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# Acquiring Incorruption: Maximian Theosis and Scientific Transhumanism

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## Abstract

Several theologians have pointed to resonances between the Greek Patristic doctrine of deification or *theosis* and recent transhumanist narratives: both discourses indicate death as the final enemy of humankind and invest heavily in a hoped-for transcendence of life as we know it. These resonances will be investigated further by comparing the approach to human nature found in Maximus the Confessor and in the prominent transhumanists Nick Bostrom and John Harris. In addition to sharing with transhumanists a disavowal of death and a trajectory towards transcendence, Maximus also shares a view of human nature that is more dynamic and open-ended than is commonly attributed to his Late Antique context. On the other hand, Maximus also insists on the persistence of this dynamic nature in its integrity even into the eschaton. He does so for a number of reasons that should give Christians pause about any rhetoric that calls for an abandonment of human nature: (1) that *theosis* depends precisely on sharing a human nature with Christ; (2) that our vocation as mediators in creation depends on our physical bodies as the locus of shared existence with the material world; and (3) that corruption has a providential use in binding us together with our neighbors and in cultivating virtue as we strain for the incorruptible and supernatural gift of *theosis*.

## Keywords

Deification, nature and grace, transhumanism, logos

## Introduction

Several commentators on the contemporary transhumanist movement have noticed that there exists, already in the ancient Christian tradition, a discourse that is itself *transhumanist*, in the sense of

reaching beyond the human; in some cases not only beyond the human as it is now, but even beyond the human as such.<sup>1</sup> This discourse is complete with its own literature, its own communities, and even its own technologies. I am speaking, of course, of the doctrine of *theosis*,<sup>2</sup> which can be found in seminal form in the New Testament, is popularized by Athanasius and the Cappadocians, and develops to its full maturity in monastic writers such as Maximus the Confessor. As Todd Daly has noted, the monastic tradition shares with the transhumanist agenda three things: a belief that death is our greatest enemy, that bodily decay is an unnecessary aspect of our existence, and that there are steps that we can take now to participate in a life that transcends the human.<sup>3</sup>

This article extends Daly's insights about how literature surrounding *theosis* resonates with transhumanist narratives to discuss not the ethical or practical questions about scientific transhumanism—How far can science carry us from the human? Or how far should we allow science to carry us?—but rather the metaphysical questions that arise from the logic of deification itself. If we accept that deification is possible, what exactly does it entail? How is it possible? And what are the means by which it is achieved? To answer these questions, this article engages the thought of Maximus the Confessor, who is arguably the most refined proponent of deification and also a metaphysician in his own right. In discussing Maximus, some points of contact and points of tension with transhumanists will be highlighted, particularly Nick Bostrom and John Harris. It will be argued that reading Maximus specifically as a type of proto-transhumanist brings to light many of the common misconceptions regarding deification and its implications for Christians. Further, reading him in this way allows us to go beyond simply repeating his teachings, but to think through them afresh in light of recent technological advances.<sup>4</sup>

## What Does Deification Entail?

*Theosis*, as the name suggests, implies that humans are in some sense 'made god', which in turn implies a form of transformation out of themselves. Maximus is most insistent on this point, that deification is not simply the fulfillment of natural capacities within us, but something beyond them, and immeasurably greater. He sets deification within the arc of creation, fall and redemption as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> See the special issue of *Theology and Science* 16.3 (2018), M. Burdett and V. Lorrimar (eds).

<sup>2</sup> I will use the words *theosis*, deification and divinization interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> T. Daly, 'Chasing Methusaleh: Transhumanism and Christian *Theosis* in Critical Perspective', in R. Cole-Turner (ed.), *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), pp. 129–30.

<sup>4</sup> On the importance of reading Maximus in this way, see A. Louth, 'Man and Cosmos in St. Maximus the Confessor', in J. Chryssavgis and B. Foltz (eds), *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 59–61.

