "the difference (ἡ διαφορά) between the natures or subjects". A few lines later, Cyril uses exactly the same phrase construction with the same meaning, clearly intending to turn the Antiochene discourse about the difference between the natures of Christ into an orthodox one.²⁰ Both occurrences of the phrase are thus intended by Cyril to be used as a technical tool for speaking about the duality of Christ. Cyril considers this terminology to be a sufficient way of talking about duality in Christ, correcting a non-orthodox view that over-emphasises the unity of the Son. This clarification was also Severus' original intention. For example, in his first letter to Sergius, Severus names and faithfully cites a long passage from Cyril's *Second Letter to Succensus*, in which Cyril argues against "mingling" the elements of Christ.²¹ Cyril emphasizes that the nature of the Word could not have passed into that of the flesh or inversely and that each is remaining "in the property according to nature" (ἐν ἰδιότητι τῇ κατὰ φύσιν ἑκατέρου μένοντος).²² Cyril further exemplifies this by another union which avoids conflation, namely the union of soul and body in human nature, in which the two elements continue to maintain their difference according to nature (τὸ διάφορον κατὰ φύσιν).²³ And Severus proves himself a close follower of Cyril both in letter and in spirit. He too proposes the arguments taken from Cyril against those who mingle

¹⁸ H. VAN LOON, *The dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, Leiden & Boston, 1983, pp. 538–39.

¹⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, "Letter to Accacius of Melitene", in WICKHAM, *Select letters*, p. 50: οὐ γὰρ τοὶ παῦτόν ὡς ἐν ποιότητι φυσικῇ θεότης τε καὶ ἀνθρωπότης. In his translation, Wickham (p. 51) omits to render the "ὡς".

²⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, "Letter to Accacius of Melitene", in WICKHAM, *Select letters*, p. 52, lines 1–5.

²¹ TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, pp. 147–48.

²² Cyril of Alexandria, *Select Letters*, p. 89 (modified).

²³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Select Letters*, p. 89.

the natures of Christ and further conjoins the diversity in natural property with difference as in natural quality:

It is therefore already made known [...] from these things that natural property [ἰδιότης] (implies) the otherness of natures of those things which have come together to union, and the difference (lies) in natural quality.²⁴

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that Lebon had good reasons to associate Severus' notion of difference as in natural quality with Cyril's rationale for the difference in Christ through the otherness of the natural properties.²⁵ However, where Lebon seems to go too far is in the interpretation he offers for this qualitative difference. The Louvain scholar identifies another correlative of it in Cyril who, according to Severus' notation too, associates the notion with the logos of the how of being (ὁ λόγος τοῦ πῶς εἶναι).²⁶ Lebon takes this logos to refer to the essence or species in Cyril, which may seem to imply that the properties differentiated are nothing other than the (constitutive) differentiae between the human species and God.²⁷

Hans van Loon has charged Lebon with inconsistency in this matter too as the Belgian scholar also showed that the Miaphysites shared the opposite picture of a *physis* that is a concrete entity and not an abstract essence.²⁸ This would render the specific difference less relevant for Cyril and the Miaphysites. Hans van Loon' alternative to this is that in as much as we can accept that natural quality in Cyril does not mean something "added" but rather something that gets "attached by nature or substanti-

²⁴ TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 148. Torrance renders ἰδιότης as "particularity" instead of "natural property" to highlight Severus' intent to keep it different from a divisive property. This, however, may bring in too much of an interpretation into the translation.

²⁵ As we shall see below, Maximus himself does not raise any doubts about the formula itself, but only about its interpretation.

²⁶ LEBON, *La Christologie*, p. 539.

²⁷ LEBON, *La Christologie*, p. 539: "Ce λόγος τοῦ πῶς εἶναι, qui est la qualité naturelle, correspond évidemment ce qu'en notre langage, nous exprimons par l'essence spécifique".

²⁸ VAN LOON, *The dyophysite*, pp. 227–28, 542–43.

ally” to God’s being,²⁹ then it can safely said that it represents a whole set of natural properties,³⁰ which can include the “differentiae, the propria and the inseparable attributes.”³¹ This looks like a safe proposition to hold, but it is still too minimalistic for our demands. We are looking for an interpretation of Cyril’s idea of difference in Christ, something that initiated a fierce debate after Chalcedon and that contains more nuance than van Loon’s suggestion allows for. We shall see below that, even if it might be tempting to associate the item in question with the *proprium*, this is not a straightforward move because the characteristics used to differentiate the two natures in Christ are very general and common, rather than specific for one single nature.

This all shows once again how difficult it is to interpret Cyril’s idea of property and thence Severus’ concept of difference as in natural quality. I propose that in order to come to a solution, particular attention must be paid to the examples of properties provided by the two authors. Thus, we might eventually ascertain whether their intention is to associate natural quality with any of the three categories mentioned above, or to the set of all, as suggested by H. van Loon, or to something different from either.

The Hidden Background: Cyril’s Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names

During the first of his *Dialogues on the Trinity*,³² Cyril discusses the form of unity between the Father and the Son which he believes is based on the generation of the latter from the former’s substance. Yet, he considers this also to be beyond (ὕπερ ἡμᾶς) our sort of commonality in the human species as every human individual is bound by a spatial separation with respect to others

²⁹ VAN LOON, *The dyophysite*, pp. 131–32. I am thankful to Prof. van Loon for clarifying this detail of his interpretation in a private correspondence with me.

³⁰ VAN LOON, *The dyophysite*, pp. 228 and 543.

³¹ VAN LOON, *The dyophysite*, p. 202.

³² *Deux dialogues christologiques [Dial. Trin.]* ed. by G. M. de DURAND, Paris, 1964 (SC 97) [which also contains *On the Incarnation [DI]* and *On the unity of Christ [DUC]*].

“according to the law of bodies” (408b19), while in God there is no separation. As noted by van Loon already, it is in this context that Cyril introduces the traditional philosophical definition of man as “rational, mortal living being” and the question we should ask ourselves is whether it is this philosophical notion of humanity that is used by Cyril to describe the human side of Christ in Christological contexts.³³ Let us take Cyril’s work *On the Incarnation*, a Christological dialogue dated around 428, before the Nestorian crisis. According to van Loon’s analysis of the work, Cyril mostly refers to human nature as “flesh” or “humanity”.³⁴ How does Cyril describe this humanity? It is often depicted as something (τλ) “visible” and “tangible” (680d–682d), “unstable”, “changeable”, “alterable”, “transformable” (683bc), etc., and that is always in contrast with the peculiarities of the divine nature (ῆ Θεοῦ φύσις), which is “immutable” (684a), “stable” (690cd), “invisible” etc.³⁵ The context in which these different properties are described is the conservation without confusion of the divine and humanity in the incarnated Christ (683de). Cyril’s argument is in opposition to a teaching that would defend the alteration of each of the two natures during their union in Christ. In this sense, it bears a striking similarity to the context of saving the difference as in natural quality, except that here we get a list of several properties and not just one quality. However, if we turn to Cyril’s treatise on the Holy Trinity, we find the idea that the properties of the divine nature are many and expressible through many names because none of these alone could encapsulate (ἐγκυατακλεῖω) the divine nature itself.³⁶ For Cyril, as for his Christian predecessors, the plurality of these names is the solution that counters the Eunomian, unlawful identification of the divine with one single name, the “unbegotten” which would render the “begotten” Son

³³ See VAN LOON, *The dyophysite*, pp. 102–03 and 126.

