Natural Desiring and Natural Good:
On the Natural Desire for the Good in Maximus the Confessor and Aristotle

Jonathan Greig

Introduction

Aristotle's understanding of the rational appetite appeared to serve as a foundation for later ancient philosophers in their understanding and articulation of the rational appetite and the process of willing.[1] This certainly seems to be the case for the Late Antiquity Church Father, Maximus the Confessor, who used his understanding of the nature of the will to defend the Christological doctrine that Christ possessed a divine and human will. While Maximus presupposes Aristotle's understanding of the rational appetite in his description of the faculty of willing, he seems to add something new to what Aristotle provided with the distinction between the mode and faculty of willing. In addition to this, Maximus understands that the faculty of will has a fixed natural inclination for the good, while the mode of willing may be conditioned to desire either the real or apparent good.

On comparing Maximus's understanding of the will to that of Aristotle, both Maximus and Aristotle would agree that the rational appetite has the highest good for human nature as its end, however it seems that they would disagree on the way that the appetite has that good as an end. Maximus, for instance, emphasizes that the virtues, which constitute the human good, exist in us by nature through the faculty of will's natural inclination for the good.[2] Aristotle, by contrast, appears to deny that the virtues exist in us by nature, saying rather that our natures merely have the ability to receive and develop the virtues.[3] In saying this, Aristotle implies that the natural good is outside of us and is introduced and brought about through habituation. The question, then, is whether Maximus and Aristotle disagree with each other on this point, or whether there is a way in which they fundamentally agree with each other in spite of the apparent difference in emphases. I propose that Maximus and Aristotle ultimately agree about the nature of the rational appetite in some way containing the virtues which constitute the good for man. The virtues have an implicit existence in

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[1] C.f. Michael Frede's *A Free Will* 19, listing why and how Aristotle should be first considered as influencing later ancient philosophy, especially the Stoics' conception of willing.

[2] *Disputation* 33-35, §88-95; discussed in further detail on pp. 8-9.

[3] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a19–25; discussed in further detail on p. 12.

the inclination of the faculty of will for the natural good, even though the person who employs his will in particular ways does not yet have the virtues until he habituates them within himself in accordance with this natural inclination of his will. In making this proposition, an analysis of the rational appetite for Aristotle and the faculty of will for Maximus is needed in order to show how the rational appetite for Aristotle and the will for Maximus have the natural good as an end. Likewise, the implicit distinction between the rational appetite's fixed desire for the good must be distinguished from the changeable desires of the appetite which may or may not accord with appetite's fixed desire for the good; for Maximus, this will be shown to imply the distinction that he makes between the faculty and modes of willing. An argument will then be given for showing in what way Aristotle and Maximus would agree on the nature of the virtues existing as part of the rational appetite's desire for the natural good.[4]

Rational Appetite and the Chief Good in Aristotle

Aristotle first considers the rational appetite with a discussion on what begins movement in *On the Soul* 3.9, just after he earlier gave a consideration of the powers of sensation, imagination, and the intellect:

> The soul of animals is characterized by two faculties, (a) the faculty of discrimination which is the work of thought and sense, and (b) the faculty of originating local movement. Sense and mind we have now sufficiently examined. Let us next consider what it is in the soul which originates movement.[5]

In this passage, one should note how the faculty which begins movement—appetite—appears to follow naturally from sensation and thought, which are characteristic powers of animals' souls. This implies that movement is something distinct to animals which possess either sensation or (also) thought. So far, Aristotle seems to characterize the faculty of movement as something separate from the other faculties of sensation and thought, but it seems one may wish to be careful how much this separation is emphasized, since: "wish [is] found in the calculative part and desire and passion in the irrational; and if the soul is tripartite appetite will be found in all three parts."[6] Assuming that wish

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[4] In making this argument, I do not think one needs to address whether Aristotle and Maximus the Confessor share the same concept of willing—a question I address in more detail in p. 7, n. 24. Both Aristotle and Maximus at least hold the same position that the faculty of rational appetite, or also willing for Maximus, implicitly desire the natural good.

[5] *On the Soul* 432a15-20.