For God created us in such a way that we are similar to Him (for through participation we are imbued with the exact characteristics of His goodness), and from before the ages He determined that we should exist in Him. In order for us to attain this most blessed end, He gave us a mode [τρόπος] by which we could make proper use of our natural powers. However, man voluntarily chose to reject this mode [τρόπος] by misusing his natural powers, and in order to prevent man from becoming completely estranged from God, He introduced another mode in its place, more marvelous and befitting of God than the first, and different from the former as what is above nature is different from what is according to nature. According to the faith held by all, this was the mystery of the supremely mystical sojourn of God among human beings.<sup>5</sup>

This passage shows that for Maximus, there is, or at least was, a way for humans to fulfill God's intention for them in a purely natural, human way. However, because humans misused these natural capacities, they lost access to this path to union with God and the world. God's response was to give to human beings a new way, 'more marvellous and befitting of God than the first', that not only restores what was lost, but that goes radically beyond it. This new way is the way of deification through the incarnate Christ, an incomparably higher vocation that transcends the human itself, not only in its fallen form as we know it now, but even in its protological, first-formed reality.

Maximus clarifies this insistence that deification is a higher vocation than that given to the first human beings when he considers the question of whether deification is based on natural faculties. Maximus would of course have recourse to the argument that we have a natural capacity for deification that has been lost or obscured by the Fall. He ultimately argues, however, that deification is not based on a natural faculty, otherwise how could it 'make the divinized person go out of himself'.<sup>6</sup> In the fourteenth century, the question of whether deification is a natural or supernatural state would arise again in Palamas' refutation of Barlaam. Palamas cites this passage and adds the argument that if deification were merely a perfection of natural gifts, Christ's radical condescension would be unnecessary.<sup>7</sup>

This point is worth belaboring, because there is a sense in which, as was seen in the first passage, Maximus views nature as being naturally oriented towards God, participating in Him, and even possibly being unified with Him in a lesser way. What deification brings, however, is something new, beyond the capabilities of natural beings and given freely in Christ. It is this ecstatic

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<sup>5</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. N. Constat (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 7, 1097C–D, p. 133 (hereafter cited *Amb.*).

<sup>6</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.* 20, 1237A, DOML<what is DOML?>, p. 409.

<sup>7</sup> See Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), especially 3.1.26-30, pp. 82-86.

character of Maximus' description of deification that aligns him at least in a simplistic way with transhumanists. Both schools agree that humans are not limited, nor should they be limited by the way in which we live now and even by our nature as such.

Where Maximus differs most from the transhumanists, however, is in his insistence that human nature, while being transcended in deification, is not thereby destroyed: 'He completely divinized us, without in any way violating or essentially altering our nature.'<sup>8</sup> Here, the transhumanist ideal is undercut—the goal for Maximus is not to leave humanity behind to become gods, per se, but to live the life of God as human beings. The deified person, while not changing its nature, ceases to live its own life and lives the life of God: 'refraining even from its own natural activity, wholly gathered into God'.<sup>9</sup>

Maximus holds these two sides of deification together at every turn: deification is a transcendence of the human but not an abandonment of the human. It is both an ecstasy out of human nature and a fulfillment of its proper destiny. Thus the oft-repeated maxims that 'to become deified is to become truly human' or that 'God asks only that we become what we truly *are*' summarize only one aspect of the doctrine of deification.<sup>10</sup> While emphasizing this aspect is perhaps apologetically necessary in certain contexts, it fails to grasp the fullness of God's gift, which is not only a gift of what we truly are but of what He is. Holding these two poles together is crucial for Maximus both to insist on the superabundance of God's gift to us and to connect it to the source of deification in the incarnate Christ; for it is through the Incarnate Christ, of course, that deification becomes possible.

## How is Deification Possible?

As we saw in Maximus' summary of the creation, fall and redemption in *Ambiguum 7*, deification is already prefigured in creation. For Maximus this occurs through the principles, or *logoi*, of creation. These *logoi* represent God's pre-existing wills, or pre-determinations for all levels of beings, particulars and universals, and express His will that all things be united to Him in one whole. His original plan was for humans to be at the center of this unification of creation:

Man was called to achieve within himself the mode of their completion, and so to bring to light the great mystery of the divine plan, realizing in God the union of extremes which exist among beings, by harmoniously advancing in an ascending sequence from the proximate to the remote and from the inferior to the superior.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Amb.* 31, 1280 B, DOML, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> *Amb.* 10, 1113B, DOML, pp. 163–65.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), pp. 132–36. For a fuller treatment of the question of 'nature' in Maximus see Demetrios Harper, *The Analogy of Love: Maximus the Confessor and the Foundations of Ethics* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018), especially pp. 129–35.