³⁴ VAN LOON, *The dyophysite*, p. 272. H. van Loon also identifies in Cyril the very rare expression “man by nature”.

³⁵ See also, *DI*, 691d.

³⁶ Cyril, *Dial. Trin.* V 558cd. For a subtle analysis of Cyril’s arguments and methodology, see M.-O. BOULNOIS, *Le paradoxe trinitaire chez Cyrille d’Alexandrie. Herméneutique, analyses philosophiques et argumentation théologique*, Paris, 1994, pp. 91–102 at 98.

into a non-divine item.³⁷ The strategy of avoiding the confusion of the multiple biblical names with the essence is rooted in Origen, who was the first to consider the names of Christ such as “light”, “life”, “truth”, etc. as “conceptualizations” (*epinoiai*) applicable to Him by the human mind.³⁸ The relegation of these names to the conceptual activity of the human mind may sound too deflationary a move but it is likely that Origen did not see the concepts of the human mind as bare notions bereft of any reality.³⁹ Basil of Caesarea too considered these names as “conceptualizations” that are not simple imaginations (*φαντασιῶν*) of the mind but bear on empirical experience: “After an initial concept (*νόημα*) has arisen for us from sense perception (*ἀπὸ τῆς αἰσθησεως*), the more subtle and precise reflection on what we have conceived is called conceptualization (*ἐπίνοια*)”.⁴⁰ It is, Basil argues, on the basis of different conceptualizations that many and different names can be applied to Christ. This detail of a plurality of names applicable to one and the same entity is crucial for Basil’s anti-Eunomian argument that the substance of God, being absolutely simple, cannot be equated with the collection of the properties named by these different nouns.

Cyril’s method is very close to the one above: he describes the whole process as taking its root in repeated “contemplations” (*ἐκ πλείεστων ὄσων θεωρημάτων*) which the mind collects from the Bible by means of further “refined representations of conceptions” (*κατερρινημέναις φαντασίαις ἐννοιῶν*).⁴¹ Cyril gives very simi-

³⁷ See, for details, BOULNOIS, *Le paradoxe*, pp. 174–77.

³⁸ See Origen, *Comm. on John* I, IX, p. 53. For a history of this tradition starting from Origen and echoing later in both Theology and Christology, see T. KOBUSCH, *Sein und Sprache. Historische Grundlegung einer Ontologie der Sprache*, Leiden, 1987, pp. 48–64.

³⁹ Origen devised his theory of *epinoia* as a reaction against the Sabelians’ pure conceptual or modalist interpretation of the divine hypostases as different “masks” of the same single divine entity. See, for details, KOBUSCH, *Sein und Sprache*, pp. 49–51, who argues that a kind of conceptual realism was practised by Origen.

⁴⁰ Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium*, I,6, 524b in *St Basil of Caesarea. Against Eunomius*, trans. by M. DELCOGLIANO & A. RADDE-GALLWITZ, Washington DC, 2011, p. 98.

⁴¹ Cyril, *Dial. Trin* V, 558ab. For Cyril’s theory of collection (*ἐρανίζομαι*), see BOULNOIS, *Le paradoxe*, pp. 98–99.

lar examples of conceptualizations regarding Christ as “light”, “life” etc. and insists that they contribute to a unitary and informative picture about the divine nature. Hence, Cyril and Basil too convey that despite the transcendence of the divine essence, human language can still represent some of its properties in analogy with how similar general traits can be identifiable for the human nature. As we shall shortly see, this conjunction of non-essential properties is hardly embeddable in a philosophical traditional scheme of substance and non-substance entities. As we shall suggest, these properties are neither substantial, nor accidental or the so called *propria* of an entity and this asks for an alternative interpretation of them.⁴²

The Natural Qualities and the Conceptual Difference of the Natures

We have so far seen that the properties described by Cyril look like the general characteristics of entities that get deciphered through conceptualization. The human properties discussed by Cyril seem to confirm his intention of talking about humanity in general terms, rather than by using a definition of humanity or even its *proprium*. If for God we do not have a definition, for man we do have. However, Cyril does not seem interested to use this definition when he talks about the difference between the two natures in Christ. Rather, as described above, he employs many conceptual representations of the two natures in the same way as he reasons about God. Though perfectly aware of the notion of the *proprium*, he does not use it in those contexts in which he often portrays humanity by means of properties it has in common with other animals such as “visible or ‘mortal’”, in contrast with its *proprium* which he denotes by “risibility”.⁴³ As a matter of fact,

⁴² Note that Cyril does not present this process in terms of abstraction since the divine properties cannot be abstracted from various divine items as if they would inhere in a multitude of divinities. Nor are they called for through the Platonic mechanism of recollection.

⁴³ For examples and details about the philosophical tradition regarding the *proprium* that seems to be implied in here, see Barnes’ comments in *Porphyry, Introduction*, trans. by J. BARNES (Oxford, 2003), pp. 208–13. For more on Cyril’s use of the *proprium*, see VAN LOON, *The dyophysite*, pp. 102 and 131.

he attributes the association of the “(un)begottenness” with the proprium as pertaining to the Eunomians and proposes a stark rebuttal of this on the basis that there are many unbegotten entities yet and also there are a multitude of beings that are born.⁴⁴ Therefore, he concludes, “(un)begotten” could not be deemed as a proprium of God.⁴⁵

Interestingly, the treatise *On Incarnation* abounds in the use of the word “humanity” (ἄνθρωπότης) instead of phrases like “human nature” (ἡ ἀνθρώπου φύσις) or its equivalents, as is also the case with “divinity” (θεότης) instead of the divine nature (ἡ θεία φύσις). Different sets of properties seem thus to concur in the building of a common notion of “divinity” and “humanity”. These two concepts being further refined and wisely put together, it can be further said with Cyril that “Godhead and manhood have given us the one Lord, Christ and Son by their mysterious and inexpressible unification”.⁴⁶

If Cyril’s method indeed leads to the construction of polished notions of divinity and humanity out of very general or common impressions, then the “natural quality” by which he distinguishes the two natures must be nothing than what results from these common representations that the mind makes about each nature. A conjunction of properties obtainable through repeated conceptualizations which nonetheless cannot be equated with any of the classic distinction between substantial or non-substantial properties we may be accustomed from Aristotle onwards. Hence, how should one interpret it? I would tentatively suggest that these properties approximate well the generic features of objects that the Stoics take as starting point for the construction of concepts. For example, according to Diogenes Laertius, the Stoics construct common notions by the means of “a natural conception of the

⁴⁴ Cyril, *Dial. Trin.* II, 420, 15–20.