[6] *On the Soul* 432b5-9.

and desire are aspects of the appetite, Aristotle is saying that the appetite exists in correspondence with each part of the soul—the rational, sensitive, and nutritive, given Aristotle's prior tripartite division of the soul.[7] It may remain a question whether the appetite is a separate faculty in distinction to these powers, but what Aristotle makes clear here is that the appetite includes both rational and irrational desiring.[8]

The next question would be to ask in what way movement involves either thought or appetite. Aristotle first negates the source of movement lying solely in the mind, since the mind as speculative —when it perceives and thinks on something—has nothing to do with whether that thing should be pursued or avoided. Likewise, even when the mind is practical in calculating means to attain some object as an end, it does not start a movement by itself but rather provides the means towards which a given desire can be achieved.[9] So while the mind is not simply involved as the source of movement, neither is the appetite by itself: one may avoid an appetitive desire by following the mind's dictates which would suggest another direction.[10] By narrowing down the criteria to show that neither the mind nor the appetite by themselves are capable of originating movement, Aristotle concludes that both must act together as the cause of local movement:

> Both of these then are capable of originating movement, mind and appetite: (1) mind, that is, which calculates means to an end, i.e. mind practical (it differs from mind speculative in the character of its end); while (2) appetite is in every form of it relative to an end: for that which is the object of appetite is the stimulant of mind practical; and that which is last in the process of thinking is the beginning of action. It follows that there is a justification for regarding these two as the sources of movement, i.e. appetite and practical thought; for the object of appetite starts a movement and as a result of that thought gives rise to movement, the object of

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[7] Although, as was pointed out earlier, the nutritive power is left out as a source of movement in spite of Aristotle's suggestion, here, that the nutritive power may have appetite given the correspondence to Aristotle's tripartite division of the soul.

[8] Richard Sorabji considers this further in his "The Concept of the Will" in *The Will and Human Action* 8, when discussing how desire, though irrational, is also rational in sharing in reason: "For Aristotle qualified the Platonist view that *boulêsis* [the term Plato used to indicate rational desire for the good; c.f. *The Will and Human Action* 6] belongs to the rational part of the soul, as indeed Plato himself had done before him. At the opposite extreme, Aristotle once says that *boulêsis* exists in children before reason or intellect (*logismos, nous*) and is irrational. But elsewhere he calls it rational. And his more considered view is that the part of the soul that desires, even if called irrational, does have a share in (*koinônein*) reason, and can even in a secondary sense be said to have reason (*logon ekhein*), because it listens to reason even if it does not reason things out for itself. The general effect is to make *boulêsis* distinct from reason, though still related to it."

[9] *On the Soul* 432b27-433a1.

[10] *On the Soul* 433a1-8.

> appetite being to it a source of stimulation. So too when imagination originates movement, it necessarily involves appetite.[11]

Recognizing that the mind and the appetite are responsible in some way for movement, Aristotle outlines the process of movement as beginning with: (1) the appetite's focus on (and intention for) the object; (2) the mind being given the appetite's object as an end; (3) the mind calculating means to that object as an end; and (4) action commencing with what is last in the process of thinking. In this process, one can see how the appetite and mind work together towards producing movement which is rationally driven or, in some sense, willed.

Yet, while the two faculties of mind and appetite are at work in this process of willing, Aristotle next says that the faculty which originates movement must still be one and not two:

> That which moves therefore is a single faculty and the faculty of appetite; for if there had been two sources of movement—mind and appetite—they would have produced movement in virtue of some common character. As it is, mind is never found producing movement without appetite (for wish is a form of appetite; and when movement is produced according to calculation it is also according to wish), but appetite can originate movement contrary to calculation, for desire is a form of appetite.[12]

In spite of the fact that mind was shown to be a factor in the rational appetite causing movement, it is ultimately the appetite, or desire (whether rational or irrational), which begins movement or makes it possible in some degree. Mind, then, functions as a sort of guide for the appetite—forming the appetite and providing the immediate steps towards attaining the end that the appetite desires. However, even with the mind's presence in calculating the means towards attaining that end, appetite can carry out movements without the input of the mind. Aristotle likely has in mind the example of the incontinent man who knows, for example, the general proposition that certain actions—like eating too much—should not be done, but such a man is unable to stop himself from actually doing that action.[13] In this case, appetite more than mind is what ultimately brings about the action

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[11] *On the Soul* 433a13-21.

[12] *On the Soul* 433a22-26.