<sup>11</sup> *Amb.* 41, 1305 B, DOML II, p. 105.

This ‘proto-deification’, or unity of all things in God, required that humans be in the center of creation, not at the top with purely intellectual beings, nor at the bottom with purely material beings. Adam was created last as a ‘kind of natural bond mediating between the universal extremes through his parts’.<sup>12</sup> Humans are called to unite the created world together and with God.

The first point to be made about Maximus’ vision of the human vocation in creation is that it is granted not because human beings are intrinsically higher than all created beings,<sup>13</sup> but precisely because of their existence in the middle of the continuum from inanimate objects up to the angels. Were humans to produce artificial intelligence or even posthumans of any form, the existence of such beings could never threaten the unique calling and position given to human beings in Christ. Just as the technological and intellectual achievements of Egypt and Greece never threatened Israel’s status as the chosen people of God, so the achievements of non-humans, no matter their grandeur, can never threaten God’s providential choice of humans as ‘chosen creatures’.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, humans will always unite the extremes of creation since they are both material (like inanimate objects) and spiritual (like the angels).

Here we see why Maximus is at pains to insist that human nature is not destroyed when united to God in deification. For the human to leave behind her own nature, would also be to leave behind her vocation as the mediator between the rest of creation and God. For although we as humans have failed in this vocation such that God instituted a ‘new mode greater than the first’, He did not destroy this unifying and mediating aspect of humanity’s place within creation. Celia Deane-Drummond is right to point out that when transhumanists speak of leaving behind the human, they often mean and certainly imply ‘leaving behind the animal’, as well.<sup>15</sup> In Maximus’ vision, this is a particularly stark prospect for it means leaving behind God’s good will, his **ευδοκία** for creation. Thus it is important that Christ both fulfills and transcends the true human vocation of unifying all creation, bringing about this new mode of existence which both includes and transcends the first mode given to Adam. Just as it is important that Christ was and remains material, it is important that humans, even in the deified state, remain material. Proposals that suggest severing the tie between

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<sup>12</sup> *Amb.* 41, 1305 B, DOML II, p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> Although the Mother of God is repeatedly hymned liturgically in the Byzantine tradition as, for instance, ‘incomparably greater than the seraphim’, it can be argued that she has this station not by virtue of her human nature but by virtue of the gift of deification she has received through her Son and her proximity to Him.

<sup>14</sup> See Deut. 7:6-8.

<sup>15</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, ‘Taking Leave of the Animal? The Theological and Ethical Implications of Transhuman Projects’, in R. Cole-Turner (ed.), *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), pp. 115–20.

the intellectual and physical aspects of human existence are, therefore, dangerous for Christians in that they amount to a rejection of God's will and *logos* for humankind.<sup>16</sup>

Christ makes deification possible specifically through taking on our human nature, uniting both the material and spiritual. The Fall, while leaving the *logos* of human nature unchanged, has instituted a new mode [τρόπος] in which we are no longer oriented in our lives towards the one *Logos*, but inward in self-worship and downward in the worship of creation. Having failed in our own vocation, Christ condescends to

be mingled, without change, with human nature through true union according to hypostasis, uniting human nature without alteration to Himself, so that He would become man—in a manner known to Him—and at the same time make man God through union with Himself.<sup>17</sup>

Maximus follows here Athanasius' oft-quoted maxim: 'God became man that man might become God', but in a distinctly Chalcedonian key, emphasizing that both human nature and divine nature persist in their union. What is true of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ becomes true of humanity, by grace, in the deified state:

For inasmuch as He came to be below for our sakes and without change became man, exactly like us but without sin, loosing the laws of nature in a manner beyond nature, it follows that we too, thanks to Him, will come to be in the world above, and become gods according to Him through the mystery of grace, undergoing no change whatsoever in our nature.<sup>18</sup>

Again, we find Maximus pulling back from a full-blown abandonment of the human, not only in fact, but on principle. In shunning our human nature, we would also shun Christ's human nature, and thereby cut off the source of our rising beyond that human nature to share in the divine life.