⁴⁵ Cyril, *Dial. Trin.* II, 420, 26–27.

⁴⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, “Second Letter to Nestorius”: ἀποτελεσασῶν δὲ μᾶλλον ἡμῶν τὸν ἕνα κύριον καὶ Χριστὸν καὶ υἱὸν θεότητος τε καὶ ἀνθρωπότητος διὰ τῆς ἀφράστου καὶ ἀπορρήτου πρὸς ἐνότητα συνδρομῆς, in WICKHAM, *Select letters*, p. 7. I am thankful to Prof. van Loon for pointing out to me the right reference to this passage in Cyril.

general characteristics of a thing (ἐννοια φυσικῆ τῶν καθόλου).⁴⁷ According to this view, for instance, by getting repeated sensory impressions of white things, we gradually put them together by building into the notion of “white”. Similarly, Diogenes (DL, VII, 61) explains how the generic notion of Animal gets formed in this Stoic account by the conjunction of different conceptualizations about different sorts of animals. This subtle link between conjunction and conceptualization as based on general traits of beings has further led the Stoics to the idea of “common notions” as being contents naturally shareable by all rational beings that can have natural sensorial experiences.⁴⁸ It seems to me the same correlation between multiple features described by the many names of Christ and their joining together to the same entity as if they would compose a “common notion” of divinity was identified earlier in the anti-Eunomian arguments.⁴⁹ And this same link between the capacity of the mind to construct concepts out of generic features of entities is confirmed by Cyril’s general idea that the difference between divinity and humanity “in quality of nature” would be subject only to the mind’s contemplative work (ἄν νοηθεῖται).⁵⁰ In other words, the same mind which builds up the two notions can discern them accordingly. Cyril plainly asserts that the duality of Christ resides in the notions we have about him (ὡς ἐν ἐννοίαις

⁴⁷ Diogenes Laertius [DL], *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* VII, 54, trans. in F. H. SANDBACH, “Ennoia and prolepsis in the Stoic theory of Knowledge”, in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. by A. A. LONG, London, 1971, p. 25.

⁴⁸ See, for details, C. BRITAIN, “Common sense: concepts, definition and meaning in and out of the Stoa”, in *Language and learning. Philosophy of language in the Hellenistic Age*, ed. by D. FREDE & B. INWOOD, Cambridge, 2005, p. 177, and H. DYSON, *Prolepsis and Ennoia in the Early Stoa*, Berlin, 2009.

⁴⁹ One important tracing of the Christian theory of conceptualization to Stoic roots, though not made on exactly the same grounds as those presented here, has been also suggested by T. KOBUSCH, *Sein un Sprache*, pp. 48–59, and T. KOBUSCH, “Die EPINOIA – Das menschliche Bewusstsein in der antiken Philosophie”, in Gregory of Nyssa: *Contra Eunomium II. An English version with supporting studies. Proceedings of the 10th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Olomouc, September 15–18, 2004)*, ed. by L. KARFIKOVA, S. DOUGLASS & J. ZACHHUBER, with the assistance of V. HUSEK & L. CHVATAL, Leiden, 2007, pp. 3–21.

⁵⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, “Letter to Accacius”, in WICKHAM, *Select letters*, p. 51.

δεχόμενοι),⁵¹ and there is nothing special about this intellectual process defined by him as “theoria” because it is equally applicable to the difference between soul and body in a human being.⁵² The parallelism between the two models is perfect “for purely mental consideration by the mind’s eye”,⁵³ so any other kind of difference would turn both man and Christ into two separate entities. Division must thus mean something purely extra-mental, something similar to a concrete cutting into two that leads eventually to a “spatial” separation, such as that between corporeal beings. However, this does not mean that for Cyril differentiation by the mind is simply a psychological process. It is true that Cyril sometimes talks as though this were the case, as for example when he considers the difference between the natures as a difference between the terms that designate them (φωνῶν δὲ διαφοράν).⁵⁴ However, if his method has something in common with the Stoic view of concept formation, as we have suggested, then all these names must rely on a causal mechanism, i.e. they must be produced by that reality which falls under the produced concept. This should mean, among other consequences, that they are not pure constructions of the mind deprived of any reality but rather a different kind of conceptual reality to which we may not be accustomed.⁵⁵ According to the Stoics, the mind would put together the multiple representations insofar as it believes that they all arise from the same cause. Similarly, I believe it is only by accepting the multiple appellations of God as all coming from God as “author” of the Bible that the mind can put them all together in a unitary

⁵¹ Ibid. frag. 12, p. 48. See also, Cyril’s first letter to Succensus, in WICKHAM, *Select letters*, p. 77.

⁵² Cyril of Alexandria, “Letter to Eulogius”, in WICKHAM, *Select letters*, pp. 63–64. Cyril’s (Stoic) constructivism about universals is visible in this passage as he freely says that “we unite them [the soul and body] and get one nature of man” (p. 65).

⁵³ Cyril of Alexandria, “Letter to Succensus”, in WICKHAM, *Select letters*, p. 77.

⁵⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, “Letter to Accacius”, in WICKHAM, *Select letters*, p. 51.

⁵⁵ On the Stoic conceptual realism, see V. CASTON, “Something and nothing: the Stoics on concepts and universals”, in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 17, ed. by D. SADLEY, Oxford, 1999, pp. 145–213.

notion of the divine. In light of this, one might say that the mind must be affected by the same cause in order to agree that all conceptual representations refer to the same entity. And when there is a name that is not explicitly stated in the Bible, Cyril seems to imply that the mind could add further names that contribute to a better precision and congruence under the same notion. We know that the Stoics complemented in a similar fashion their common notion of god “conceived of, and grasped by prolepsis to be, not only immortal and blessed, but also humane, protective, and beneficent”.⁵⁶

Severus on Natural Quality and Common Notions

That common notions of humanity and divinity made of various cumulative characteristics are implied in Severus’ thought can be easily seen from his reaction against the Chalcedonian dictum that speaks of two properties (and two activities). Severus points out that there are many properties that characterize every nature and not just two:

‘For example, of his humanity there is perceptibility, and visibility, and mortality, and being subject to hunger and to thirst and to other things like it. And there are many properties of the divine nature: invisibility, intangibility, being before the ages, being unlimited.’⁵⁷

Again, we face here a multitude of properties in which none is a differentia or the proprium of human being. They are arguably general properties taught by the Bible as applicable to divinity and humanity and it is likely that they featured as common notions for the Christian mind. By the end of the same first letter to Sergius, Severus points out, following Cyril’s account in the *Commentary to John*, that these properties must be considered in analogy with the more materialistic natural qualities of a body, “as for example the quality of being solid, or of taste, or of density, or of weight, or of thickness or transparency”.⁵⁸ These are

⁵⁶ DYSON, *Prolepsis*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 155.