[13] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b7-15.

whether or not the mind actively functions with the appetite in considering and calculating the proper means for realizing the desire.[14]

Given the way that appetite and mind have been shown to produce movement, one may next wish to consider the rational appetite's proper object of desire. Remembering that the appetite first initiates movement, Aristotle explains that the "farthest back of all the objects of [the rational appetite]" is what first begins movement among other potential objects of desire.[15] This would imply that whatever is the highest object of desire for the rational appetite is what begins movement in any particular action. On one level this can apply to any particular desire that brings about movement for us: the desire for food, for instance, which may stand out among other objects of desire—like reading for intellectual enjoyment or running for physical exercise. On a general level, if one looks at all desires together and considers what would first cause movement for which the other desires would be subordinated, this would have to be the first object that brings about movement for the rational appetite. Indeed, Aristotle has this in mind in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he considers, "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim."[16] Considering that the object of any pursuit is the good, this implies that the rational appetite ultimately desires something which it perceives to be good and completes its desiring. In all actions, Aristotle surmises that all other goods (whether real or apparent) which are objects of desire must be relegated to the highest good for which we act in anything we do.[17] As Aristotle eventually shows,

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[14] Michael Frede goes into further detail on how appetite always begins movement, whether or not its desire is rational or non-rational, in his *A Free Will* 24: "One's willing, one's desire of reason, is a direct function of one's cognitive state, of what reason takes to be a good thing to do. One's nonrational desire is a direct function of the state of the nonrational part of the soul. One acts either on a rational desire, a willing, or on a nonrational desire, an appetite. In the case of conflict, there is not a further instance which would adjudicate or resolve the matter. In particular, reason is not made to appear in two roles, first as presenting its own case and then as adjudicating the conflict by making a decision or choice. How the conflict gets resolved is a matter of what happened in the past, perhaps the distant past."

[15] *On the Soul* 433b10-13: "… it follows that while that which originates movement must be specifically one, viz. the faculty of appetite as such (or rather farthest back of all the objects of that faculty; for it is that itself remaining unmoved originates the movement by being apprehended in thought or imagination), the things that originate movement are numerically many."

[16] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139a17-31.

[17] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a18-22, in particular: "If then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good."

the content of this chief good is the "activity of soul in accordance with virtue."[18] The virtues, then, are the activities of the soul which would fulfill the desire for the highest good, so that it is in one's acquiring and exercising the virtues that the rational appetite's ultimate desire for the chief good is met.

One may wonder: if the rational appetite has the highest good as its most basic desire for which other things are desired, why may it be possible for one to mistake the good in accord with the highest good for an apparent one? As Aristotle later shows, some people mistake the constitution of the highest good for mere pleasure, wealth, or honor, even though they all aim at what they believe to be the chief good.[19] The problem in this case is making a proper intellectual judgment about the constitution of that highest good before one can make the proper choices and habituations of the appetite toward attaining the chief good. Incontinence is another more realistic example of mistaking the real good for the apparent good, when one grasps the universal principle that something is to be done, but his appetite has yet to properly desire it.[20] In both this case and the case of intellectually mistaking the nature of the highest good, deliberation on the part of the mind and the habituation of the rational appetite are needed to rightly desire and judge the proper courses of action which would achieve the highest good which the rational appetite fixes on.[21] For Aristotle, at the same time, it is not just doing the proper actions which constitute the chief good—happiness—but also possessing the habit and power of the soul which enables one to do these actions.[22]

In conclusion, one may see how Aristotle's rational appetite functions by being set on the highest good as the final cause for which it desires other goods. Although the mind may misapprehend the nature of the real good and although the rational appetite may wrongly desire other goods not in accord with this highest good, it is on account of the rational appetite being set on the highest good as a final cause that movement happens for someone. In this way, we may

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[18] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a16-18.

[19] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a13-29, where Aristotle reviews various popular opinions about the nature of the chief good, happiness. It is interesting to note that, just afterward in 1095a30-b13, Aristotle mentions that an understanding of the nature of the good necessitates not only intellectual education but also being brought up with good habits. Knowledge of the good is, then, experiential as well as intellectual.

[20] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b7-15, especially regarding incontinence in comparison to continence.

[21] See Frede's *A Free Will* 27 which further discusses how reason and choice work in aiming at the good for Aristotle.

[22] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a16-18.

establish some connection to Maximus the Confessor's concept of the faculty of will having an innate desire for the highest goods which are natural to human nature. It then remains to be shown how Maximus's understanding of the will and modes of willing correspond to—and deviate from—this understanding of the rational appetite.