It is worth pausing here to take stock of Maximus' description of deification and to ask ourselves if there is any room to push his vision in a more ecstatic direction. It is clear that for Maximus, the *logos* of human nature, as God's glorious and pre-existent will for human beings, cannot be violated, even if it is lifted up to a higher mode. What is not always clear, however, is the precise limits of that *logos*. At what point have we gone out of the *logos* of human nature and into something non-human? Unlike many Neo-Platonist conceptions of the form (εἶδος), Maximus'

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion about proposals for disembodied consciousness in light of the late antique doctrine of the Resurrection, see Yannis Papadogiannakis, 'Individuality and the Resurrection in Some Late Antique Texts', in A. Torrance and J. Zacchuber (eds), *Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 129–42.

<sup>17</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *On the Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios*, trans. M. Consta (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 22.2, p. 150.

<sup>18</sup> *Amb.* 31, 1280D, DOML, p. 151.

theory of the *logoi* gives a more dynamic picture of nature than we might expect. Paul Blowers<sup>19</sup> and Christopher Southgate<sup>20</sup> have helpfully noted that the *logoi*, as ‘God’s immanent intentions’, ‘retain a certain malleability and suppleness’.<sup>21</sup> As Maximus writes to Thalassius, God is continually at work not only in preserving beings, but in their creation, growth and sustenance.<sup>22</sup> Although the *logoi*, as principles of beings, do not change, they should not themselves be thought of as static self-existent exemplars, but as God’s dynamic will for each particular being, including each moment of its positive becoming. The *logoi* are, more properly speaking, trajectories and as such include within their purview stages along the way to their final end.

Here we can see something of a rapprochement between Maximus’ vision and the vision of the transhumanists. Nick Bostrom sums it up best: ‘Transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways.’<sup>23</sup> Maximus would never call human nature ‘half-baked’, since its origin is in the good Creator, but he would agree that much of what we experience now as being inescapably ‘human’ may be little more than the temporary ‘mode’ [τρόπος] in which we find ourselves, consequences of our own sinful history and failure of vision. Ironically, for very different reasons, both groups single out sexual reproduction as a finite and unnecessary aspect of our existence. Maximus points to Christ’s seedless conception and celibacy as indicative that conjugal union is transcended in the eschaton. For John Harris, the primary danger of sexual reproduction is the seemingly random mix of attributes passed on to offspring.<sup>24</sup> While these motives are at odds with one another—Maximus would balk at the idea that human traits arise through chance—they come together on this point: much of what we know of as human, including sexual reproduction, is contingent and alterable.

## How is Deification Achieved?

This leaves us with our final question: how deification is achieved. Here the rhetorical similarity between Maximus and Nick Bostrom is marked. Both point to the fact that the primary obstacle to transcending our current existence is a problem of desire. Both agree that our vision of what is or

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Blowers, ‘Unfinished Creative Business: Maximus the Confessor, Evolutionary Theodicy, and Human Stewardship in Creation’, in D. V. Meconi (ed.), *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 177–79.

<sup>20</sup> C. Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), pp. 61–65.

<sup>21</sup> Blowers, ‘Unfinished Creative Business’, p. 179.

<sup>22</sup> *Ques. Thal.* <what’s this?> 2.2, 97.

<sup>23</sup> Nick Bostrom, ‘Human Genetic Enhancements: A Transhumanist Perspective’, *Journal of Value Inquiry* 37.4 (2003), pp. 493–506, at p. 493.

<sup>24</sup> John Harris, *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 172–80.

could be beyond ourselves is clouded by our attachment to things as they are. Nick Bostrom, in his attempts to argue for human enhancement, calls this attachment to things as they are a ‘status quo bias’.<sup>25</sup> And while Bostrom’s ‘posthuman symphonies’ are a far cry from Maximus’ descriptions of mystical ascent, they share a similar argument. Bostrom appeals to David Lewis’s theory of dispositions to show that we might have values now that we are unaware of because of our limited experience. He gives the example of a Wagnerian opera. Someone might be a committed anti-Wagnerian, but after hearing more of his oeuvre, realize that Wagner fits with her values.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, someone who considers the ideal of a posthuman being distasteful may be transformed upon meeting such a being.