⁵⁸ TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 160.

obviously very general traits of bodies and do not single out any *propria* of a certain group of bodies. Rather, they seem to add up together to form the notion of a natural body. In that same passage, Severus points out that according to Cyril we must reason about divinity in a similar manner to thinking about bodies while being aware of the materialistic limits of our language. This chimes well with the previous suggestion that we interpret Cyril's account in line with Stoicism, as the Stoic mechanism of causation is based on the causal activity of the physical bodies. Severus' suggestion thus seems to be that we reason about natural quality in Christology in analogy with the natural qualities of a body. This should therefore mean that we extrapolate the causal mechanism to non-material entities such as divinity but keep the rest in a good analogy with that. It is, I surmise, this very concrete or materialistic picture that drives the two authors to regard the Chalcedonian duality about Christ as a splitting of Christ "in independent parts", i.e. as a mutilation of him as though he were a body cut into two spatially separated pieces:

we confess the particularities of the natures from which Emanuel is, that is (particularities) that (lie) in natural quality, and not such that the natures should be cut off independently and separated from each other. For whoever does not confess it, arrives at the opinion of those who confuse *ousiai*.⁵⁹

In this fragment Severus also suggests that natural quality is only the set of all the general characteristics⁶⁰ used to describe one nature. For our purposes, however, it is less important whether natural quality means here the whole set or might refer to each of those traits taken in isolation. What is crucial, rather, is to establish whether they resemble the *propria* of the nature in question. However, Severus is openly against this idea of the properties approximating the *proprium* when he describes in detail the features of the human nature in which the Logos gets incarnated:

when we make terms about the inhomination, we say that it is the propriety of the humanity to hunger, or to thirst, or to be weary, but we do not say this in any precise way, for this is not the propriety only of man, but also of the other living creatures, which

⁵⁹ TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 214.

⁶⁰ Torrance renders these properties by "particularities".

by nature breathe the air, and live lives subject to the senses and are nourished. Because a propriety, expressed precisely, is that thing which belongs to something alone, and without sharing with another. But because to hunger and to thirst or to be tired are not properties of the bodiless God, because of this, in a comparison in relation to him, we call these ‘properties of humanity.’⁶¹

Hence Severus, like Cyril before him, is aware of the notion of the proprium as a property applicable to a limited category of beings as though it “belongs” to them solely. And he even provides the example of “risibility” for men and “neighing” for horses in that very same context.⁶² However, he is explicit that it is not the proprium that he has in mind when he describes the natural quality of humanity but rather a conjunction of general notions that are equally applicable to other beings and not to humans exclusively. These are, as suggested earlier, general characteristics that the mind adds up together in order to build up the concept of humanity as different to that of divinity. Of course, this does not mean that God incarnated himself in the notion of humanity or finally that humanity is nothing but what man has in common with other animals. On the contrary, both Severus and Cyril time and again stress the rational part of the individual human nature which Christ put upon himself, only they appear to see no compelling necessity for including this in their account of the difference in natural quality. In the light of this, the difference between the two natures means only a form of formal distinction which is able to show “how they are” one in respect to the other and not “what they are”:

It is clearly established ... that natural quality is the principle of how (a thing) is, for the Doctor [Cyril] said: with respect to how they are, these things which are named are seen to be different and are unlike each other in anything. And so we confess the difference and the particularity and the otherness of the natures from which Christ is, for we do not quarrel about names, but (we confess) the particularity which (lies) in natural quality and not that which will be set in parts, each one existing independently.⁶³

⁶¹ TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 194.

⁶² TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 223.

⁶³ TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 150.

Echoing Cyril's view that a proper comparison of two entities is conditioned by their being co-specific/generic, Severus thus implies in this passage that there is a specialized way of marking the otherness of those entities and that heterogeneity is not arbitrarily stipulated. Rather, it represents a true principle that shows how entities are in general and Severus does not shy away from emphasizing that it stays "firm and unchangeable".⁶⁴ It is on the basis of this difference that Severus might equally complement his theory with the Alexandrian's idea that this difference in Christ is subject to the mind's power of discernment, in opposition to any other sort of difference that might endanger the absolute unity of Christ.⁶⁵ We shall now proceed to show that although this theory was meant to save the duality in Christ, the whole approach was to be critically interpreted as the denial of a real duality in the Savior.

Maximus' Idea of Common Concepts

Maximus' Christological arguments, presented in his *Epistles* and *Opuscula*, address with great interest the problem of the difference as in natural quality. However, Maximus' arguments are already foreshadowed by his general view of the relationship between nature and its properties, which he elaborated long before in his *Ambigua to John*.⁶⁶ And by way of comparison, it would also be useful to start with some passages that reflect Maximus' concern with Eunomian arguments too. Of course, Maximus' engagement with Eunomius' theology can be explained by the fact that *Ambigua* is a commentary on Gregory the Theologian, and Maximus could not have missed the Theologian's attack on Eunomius' heresy.

Chapters 16 and 17 of *Ambigua* indeed consist of Maximus' interpretation of Gregory the Theologian's anti-Eunomian arguments in his *Oratio* 28. Maximus takes up the task of explaining



⁶⁴ TORRANCE, *Christology after Chalcedon*, p. 183.

⁶⁵ See LEBON, *La Christologie*, pp. 526–27, no. 198–99.

⁶⁶ All references to *Ambigua* and translations are taken from N. CONSTAS (ed. and trans.), *Maximos the Confessor, The Ambigua*, Cambridge, MA, 2014 (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 28, 2 vols).

Gregory's view about the properties said to be "around" (περὶ) God such as "beginningless", "immutability", and "incorruptibility", the properties of divinity we have encountered above in Cyril and Severus. Gregory's argument, as shown by Maximus, aims to oppose the Eunomian impulse to equate God's essence with the property of being "unbegotten" for several general reasons:

- 1) because to profess a general equivalence between the property and the divine essence would imply "the introducing of many essences of God" as there are many such properties said about God;⁶⁷
- 2) definitions of a thing's essence are based on positive terms, referring to a thing's existence and not to what the thing is not, that is, on privative properties, which show what the thing is not;⁶⁸
- 3) definition is a complex formula which does not contain only a single term but "items which expand and explain the summary designation of a thing, which is its name".⁶⁹ Maximus draws the obvious conclusion that none of those properties invoked by the Eunomians "can ever be the essence of God".⁷⁰

Maximus goes on to describe Gregory's preference for negative terms in his discourse on God as an intentional move taken to counterbalance the Eunomian trust in the human capacity to know God's essence. Maximus thereafter responds positively to Gregory's answer to his adversaries' accusation that his claims obstruct the very comprehension of the fact that God exists. Since Gregory argues that all we know about God is not his essence, how then, the Eunomians would ask, can we be sure on this premise that He actually exists? Gregory characterizes this move as a "treacherous twist" unjustly intended to make him appear like an atheist and proposes that despite our limits we can still know important things about God through his properties. It is important to notice in this context how Maximus describes Gregory's move. The Confessor sees it as an attempt to "make clear and intelligible, on the basis of prevailing common concepts (οὐτῶς τῶν κοινῶν ἐννοιῶν κερρατηκῶν), that the Divine is infinite".⁷¹ He further adduces that "the same common concepts demonstrate

⁶⁷ *Amb.Ioh.* 16, PG 91, 1221CD; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 379.