Faculty and Mode of Willing in Maximus the Confessor

As with Aristotle, Maximus the Confessor treats the process of willing as an interplay of the activities of both the intellect and the appetite, as he shows in his treatment on the will:

> For we desire before we deliberate; and after deliberating, we judge; and after judging, we freely choose that which has been shown by the judgment to be the better [course of action] over that which has been shown to be worse.[23]

In contrast to Aristotle separately describing the work of each faculty in the process of willing, Maximus appears to synthesize the work of the appetite and practical reason when he considers desire and deliberation/judgment together in that process. As was seen with the rational appetite, desire is first in the chain of willing, and deliberation follows upon the object of desire with its consideration of the options by which that object can be attained. Unlike Aristotle, Maximus considers the extra acts of "deliberation," "judgment," and "free choice" in the process of willing, while Aristotle had just considered the mind's calculation in place of those acts.[24] Deliberation, here, also seems to be a constant factor in willing, while, for Aristotle, the mind's calculation does not always accompany the appetite's desiring in originating movement. Such seems to be implied in the *Disputation with Pyrrhus,* where Maximus makes clear that man possesses the faculty of will in virtue

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[23] *Opuscula Theologica et Polemica I* PG 91:13A.

[24] Concerning "free choice" in relation to Aristotle, it is a question whether this concept exists in his account of the rational appetite. While this paper is more concerned with the component of the rational appetite which originates movement, this is one area where it is likely that Aristotle does not have a corresponding understanding of free choice in the way that Maximus understands this. It seems that Maximus sees free choice as a voluntary, uninhibited act of the mind consequent on the mind's (or will's) judgment on a course of action; one has the choice to voluntarily pursue or not pursue that particular path. By contrast, Aristotle seems to take the appetite to move a person whether or not it is rational; unless a person is habituated one way or another, it seems otherwise by accident that he is moved in a rational or irrational manner. For a further discussion of this, see Frede's *A Free Will* 19-30, and Sorabji's "The Concept of the Will" in *The Will and Human Action* 11-12, where both argue that Aristotle lacks the notion of willing,

of his reason, unlike the animals which move without reason, so that reason is always a constant factor in movement for human nature.[25]

Maximus also shows how this is the case in detailing the process of willing as always including deliberation and judgment:

> For no one makes use of something without having first initiated [the act]. And no one initiates [an act] without having first decided [what to choose]. And no one deliberates without having first examined [the alternatives]. And no one examines [the alternatives] without having first intended. And no one intends without having first reflected. And no one reflects without having first been moved by appetite. And no one is intelligently moved by appetite without being by nature rational. Therefore man being by nature a rational creature is appetitive, reflective, capable of intending, inquiring, examining, freely choosing, initiating [an act], and employing [something].[26]

Once again, the appetite is shown as being the first factor which brings about motion, although the other actions of reflection, deliberation, and judgment are also necessary components in human/rational willing. One difference of this passage from Aristotle's discussion of the rational appetite is its explicit claim that being intelligently moved always implies a rational nature, whereas Aristotle considered the possibility that a man could be moved by appetite without the mind's judgment. For cases like this—the incontinent man, for instance—Maximus would perhaps say that a man can be moved by the habit of a false deliberation, mistaking the apparent good for the real good in his willing, even though that man may intellectually grasp the right judgment about what should happen. In spite of this difference in how mind is involved with movement, Maximus would at least agree with Aristotle that the appetite has a rational counterpart which begins movement by presenting a given desire to the mind which considers the means towards carrying out that desire.

In seeing that both appetite and the mind are involved in the process of willing, Maximus the Confessor goes on to show how the faculty of will has a natural inclination for what is good, or at least what is natural, in *Opuscule 3*:

> For the natural will is 'the power that longs for what is natural' and contains all the properties that are essentially attached to the nature. In accordance with this to be disposed by nature to will is always rooted in the willing nature.[27]

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[25] *Dispuation* 25, paragraph 61: "And again, if man by nature possesseth the faculty of reason, and if rational nature be also self-determining, and if self-determination be, according to the Fathers, the will, then man possessth the will by nature. And again, if nature [moveth without reason] in irrational beings, and moveth in man by virtue of his own free will, then [man] is by nature a being endowed with will."

[26] *Opuscule 1* 21D-24A.

[27] *Opuscule 3* 45D-48A; trans. *Maximus* 193.