Maximus must also explain why it is that deification is something worthy of striving for, despite the fact that so many choose not to. Like Bostrom, Maximus realizes that human beings often prefer lesser, known goods, to greater unknown ones and that these preferences often belie their true desires. Maximus is quick to insist that, despite the fact that human beings have chosen those things lower than God, they all have ‘a natural longing and desire for Him’.<sup>27</sup> Maximus assumes not only that humans have this natural desire for deification, but also that they are already being led, even in their messy and sinful lives, by God’s providence to deification.

Notwithstanding our earthly desires, God leads us to deification in both a positive and a negative way. In the positive way, he uses the beauty of things in the world to lead us to His beauty: God, who is superior to all, by leading us through the nature of visible creations, as if it were a kind of story, seeks to amaze us or attract our attention by the sight and knowledge of these things, as if we were no different than children, after which He directs us to the contemplation of the more spiritual principles within these things, and finally leads us by way of theology up to the more mystical knowledge of Himself.<sup>28</sup>

Thus God condescends to us even as we are, dazzled and enthralled by created beings and created goods. These created goods could, ironically, include just those goods that Bostrom promotes: technological enhancements in the moral or cognitive realm. As humans become more and more attached to technology and its products, we can trust that God in His Providence can use technology just as He has used art, literature, family and wealth in the past as conduits of grace that point beyond themselves to Him.<sup>29</sup> Just as Coventry Patmore’s son spread out the trinkets he found during the day to comfort himself after his father’s wrath in his poem ‘The Toys’, so we too turn to our

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<sup>25</sup> Bostrom, ‘Human Genetic Enhancements’, p. 495.

<sup>26</sup> Bostrom, ‘Human Genetic Enhancements’, p. 495.

<sup>27</sup> *Amb.* 48, 1361A, DOML, p. 213

<sup>28</sup> *Amb.* 71, 1413C, DOML, p. 325

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Cole-Turner, ‘Transhumanism and Christianity’, in R. Cole-Turner (ed.), *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), p. 200.

technological trinkets to comfort ourselves from the harshness of modern life. And just as Coventry Patmore looks at these trinkets with a mixture of bewilderment and compassion, so we can only hope that God will look on us who have persisted in our childish attachment to the trinkets of this life, saying: 'I will be sorry for their childishness'.<sup>30</sup>

For Maximus, thankfully, God is leading us to deification through the things of this world in a more direct, powerful way, through the sacraments: first in baptism, and then in the 'climax of everything' that is the Eucharist.<sup>31</sup> As noted earlier, Maximus associates our mode of coming into being through sexual reproduction and physical birth as aspects, not of human nature as such, but of the bonds placed on human nature because of our fallenness. The pre-requisite for deification, then, is to be born anew, according to the new mode of human nature instituted in the Incarnation of Christ.<sup>32</sup> This new birth is baptism, which allows us to be born again in the Spirit and through which God grants 'to those who believe in His name the power to become children of God instead of flesh and blood'.<sup>33</sup> The aphorism 'become what you are' alluded to earlier becomes truest when addressed to the baptized in virtue of their baptism.<sup>34</sup> The gift of birth in the Spirit bestows the capacity to become deified that was not already present in human nature.

The fulfillment of this new capacity of deification is realized in the liturgy, when the physical elements of bread and wine are transformed into Christ's body so that 'by holy communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship and identity with Him by participation in likeness'.<sup>35</sup> Those who partake of this sacrament can 'be called gods by adoption through grace because all of God entirely fills them and leaves no part of them empty of His presence'.<sup>36</sup> The Eucharist, although it takes place in time and space, is the supreme moment of Christ's self-gift and, thus, the supreme moment of deification.

Often, however, our sinfulness obscures the positive gifts of God's providence and even of the Eucharist itself. Therefore, God also uses a negative way to lead us from worldly desires to deification. He has providentially mixed pain with the pleasures of this world to point us beyond them:

God, however, in His providential concern for our salvation, attached pain to this pleasure, as a kind of power of chastisement, whereby the law of death was wisely

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<sup>30</sup> Coventry Patmore, 'The Toys', in A. Quiller-Couch (ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), p. 763.