⁶⁸ *Amb.Ioh.* 16, PG 91, 1224A; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 379.

⁶⁹ *Amb.Ioh.* 16, PG 91, 1224A; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 379.

⁷⁰ *Amb.Ioh.* 16, PG 91, 1224A; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 379.

⁷¹ *Amb.Ioh.* 17, PG 91, 1229D; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 395.

or introduce (εἰσαγαγούσῶν) that God is ‘indeterminate’ or ‘formless’ or ‘completely without parts’.⁷²

In a commentary on a different passage from Gregory’s *Ora-tio* 30, Maximus agrees that not only the attributes of the divine nature (omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, justice, etc.) but also those of human nature (servitude, obedience, circumscription, existence *ex nihilo*, etc.) are deemed proper to the two natures by the “common concepts” (κοινὰς ἐνοίας) that we have of them.⁷³ Therefore, these are good examples to help us conclude that Maximus shows himself equally favourable to the idea, as discussed earlier, found in Cyril and Severus that one could describe divinity and respectively humanity through common notions. After all, this should not come as a surprise if one recalls that Gregory is also an important source for Cyril, and implicitly for Severus, with regard to the same anti-Eunomian teaching.

Maximus would thus seem well prepared to accept what follows from distinguishing the divine and human nature according to common notions, but is he content with that? I will argue that he is not, for indeed Maximus’ reception of this argument does not yet imply that he agrees that the only acceptable difference between humanity and divinity is a difference in natural quality. The reasons for his reluctance to accept this idea are already present in his commentary on Gregory. Let us first notice that both Gregory and Maximus accept there can be a meaningful discourse about the essence of things, that is, at least *prima facie* they are not agnostic that there is such an essence but want to establish our limited apprehension of it. The question, however, remains as to how we might understand this narrowness — is it an ontological given or rather a restriction forced on us by the Fall? This question is too complex to be addressed fully and lies beyond the scope of this paper, but I would like to suggest that despite Maximus’ general commitment to the limited capacities for knowledge by human nature as incurred by the Fall, he nevertheless proves to be more positive with respect to our capacity to understand the created world and make predications of it.

⁷² *Amb.Ioh.* 17, PG 91, 1232AB; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 395–96.

⁷³ *Amb.Ioh.* 28, PG 91, 1272C; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 2, p. 33.

Knowledge through Universals Is Necessary

One suggestion of this capacity for knowledge of the world is found in Maximus' nuanced contrast between the two types of properties applicable to bodies that correspond to "accidental" and, respectively, "essential or constitutive properties". Following Gregory, Maximus indeed accepts that a complete knowledge (τελείαν κατ'ἀλήθειαν) through natural predicates such as "being a body" or "suffering corruption", which can be applied to a particular compound (στοιχεῖόν τι) such as "man", "ox" or "horse", is limited. The reason for this would lie in the need to place the subject of these attributes together with them, "for it is the subject (τὸ ὑποκείμενον) which is born, suffers corruption, and is marked by qualities (πεποίωται)".⁷⁴ Maximus' interest, thus, is in distinguishing the "collection of properties", which shows "how" something is, from "what" a thing is, that is, from the essence of a thing, and he assumes we have only a limited means for accessing that essence. However, in drawing the comparison between the subject and its properties, in his examples "being born" and "suffering corruption", Maximus contrasts these particularized properties with general terms such as "man", "ox" or "horse", which according to him would give us further knowledge about the body in question. What sort of knowledge would that be? Maximus suggests that, for instance, these general terms would convey that the topic is about "living beings" (περὶ τὰ ζῶα, that is, in terms of ancient logic, with which Maximus seems to be quite familiar, they would include their superior species. Maximus further explains his thought in terms of ancient rules for predication by associating the general terms (species and genera) with the universals that are predicated of the particular and not vice versa, "for particulars are never predicated of universals, nor species of genera".⁷⁵ Therefore, the knowledge of the universals seems to be the key element for grasping the object in question "completely and without remainder" (τελείως καὶ ἀπαράλειπτως).⁷⁶ However, as is well known from the history of

⁷⁴ *Amb.Ioh.* 17, PG 91, 1225A; CONSTAS *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 383. The obvious Peripatetic context of Maximus' argument is confirmed by his immediate appeal to the rule of the priority of "subject" in terms of predication.

⁷⁵ *Amb.Ioh.* 17, PG 91, 1225BC; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 385.

⁷⁶ *Amb.Ioh.* 17, PG 91, 1225C; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 387.

philosophy, whenever the matter at hand turns towards universals, it cannot be easily settled. In Maximus' case the difficulty emerges from a double concern. Firstly, he seeks to explain the nature of things by means of participation in the *logoi*, or intelligible principles of reality pre-existent in God's mind from eternity, a theory which would place him in the proximity of a Platonic theory of "exemplarism" concerning universals.⁷⁷ And secondly, the problem arises from his opposition to a pure *ante rem* conception of universals, which is clear from his explicitly stated view that universals actually consist in particulars.⁷⁸ These two opposing sides of Maximus' theory of universals have triggered the recent portrayal of Maximus as a defender of "immanent realism".⁷⁹ I believe this type of realism, which presents the universal as wholly and fully existent in each individual, receives its impetus from Maximus' analysis of God as the cause of creation and from his subsequent portrayal of the properties of created beings in terms of their springing from a common generic motion caused by God.⁸⁰ By this, Maximus implies that the properties of each individual are metaphysically grounded in a unifying and commonly generic capacity or power to move which originates in God as their Cause. That active power complements substance and accommodates itself to all genera and species accordingly, without losing its generic unifying character ultimately

⁷⁷ See, for details, T. TOLLEFSEN, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford, 2008.

⁷⁸ "For if the universals subsist (ὁφείσθησεν) in the particulars, and do not in any way possess their principle of being and existence by themselves, then it is quite clear that, if the particulars were to disappear, the corresponding universals would cease to exist", *Amb.Ioh.* 10, PG 91, 1189CD; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 313.

⁷⁹ See C. ERISMANN, "Maximus the Confessor on the logical dimension of the structure of reality", in *The Architecture of the Cosmos: St Maximus the Confessor. New Perspectives*, ed. by A. LÉVY, P. ANNALA, O. HALLAMAA & T. LANKILA, with the collaboration of D. KALEY, Helsinki, 2015, pp. 51–70, and T. TOLLEFSEN, "The Concept of the Universal in the Philosophy of St Maximus", in *The Architecture of the Cosmos*, ed. by A. LÉVY *et alii*, pp. 70–93.