That the will "longs for what is natural" may appear mysterious at first glance, since it would appear that we are driven by various desires which may be the apparent or real good; for this reason, deliberation seems to be a necessary factor in willing to determine the real good. However, in the context of the passage, Maximus is talking about the *power* of willing and not the act of willing, where we do deliberate between varying, conflicting desires. The longing of the power of willing, as such, implies that the will's operation always has "what is natural" as the final cause for which one wills something—whether or not one's actual willing is in accord with this natural inclination.[28]

With this in mind, we may wonder what in particular would be "that which is natural" which the power, or faculty, of willing aims at. Maximus seems to address this question when he says: "By nature we have an appetite simply for what by nature is good, but we gain experience of the goal in a particular way, through inquiry and counsel."[29] The desire for what is good by nature is one which is built in to the faculty of the will, where the virtues potentially pre-exist as those by which this desire may be realized. Such is implied by what Maximus later says in his *Disputation with Pyrrhus*:

> *Pyrrhus*: Virtues, then, are natural things?
> *Maximus*: Yes, natural things.
> *Pyrrhus*: If they be natural things, why do they not exist in all men equally, since all men have an identical nature?
> *Maximus*: But they do exist equally in all men because of the identical nature!
> *Pyrrhus*: Then why is there such a great disparity [of virtues] in us?
> *Maximus*: Because we do not all practice what is natural to us to an equal degree; indeed, if we [all] practiced equally [those virtues] natural to us as we were created to do, then one would be able to perceive one virtue in us all, just as there is one nature [in us all], and that "one virtue" would not admit of a "more" or "less."[30]

Intriguingly, Maximus seems to imply that the virtues already have some kind of actual existence in us, and it is almost as if we have not yet realized their existence—much like Plato's conception of our innate acquaintance with the Forms in past lives which we only realize through the process of recollection. Although the language might imply this, the virtues do not yet have full, actual

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[28] Sorabji also notes this point in his "The Concept of the Will," in *The Will and Human Action* 20: "… Maximus has been praised for defining the natural will as a faculty directed of its essence to the good, rather than as something one calls 'will' when it happens to be so directed. Another point considered important is that the will aims at this good quite independently of reason, although reason recognizes the same good. … As for the first point, the idea of a naturally directed desire for the good does not seem particularly new. Even before the Stoics, Aristotle already holds that everybody naturally desires a happy life."

[29] *Disputation* 31, §87.

[30] *Disputation* 32-33, §88-93.

existence in us until we have learned to align and habituate ourselves away from apparent desires and goods towards the real virtues which are natural to us:

> *Pyrrhus*: If virtue be something natural [to us], and if what is natural to us existeth not through asceticism but by reason of our creation, then why is it that we acquire the virtues, which are natural, with asceticism and labours?
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> *Maximus*: Asceticism, and the toils that go with it, was devised simply in order to ward off deception, which established itself through sensory perception. It is not [as if] the virtues have been newly introduced from outside, for they inhere in us from creation, as hath already been said. Therefore, when deception is completely expelled, the soul immediately exhibits the splendor of its natural virtue. For example: he that is not foolish is intelligent, he that is not cowardly is bold, he that is not intemperate is temperate, and he that is not [unrighteous] is a righteous man. Reason, in a natural state, is prudence … Consequently, with the removal of things that are contrary to nature only the things proper to nature are manifest. Just as when rust is removed the natural clarity and glint of iron [are manifest].[31]

The virtues, then, would already be present and active in us if our sensory perception did not have the potential to mislead us into the deception of mistaking an apparent good for the real good. Given this reality, the virtues have a potential existence in us insofar as they are part of the power of the will's inclination for what is natural. They are brought about in the person who trains himself "to ward off deception" by asceticism and habituation.

In talking about the natural virtues as being present in the power of the will as opposed to the will in act, an implicit distinction is already being drawn between the faculty of the will, which belongs to human nature, and the particular inclination or mode of the will, which belongs to the person. Maximus directly considers this distinction in *Opuscule 3*:

> For to be disposed by nature to will and to will are not the same thing, as it is not the same thing to be disposed by nature to speak and to speak. For the capacity for speaking is always naturally there, but one does not always speak, since what belongs to the essence is contained in the principle of the nature, while what belongs to the wish is shaped by the intention [*gnômê*] of the one who speaks. So being able to speak always belongs to the nature, but how you speak belongs to the *hypostasis*.[32]

The disposal by nature to will is a function of the will's inherent desire for the good, but it is when the individual person (or *hypostasis*) forms a specific desire through his or her intention (or *gnômê*) that the perceived object of appetite is actually desired, whether or not truly good. So for instance, while the faculty of will may possess the virtue of moderation in eating as part of its inclination for what is natural, the person may form his intention to eat well in line with this natural desire, or he may be

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[31] *Disputation* 33-34, §94-95.