<sup>31</sup> Maximus the Confessor, 'The Church's Mystagogy', in G. Berthold (trans.), *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 203.

<sup>32</sup> *Amb.* 42, 1348C, DOML, pp. 184–85.

<sup>33</sup> *Amb.* 42, 1348 C–D, DOML, pp. 184–85.

<sup>34</sup> This is, in fact, the context in which Kallistos Ware uses the phrase 'become what you are': *The Orthodox Way*, pp. 132–36.

<sup>35</sup> Maximus the Confessor, 'The Church's Mystagogy', p. 207.

<sup>36</sup> Maximus the Confessor, 'The Church's Mystagogy', p. 203.

planted in the nature of our bodies in order to limit the madness of the intellect in its desire to incline unnaturally toward sensory objects.<sup>37</sup>

Even if God is merciful towards us when we exchange the higher gifts for the lower, Maximus insists that He is purposeful when He uses trials and sufferings to show us the limits of those goods. The Psalm tells us: ‘put not your trust in princes, nor in any sons of man, in whom there is no salvation’ (Ps. 146:3). If we accept the gifts of technology and even technological enhancements, not as limited goods to be subordinated to God, but as the anchor of our hope for transcendence, we shall inevitably find ourselves disillusioned. Only God is infinite; only God is without beginning. Deification, since it is a self-gift of Christ, cannot be given through technology, even if enhancement could play a lesser role in our ascent. As with all created pleasures, the pleasures of enhancement will be followed by limitations and pains; drawbacks that reveal that the only true source of limitlessness is Christ Himself. God uses the finitude of creation to lead to His own infinitude.

Here, in the way that God uses the limits of our life on earth, our death and corruption, to lead us to a life beyond both, we see where Maximus finally parts ways with contemporary transhumanists. In accepting God’s providential order, even in its limitations, its suffering, and cruelty, Maximus is choosing the very things that transhumanists insist are unnecessary. Further, Maximus would place transhuman technologies themselves within the world of limits, creatureliness, and finitude.

## Conclusion

Maximus’ doctrine of deification, because of its emphasis on going out of oneself to participate in the divine life of God, bears uncanny resemblance with transhumanist discourse. Maximus and the transhumanists of our time agree that humans can transcend not only many aspects of their current lives, but also their nature itself. Maximus’ discourse differs from contemporary transhumanist discourses, however, in that it insists that humans can go out of themselves while still remaining human. This difference is not only in fact, but also on principle. A deification that abandons the human is an impossibility, since the source of deification is the divinized humanity of Christ. To become posthuman would preclude becoming divine.

Maximus also accepts many of the limitations so lamented by transhumanists as providential pointers to God Himself. While agreeing with the transhumanists that our ultimate destiny is beyond the life we live now, Maximus accepts that God has ‘wisely divided the ages’.<sup>38</sup> There is a time to strive for deification and a time, or rather an age, when it will be granted. His image of Adam in the garden is helpful here:

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<sup>37</sup> *Qu. Th.* <Qu. Thal. in note 22> 61.2, FC <what is ‘FC’?>, p. 434.

<sup>38</sup> *Qu. Th.* <Qu. Thal. in note 22> 1.2.18, FC, p. 87.

It was perhaps for this reason that God temporarily forbade man to partake of it [the Tree of Knowledge], rightly delaying for a while his participation in it, so that, through participation in grace, man might first know the Cause of his own being, and afterwards, by partaking of grace, add impassibility and immutability to the immortality given to him by grace.<sup>39</sup>

In this light, I think that Maximus would interpret the transhumanist longing for life beyond the limits of our finite existence as a manifestation of our natural desire for deification. But like Adam, the transhumanists seek deification out of season and, like Adam, they risk bringing down upon them and upon us an existence more limited, more contingent, and more cut off from the source of life than before.

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<sup>39</sup> *Qu. Th.* <*Ques. Thal.* in note 22> 1.2.18, FC, p. 87.