⁸⁰ See S. MATEIESCU, "The doctrine of immanent realism in Maximus the Confessor", in *Platonism and Christian Thought in Late Antiquity*, ed. by E. EMILSSON, F. JANBY, P. PAVLOS & T. TOLLEFSEN, London & New York, 2021, pp. 201–20.

based on God as its single and actual originator and preserver.⁸¹ Maximus claims that all these things represent a good deal of the knowledge that the saints have access to, despite the general human limitations they share in common with human beings as created entities. For example, they are able to comprehend the generic motion of beings as representing “the unvarying essential identity of beings in their particular species”, through which God as source of beings guarantees that they “possess an inviolable and unchanging equilibrium in their natural identity”.⁸² And by contemplating the same motion as representing the “natural power commensurate with the substrate” of every being, the contemplator gains access to another name of God such as that of a “judge” of creation that is the one assuring “the salutary and differentiated distribution of beings”.⁸³ Maximus’ strict engagement with this differentiation of beings is profoundly based on his dynamic ontology and to that end he even describes substance itself as undergoing motion from the most generic genus to the most particular species.⁸⁴

As is clear from these examples, these names of God reflect his activity as the creator and preserver of creation. Maximus does not consider them only from the perspective of theology but also from the perspective of ontology. In this respect, Maximus seems to be projecting onto ontology the consequences of seeing God as the actual producer of the world, to the extent that the species and genera are differentiated by true and “constitutive” power-properties which supply a metaphysical grounding to predication itself. We shall now see how Maximus imports this ontological view into Christology itself and further uses it in a critical reception of the notion of “difference as in natural quality”.

⁸¹ *Amb.Thom.* 5, PG 91, 1048ab, cf. CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 33: “The most generic motion [is] constitutive of species and contains every property that naturally belongs to the essence”.

⁸² *Amb.Ioh.* 10.19, PG 91, 1133D; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 205.

⁸³ *Amb.Ioh.* 10.19, PG 91, 1133CD; CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, pp. 205–07. See, for further details, S. MATEIESCU, “Providence as Judgment in Maximus the Confessor. Some Christological Implications”, in *Pronoia. The Providence of God. Die Vorsehung Gottes*, ed. by T. HAINTHALER, F. MALI, G. EMMENEGGER & M. L. OSTERMANN, Innsbruck & Wien, 2019, pp. 351–65.

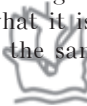
⁸⁴ *Amb.Ioh.* 10.37, CONSTAS, *The Ambigua*, vol. 1, p. 289: “For it [οὐσία] is moved from the most generic genus through the more generic genera to particular species”

Christ Is Fully Man. The Argument from Ontology

Opusculum 16 is a dense Christological piece in which Maximus is asked to comment on another monk's definition of will as a power.⁸⁵ Here, Maximus again draws on Gregory of Nazianzus, this time to distinguish the will (θέλησις) from the willed thing (θελητόν). Maximus intends to secure the idea that will is a natural capacity of every rational being (God including) and hence that there are two wills in Christ, corresponding to his two natures, despite the fact that Christ activates them, and thus wills, unitarily. Maximus supports his argument with the idea that will is "connatural" (ἔμφυτος) and "constitutive" (συστατικός) of the being in which it exists. And in this regard, he wonders how Christ might be considered "full man" (τέλειος ἄνθρωπος), beyond the recognition of the will inherent to his humanity and which the incarnation could not have destroyed. What is striking in this particular argument is the switch from talking about two wills to the discussion of one will, namely that pertaining to the humanity of Christ. Maximus agrees that defining the will as natural is but a strategy to secure the fullness of the humanity of Christ, but he repeats the same strategy when he considers the natural energy of the humanity of Christ, this time revealing that both rely on his ontology of essences and constitutive powers:

Πᾶν γὰρ εἶ τι τῶν ὄντων, συστατικὴν ἔχει διαφορὰν, τὴν ἔμφυτον κίνησιν τῷ γένει συμπαραλαμβανομένην, καὶ ποιούσαν τοῦ ὑποκειμένου τὸν ὀρισμὸν, δι' οὗ ὅτι ἐστὶ καὶ τί ἐστὶ κυρίως γνωρίζεται, πρὸς τε τὰ ὁμοειδῆ τὸ ἀπαράλλακτον ἔχον, καὶ τὸ διάφορον αὐθις πρὸς τὰ ἑτεροειδῆ· καὶ εἰ τοῦτο, πῶς δυνατὸν φυσικῆ δύναμει ἀμοιροῦντα κατὰ σάρκα, τὸν ἐνανθρωπήσαντα Λόγον ἄνθρωπον τέλειον, ἢ ὅλως ἄνθρωπον χρηματίζειν.

Every being has the inborn motion that grows together with the genus and produces the definition of the subject as constitutive difference, through which it is properly known that something is and what it is, having, in turn, both the sameness with beings of the same species and the difference from



⁸⁵ This *Opusculum* (PG 91, 184C–212A; CPG 7697.16) bearing the full title “On the two wills of one Christ, our God, to Theodore the Deacon”, has been recently dated after c. 641 by M. JANKOWIAK and P. BOOTH, “A new date-list of the works of Maximus the Confessor” in ALLEN & NEIL, *OHMC*, pp. 62–63.

those heterospecific. And if so, how it is possible to call the incarnated Word deprived of the natural power according to the flesh, complete or whole man.⁸⁶

In this fragment, one can easily recognize Maximus' approach in the *Ambigua*, as discussed earlier, which proposed that we know the subject of beings through their constitutive properties and not through their particularized properties. Here, Maximus again indicates a strong association between the generic motion and the constitutive differentia, thus granting the latter, otherwise a logical concept, a metaphysical causal power. Ever since Porphyry, philosophers had been accustomed to the idea that a differentiating property can "produce" a species when it attaches itself to the right genus.⁸⁷ But Maximus goes beyond this by grounding it in a metaphysical account that derives from his analysis of God as creator and preserver of the world. The paradoxical placement of differentia into the genus of motion is meant to ensure its constitutive force of the species and hence to back up the commonality of the specific nature beyond a purely conceptual level.⁸⁸ The argument closely resembles one that is found in *Ambiguum* 5, in which this constitutive difference is taken as a "proof" of the humanity of Christ, thus showing that Maximus reasons about Him, as about every other item in ontology. By placing these ideas at the heart of his Christological arguments, Maximus meant to champion the fullness of the humanity of Christ, his will and natural energy, and he thus reveals how deeply his Christology is dependent on his ontology.

Notably, whenever he speaks about the two wills and also when he proceeds to the topic of the two energies of Christ, Maximus has almost nothing to say about the divine will or energy. His argument addresses only the human side of Christ as if that would be sufficient to prove the duality of Christ in those respects. As we shall soon see, Maximus is fully aware that the divine lacks any constitutive property because it is without composition. But it seems that precisely on this account, when building in the difference bet-

⁸⁶ *Op.* 16, *PG* 91, 200BC.

⁸⁷ Porphyry, *Isagoge*, *CAG* 4, 8.15–10.3.