[32] *Opuscule 3* 48A; trans. *Maximus* 193.

deceived into the pleasure of eating immoderately as an apparent good. In both cases, it is how that person responds to a natural disposition to eat that characterizes what belongs to the person as opposed to what belongs to human nature with the faculty of willing.

In making this distinction, one may see that deliberation on the apparent or real good is characteristic of the way that one wills as opposed to being characteristic of the faculty of willing. Such a characteristic state Maximus calls the deliberative, or *gnomic*, mode of willing:

> *Maximus:* So then, the gnomie is nothing else than an act of willing in a particular way, in relation to some real or assumed good. … Thus, those who say that there is a gnomie in Christ, as this inquiry is demonstrating, are maintaining that he is a mere man, deliberating in a manner like unto us, having ignorance, doubt, and opposition, since one only deliberates about something which is doubtful, not concerning what is free of doubt. By nature we have an appetite simply for what by nature is good, but we gain experience of the goal in a particular way, through inquiry and counsel. Because of this, then, the gnomic will is fitly ascribed to us, being a mode of the employment [of the will], and not a principle of nature, otherwise nature [itself] would change innumerable times.[33]

By drawing a contrast with the divine person of Christ, Maximus makes the somewhat surprising claim that deliberation—one part of the process of willing—is a result of our status as created human persons who "gain experience of the goal in a particular way, through inquiry and counsel." One would initially think that deliberation is a natural part of the process of willing, but if we remember how Maximus claims that the faculty of will longs for "that which is natural" with the virtues, deliberation then applies to willing only for those who have yet to properly gain knowledge of the good through experience and to habituate their willing toward the good. This is a natural case for human persons who, having a created origin, begin their existence with initial uncertainty of the real good and gain knowledge of the good through experience. By contrast, the context of Christ as a divine, uncreated person renders the necessity for deliberation in willing obsolete for him, since Christ already possesses the knowledge of, and fixity on, the natural good.[34] Consequently, Christ's mode of willing is not deliberative but rather natural insofar as Christ already wills in accord with the

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[33] *Disputation* 30-31, §85, 87.

[34] *Disputation* 31, §87: "*Maximus:* … But the humanity of Christ does not simply subsist [in a manner] similar to us, but divinely … It is thus not possible to say that Christ had a gnomic will. For the Same had being itself, subsisting divinely, and thus naturally hath an inclination to the good, and a drawing away from evil, just as Basil, the great eye of the Church, said when explaining the interpretation of the forty-fourth Psalm: 'By the same line of interpretation, Isaiah said the same thing: 'Before the child knew or advanced in evil, he chose the good,' because he also said, "before the child knows good and to refuse evil, He chose the good." For the word 'before' indicates that He had by nature what is good, not inquiring and deliberating as we do, but because He subsisted divinely by virtue of His very being [as God].' "

natural inclination of his human faculty of willing. As a result, appetite, inquiry, and free choice are the essential factors of willing that are common to both the natural and deliberative modes of willing, while deliberation is rather a consequence of our mode of willing where we must learn to bring about the virtues within ourselves through experience.

In summary, Maximus's conception of the faculty of will mirrors Aristotle's rational appetite insofar as appetite and mind are connected in the process of willing. A key difference noted earlier was that Maximus included mind with deliberation as a constant factor in willing (at least in the deliberative mode of willing), while Aristotle saw that mind was a common, although not constant, factor in willing. In spite of this difference, Maximus also sees that appetite is the basis for willing in the person. The appetite, as part of the faculty of willing, was then shown to have a natural inclination toward the good by its nature, however this inclination was also distinguished as belonging to the power of willing as opposed to the mode of willing which is brought about in the person's actual exercise of the will. Maximus had also stated that the virtues have some existence in us by nature, even though they are not yet apparent in us until we come to train and habituate ourselves toward them through our deliberative mode of willing. It then remains to be shown how we may contrast this with Aristotle's position about the virtues not existing in us by nature.