⁸⁸ See, for details, MATEIESCU, "The doctrine of immanent realism", pp. 214–15.

ween the two sides of Christ he puts more weight on the human part and its constitutive qualities. The same strategy is visible in *Opusculum* 3, in which Maximus simply accuses Severus and his followers of stripping Christ of his human nature, against which he wants to establish that Christ is fully man (τέλειος ἄνθρωπος).⁸⁹ In support of his argument for the complete humanity of Christ, Maximus again provides a close definition of the human will of Christ in terms of the nature's essential power. He also calls it a vital power (ζωτικὴν δύναμιν) and sees it as constitutive of human nature in general, including that of Christ.⁹⁰ In this regard, he concludes that the failure to reason about the will of Christ from an ontological perspective results in depriving Christ of a real human will, as Severus did.⁹¹ The existential input of the human nature of Christ being thus ensured, it is against this "realist" background that Maximus would deem the properties of Christ portrayed by Severus to be "simple" or "conceptual".

Maximus' Critique of "difference as in natural quality"

In *Opusculum* 2, addressed to the priest Marinus, the Confessor launches a pointed attack on Severus' misrepresentation of the Chalcedonian notion of difference as division. He accuses the Patriarch of exactly the same confusion made possible, according to Maximus, by the Miaphysite identification of physis with hypostasis. Maximus' tone is of course very polemical,⁹² and this is amplified in this *Opusculum* by the observation that Severus' argu-

⁸⁹ *Op.* 3, *PG* 91, 49B. Dated between *c.* 640–643, *Opuscula* 2 (chapter 50) and 3 (chapter 51) (*PG* 91, 40A–56D; *CPG* 7697.2–3) have recently been referred to as parts of a single work by Maximus called "On the operations and the wills, to the priest Thalassius". See, for details, M. JANKOWIAK and P. BOOTH, "A new date-list of the works of Maximus the Confessor", p. 61.

⁹⁰ *Op.* 3, *PG* 91, 49B. It is precisely the lack of this ontological perspective that Maximus imputes to Severus, who would not know that the primary and most proper property of rational beings is motion.

⁹¹ *Op.* 3, *PG* 91, 49B: Θέλημα φυσικόν κατὰ Σευήρον οὐκ ἔχων ὡς ἄνθρωπος.

⁹² Emmanuel Ponsoye, the translator of Maximus' *Opuscula* into French, seems to buy into this polemical tone of Maximus when he (ironically, it seems!) adds the following note to qualify Severus' argument: "Je laisse à plus savant que moi le soin de la réflexion profonde exigée ici!" in *Saint Maxime le*

ment for “difference as in natural quality” was actually meant by Severus to mask his real intention of professing a real difference between the human and divine natures in Christ. It is crucial to observe here that while Maximus is very exact in his wording of Severus’ notion of difference as in natural quality, he also adds the awkward epithet of “ψιλή” to portray it pejoratively as a “simple difference in natural quality” (τὴν ψιλήν ἐν ποιότητι φυσικῇ).⁹³ Maximus readily explains that this view amounts only to posing a formal or conceptual differentiation of the natures which in his opinion would “produce their actual confusion” (πραγματικῶν ποιεῖται τὴν σύγχυσιν).⁹⁴ He openly contrasts this simple difference of qualities with the real or constitutive difference of nature and gives his verdict that Severus openly makes use of falsehood (τὸ ψεῦδος) in saying that “the difference in natural quality is the same thing as the real and natural difference” (τὴν ἐν ποιότητι φυσικῇ διαφορὰν, τῇ πραγματικῇ καὶ κατὰ φύσιν).⁹⁵ This contrast between difference as in natural quality and constitutive difference thus mimics the opposition of the conceptual versus the real. Obviously, Maximus’ notion of “real” and “natural” quality is the same as the concept of “constitutive difference” for which, as noted already, Maximus does not reserve a place in predication solely but buttresses it with his specific ontology. It is only by reasoning within such a background ontology that one could state that posing *only* a simple or formal difference (μόνη ψιλή) between the natures of Christ renders them distinct in conceptualization (κατὰ τὴν ἐπίνοιαν) only, as opposed to being so “in reality”.⁹⁶ Maximus is thus right to see the correlation between difference in natural quality and conceptualization in Severus, but he cannot see any justification for it as he is very strict in equating the latter with non-being.

Maximus also ventures an explanation for Severus’ deceitful mingling of simple or formal difference and constitutive diffe-

Confesseur, Opuscles Théologiques et Polémiques, Introduction par Jean-Claude Larchet, transl. and ed. by E. PONSROYE, Paris, 1998, p. 127.

⁹³ *Op.* 2, *PG* 91, 40AB.

⁹⁴ *Op.* 2, *PG* 91, 40AB.

⁹⁵ *Op.* 2, *PG* 91, 40B.

⁹⁶ *Op.* 2, *PG* 91, 41B.

rence. He explains that the two could be easily conjoined because all quality is after all natural (*φυσικῶν εἶναι πᾶσαν ποιότητητα*), but warns that posing a difference as (*ὥς*) in simple quality still does not lead to posing a difference between the natures in Christ themselves.⁹⁷ On the contrary, Maximus holds, by solely requiring a simple or conceptual difference (*ψιλῆ διαφορά*), Severus obscures the fact that he actually turns the natures of Christ into non-existent (*ἀνοπαρξίαν*) entities.⁹⁸ It is hardly credible that Severus intended to deny the existence of the natures of Christ. But what seems decisive in Maximus' twisting of his words in that way is Severus' avoidance of any reference to the constitutive difference of beings and its ontological import, a notion to which Maximus is strictly committed. Therefore, Maximus' opposition between the "real" and "conceptual" properties is a direct consequence of his ontology which he also projects onto his analysis of Christ.

Difference as in Natural Quality versus Mixed Quality

Opusculum 21 contains another harsh critique of Severus' employment of the difference in natural quality.⁹⁹ The piece is mainly dedicated to the notions of quality (*ποιότητος*), property (*ἰδιότητος*), and difference (*διαφορά*), which Maximus explains in a clear proximity to the tradition of the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*.¹⁰⁰ Prior to this explanation, however, the *Opusculum* starts first by opposing the Fathers' "brief and condensed"

⁹⁷ *Op.* 2, *PG* 91, 40B.

⁹⁸ *Op.* 2, *PG* 91, 41A.

⁹⁹ The dating of this *Opusculum* with the title "On Quality, Property, and Difference, to Theodore, Priest in Mazara" (*PG* 91, 245D–257A; *CPG* 7697.21) remains unsettled yet, but see the arguments for placing it between c. 633–645/6 in M. JANKOWIAK and P. BOOTH, "A new date-list of the works of Maximus the Confessor", pp. 70–71.

¹⁰⁰ The same topic though phrased in a more closer language to the Neoplatonic authors Elias and David appears in Maximus the Confessor, "In isagogen Porphyrii et in categorias Aristotelis" in M. ROUECHÉ, Byzantine philosophical texts of the seventh century, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 23 (1974): 70–71 and, B. ROOSEN, *Epifanovich Revisited. (Pseudo-) Maximi Confessoris Opuscula varia: A critical edition with extensive notes on manuscript tradition and authenticity*, PhD diss., Leuven, 2001, pp. 901–2.

(συνεχής τε καὶ σύντομος) account with that of those outside the Church tradition (παρὰ τοῖς ἔξω) that is, the philosophers who employ more distinctions.¹⁰¹ According to the Fathers, quality would have two subspecies, being split into general or substantial (οὐσιώδη) and particular or hypostatic (ὑποστατικόν). The example the text provides for the former, i.e. “rationality” for humanity and “neighing” for horses betray a possible confusion between rationality as a common instance of a constitutive difference and neighing as a proprium for horses.¹⁰² However, the hypostatic qualities such as an aquiline nose, or being dappled or chestnut in colour for a horse, seem to approximate better the particular properties of the philosophical tradition.¹⁰³ The text, however, does not give further details about this bipartite manner of defining quality and how it is possible to establish its equivalence with the subsequently inserted tripartite classification of quality in “general” (ποιότης καθολικώτερα), “proper” (ιδιότης μερική) and “constitutive” (συστατικός) qualities, which itself is also derived from the philosophical tradition.¹⁰⁴ Given Maximus’ acquaintance with the third technical meaning of quality as “constitutive” of beings, one may reasonably think that in the absence of other similar examples from Maximus, the first part of the text is perhaps an interpolation. However, *Opusculum* 16 abounds in arguments for the necessary distinction between will as a natural property and the “gnomic” will as the property of the willing person. This suggests that Maximus does not only work in parallel with these two schemes of the classification of quality. Rather, he also takes them as equivalent and often attempts to translate one into the other, as seems to be the case in *Opusculum* 16’s successive definition of the will as both constitutive and proper (τῶν ἄλλων ἐν τῇ φύσει πρωτίστην οὖσαν φυσικῶν ιδιωμάτων) to the human species.¹⁰⁵ By continuing to exemplify the bipartite traditional account of quality through the general and particular pro-

¹⁰¹ *Op.* 21, *PG* 91, 248B.

¹⁰² Porphyry, *Isagoge*, *CAG* 12, 17–22.

¹⁰³ More on the philosophical intricacies about the proprium in Barnes’ comments in *Porphyry, Introduction*, transl. with a commentary by J. BARNES, Oxford, 2003, pp. 208–13.

¹⁰⁴ *Op.* 21, *PG* 91, 249C. See, Porphyry, *Isagoge*, *CAG* 9.

¹⁰⁵ *Op.* 16, *PG* 91, 193D–196A.

perties of God, Maximus implicitly reveals that the tradition inherited by him refers to the top-down theological discourse on God, whose being is not composed and hence lacks any constitutive property. It is likely that this same tradition is shared by Severus of Antioch and Cyril of Alexandria, who emphasize in their approach the simplicity or the non-compositionality of God and thus refrain from submitting the divine to an ontological analysis proper to created beings. Maximus must therefore acknowledge the limits of his ontological approach when it comes to analyzing the divine part of Christ and its properties. However, that would not lead him to the same minimalist account of divinity based on common notions which Severus and Cyril seem to share in common when they talk about the difference as in natural quality in Christ.

Maximus indeed first declares that one does not speak properly (*κυρίως*) about the quality (*ποιότης*) of God, simply because divinity does not consist of substance and accidents as created beings do. We rather do that “abusively” (*καταχρηστικῶς*) and only according to our limited power to represent what is beyond us.¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, we use the various names of God such as “all holy”, “all-powerful”, “all-perfect”, etc., as if each represented a natural quality (*φυσικὴ μὲν ποιότης*) of God, and Maximus explains that that is possible because each is applicable to God solely and super-essentially (*μόνον συμπρέπον ὡς ὑπερούσιον*).¹⁰⁷ Maximus thus seems to be reasoning that these divine names represent the propria of the divine substance. This helps him to devise his central argument against Severus in this *Opusculum* that every property must belong to an underlying nature, and thus to distinguish the natural qualities in Christ must result in an affirmation of their underlying natures. But what would be the substitute for that? Maximus shows that Severus’ reasoning, if followed consistently, must lead to a composed quality (*μίαν σύνθετον ποιότητα*) in Christ which would correspond to a composed nature in Him after incarnation (*μίαν σύνθετον φύσιν*) that would render Him foreign to the simple and non-synthetic nature of Father.¹⁰⁸ But recall that one very similar argument had been composed by Sergius

¹⁰⁶ *Op.* 21, *PG* 91, 249A.

¹⁰⁷ *Op.* 21, *PG* 91, 249A.

¹⁰⁸ *Op.* 21, *PG* 91, 252A-C.

the Monophysite, who advocated a synthetic yet unique nature of Christ. But we saw Severus deploying many arguments against that view, at the head of which he placed the theory of difference as in natural quality as the best remedy for the “synousiasts”, as he called the supporters of a mixed nature in Christ. Maximus thus appears to be forcing a view on Severus that the patriarch explicitly had rejected. And by making that bold move, Maximus does not seem to be aware that he is implicitly translating Severus’ own argument into a logic of *propria* that may not be appropriate for the former’s intention with respect to the properties of Christ.

Conclusions

This paper has investigated the notion of “difference as in natural quality” and its critical reception by Maximus the Confessor in his *Opsucula*. The argument was devised in two parts: the first part identified a possible conceptual background for this expression in the anti-Eunomian theory of names shared in common by Cyril of Alexandria with Basil of Caesarea. In particular, I have suggested a Stoic rationale underlines these anti-Eunomian arguments and in light of this, the natural quality that both Cyril and later Severus talk about resembles the generic features of objects that get conceptualized by the Stoics by the means of common notions. One important reason for this interpretation consisted in the fact that according to Cyril, the properties of God and humanity devised through conceptualizations do not match with a classic Aristotelian-like division of them into substantial and accidental features of objects. And in like manner with the Stoics, Cyril talks about the difference between natural qualities as obtainable at the level of conceptualization, and not *prima facie* at the level of beings themselves. I further argued this view was later developed by Severus of Antioch with the explicit anti-Chalcedonian goal to allow for differentiation of generic or common features in Christ and thus avoid any division thereof by placing the differentiated natural qualities at the level of conceptualization.

In the second part, Maximus the Confessor’s charge against this Severan idea has been presented within the context of Maximus’ essentialist ontology. I have first identified a parallel positive reception in Maximus of the idea of common notions stemming

from Gregory of Nazianzus' treatment of the divine names. However, I argued that the Confessor also identifies the limits of this tool when it comes to the analysis of the human nature *per se*, which he ascribes to an approach based on universals. Maximus' metaphysics of motion as based on his remarkable philosophical analysis of the idea of creation was further adduced as an integral part of his theory. It has been shown that in light of this metaphysical advancement Maximus can claim that the universal constitutive properties that define the nature of every species and individuals partaking in it are all composing an ontology covering the whole natural properties of being and from which the human nature of Christ cannot make exception. It has thus been argued that Maximus' Christology is highly dependent on his ontology and when projected by Maximus against this essentialist metaphysics of properties, Severus' notion of "difference as in natural quality" becomes deployed of any reality. Several passages from different *Opuscula* by Maximus highlight Maximus' interpretation of Severus along a simply conceptual and non-realist approach to the properties of Christ which was probably not intended as such by Severus. This proves once again that still more work is needed to understand the *difference in the natural quality* of these antagonistic theologies.