Comparing Aristotle and Maximus on the Natural Desire for the Good

Given the comparison of the faculty and process of willing for Aristotle and Maximus the Confessor, we may now answer the question of how the rational appetite has an inclination for the natural good as part of its desiring. As was shown earlier, Maximus defines the faculty of the will as "the power that longs for what is natural," containing "all the properties that are essentially attached to the nature,"[35] or, in other words, the virtues which exist in us by nature. We can connect this with Aristotle's statement that all men by nature desire the highest, chief good as the end for which they act in all things.[36] Just as the natural good for Maximus implies the virtues, so also for Aristotle the chief good as happiness implies the possession and exercise of the virtues.[37] One noticeable difference to observe is that Maximus considers the virtues to already reside in us by nature, even though we have yet to bring them about fully in our willing. Aristotle, by contrast, appears to take a

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[35] *Opuscule 3* 45D; trans. *Maximus* 193.

[36] C.f. Sorabji in his "The Concept of the Will" in *The Will and Human Action* 20.

[37] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a16-18.

contrasting view when he says that the virtues come about through our nature being capable of receiving them:

> From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance, the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up then thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.[38]

This initially seems to conflict with Maximus's statement that the virtues exist in us "by nature" as part of the inclination of our power of the will for the good. However, when Aristotle considers that nothing which behaves in one way by nature can be trained to be otherwise, this actually seems to be the case for our desiring the chief good: our desiring must have a terminus for which we act. It is not as if we can at one point desire the highest good in happiness and the not desire it, since it is that first good for which we act in anything.[39] So it seems that a clarification is needed when Aristotle makes this claim between the other desires, which can be habituated, and the fixed desire for the chief good itself.

It is with this clarification in mind that we can apply Maximus's distinction between the natural power of the will and the mode of will had by the person. While the former is immutably the same for all insofar as we have the inclination toward the final good, the latter is changeable insofar as one can habituate himself into a virtuous or non-virtuous state. Thus, Aristotle's observation that the virtues do not arise in us by nature applies to Maximus's mode of willing insofar as our mode of willing can be habituated into possessing the virtues from a state of not possessing the virtues. If anything, Aristotle's statement that "we are adapted by nature to receive [the virtues]" implies that our nature has the capability of developing the virtues, and this would only be the case if our desiring of the final good necessarily implied the virtues which constitute that good. On this point, both Aristotle and Maximus seem to hold the same position, while they use different ways of talking about this reality.

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[38] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a19-25.

[39] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a18-22; c.f. p. 5.

Conclusion

Having reviewed Maximus the Confessor and Aristotle on the nature of the rational appetite desiring the good as an end, we may now answer the question of how the will as rational appetite possesses the virtues as part of the natural inclination for the highest good. Both Aristotle and Maximus the Confessor describe the nature of willing as beginning with the appetite and being directed by the mind through calculation or, for Maximus, deliberation and judgment of the proper steps toward achieving a given desire of the appetite. It was then shown how the appetite eventually has the highest good as the first desire, which, for Aristotle, is the possession of the virtues which constitutes that good as happiness. For Maximus the Confessor, this was shown to be the inclination of the power of the will for what is natural, and this implied the existence of the virtues in us "by nature" which constitutes the will's inclination for the good. The implication of this is that the virtues already potentially exist in us through the will's innate desire for the good, and so it is through practice and habituation—and, for Maximus, asceticism—in our deliberative mode of willing that the virtues can be brought about according to this natural desire. Aristotle's view ultimately implies this particular emphasis by Maximus insofar as the rational appetite's basic desire for the good suggests the possession and exercise of the virtues which constitute that good.

While Aristotle and Maximus have the same essential view about the nature of the rational appetite, it is worth seeing that Maximus's distinction between the faculty and mode of willing helps to clarify the implicit question of how one can have a fixed desire for the good at the same time as having various kinds of desires which may be for either the apparent or real good. Maximus ultimately uses this distinction to show in what way Christ was fully human while simultaneously being sinless and not having ignorance of the good within himself, however his discussion has a strong philosophical application to the question of human willing from an ancient perspective. With his roots in Aristotle's understanding of the rational appetite, Maximus's distinction helps to make clear how our willing has an anchor in the natural good, even though our willing can be mistaken in wrongly perceiving the good in deliberation.

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