

# illuminating friendship or friendship as ethical virtue (φιλία) in Saint Maximus the Confessor and Aristotle

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## Abstract

This study has pursued a microcosmic perspective of the Maximian ethics, the doctrine of love, and friendship and the role of love in the manifestation of virtuosity through ongoing ethical transformation. In Saint Maximus' view, the internal integrity of the spiritual microcosm is closely connected with the integrity of the interrelations in the new form of *politeia*. One of the most beautiful ethical themes of this interpretation is the theme of friendship (*philia*), highlighted by Saint Maximus to demonstrate the integrity of love and, implicitly, of ethical virtue, as an expression of cosmic reconciliation. I have illustrated the interpretation of one of the spiritual models of ethical virtue, namely the spiritual friendship (*philia*), seen as that state whereby virtue, and also vice, can be surprised directly and can be involved in virtue education.

**Keywords:** friendship, friends, virtuosity, ethical virtue, virtue education, agape, community

THE THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS OF VIRTUE ethics in relation to patristic anthropology provide a possibility for other theoretical enunciations allowing the thought to inaugurate a new hermeneutics in the philosophical tradition. If the specific exegesis has illustrated in a multitude of comparative studies the difficulty of reading Aristotle in the anthropological thought of Saint Maximus the Confessor<sup>1</sup>, this study proposes a kind of reflection on

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<sup>1</sup>I present a series a reference titles about the relationship between Aristotle and patristic authors: Cristophe Erismann, "A world of Hypostases. John of Damascus's rethinking of Aristotle's categorial ontology," *Studia Patristica L*, Peeters Publishers, 2011: 269-87; Cristophe Erismann, *The Many Roots of Medieval Logic: The Aristotelism and The Non-Aristotelian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Catherine Kavannagh, "The Influence of Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena's Treatment of Aristotle's Categories," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 79 (4), (September 2005): 567-96; Julia Konstantinovskiy, "Dionysius the Areopagite versus Aristotle,"

ethical virtue as seen in the multiple aspects of its phenomenality: friendship, spiritual order and love. The ethical account proposed henceforth is a manner of interpreting those aspects which carry a divine semblance or refer to the act of deification (*theosis*) and offer a possibility for participation in the relationship) discourse, which complements the complex image of the virtue ontology: friendship (φιλία) as an ethical virtue in Saint Maximus the Confessor and Aristotle.

This analysis begins with an outline of the notions of friendship and social group in late antiquity, *where, when* and *how* the patristic authors appealed to, adapted and integrated the ancient concept of friendship in the Christian ethical discourse, capitalising on the approach of this concept in Aristotelian ethics. The hypothesis of such integration suggests that the patristic authors developed a new strategy to define the structure of the Christian community compared to the community typology in late antiquity. This study shall pursue a comparative analysis of the different

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*Studia Patristica*, vol. 42, (2006): 313-20; M. Frede, "Les Catégories d'Aristote chez les Pères de l'Eglise grecs" in *Les Catégories et leur histoire*, Eds. Otto Bruun, Lorenzo Corti, (Paris: PUF, 2005): 135-73; Runia T. David, "Festugière Revisited: Aristotle in the Greek Patres," *Vigilae Christianae*, 43, Issue 1, (1989): 1-34; David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Divisions of Christendom*, (Oxford University Press, 2004); David Bradshaw, "The Presence of Aristotle within Byzantine Theology," in *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, Edd. Niketas Siniossoglou and Anthony Kaldellis, (Cambridge University Press, 2017): 381-96; Clark Elisabeth, *Clement's Use of Aristotle: The Aristotelian Contribution to Clement of Alexandria's Refutation of Gnosticism*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1977); K. Ierodiakonou, "Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias on colour," in *The Parva Naturalia in Greek, Arabic and Latin Aristotelianism. Supplementing the Science of the Soul*, Eds. B. Bydén and F. Radovic (Cham, 2018): 77-90; K. Ierodiakonou, "The Byzantine reception of Aristotle's theory of meaning," *Methodos* 2019: <https://journals.openedition.org/methodos/5303>; Zacchuber Johhanes, "Universal in the Greek Church Fathers," in *Universal in Ancient Philosophy*, Eds. Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabrielle Galluzzo, (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, 2013): 425-70; Dirk Krausmuller, "Aristotelianism and the Desintegration of the Late Antique Theological Discourse," in *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity. The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, Eds J.W. Watt and J.Lossl, (Farnham, 2011): 258-71; Dirk Krausmuller, "Aristotle in Cappadocian Garb: the Trinitarian Speculation of Nicetas Stethatos and Leo of Chalcedon," *Erytheia*, 37 (2016): 37-54; J.W. Watt "Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in Syriac Tradition" in *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity. The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, Eds J.W. Watt and J.Lossl, (Farnham, 2011): 239-57; David G. Robertson, "Stoic and Aristotelian Notions of Substance in Basil of Caesarea," *Vigilae Christianae*, 52, Issue 4 (1998): 393-417; Vasilios Betsakos, Στάσις ἀεικίνητος. Ἡ ἀνακαίνιση τῆς Ἀριστοτελικῆς κινήσεως στὴ θεολογία τοῦ Μαξίμου Ὁμολογητοῦ, [Ever-Moving Repose: The Renewal of Aristotelian Movement in the Theology of Maximus the Confessor]. (Athens: Armos, 2006); Ladislav Chvátal, "'Mouvement circulaire, rectiligne et spiral'. Une contribution à la recherche des sources philosophiques de Maxime le Confesseur," in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 54, Issue 1-2, (2007): 171-90; Mosmann Roueché, "Byzantine Philosophical Texts of the Seventh Century," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik (JÖB)*, 23, (1974): 63-81; M. Roueché (ed.), "A Middle Byzantine Handbook of Logic Terminology," *JÖB*, 29, (1980): 71-98; Mosmann Roueché, "The Definitions of Philosophy and a New Fragment of Stefanus the Philosopher," *JÖB*, 40, (1990): 107-28

interpretation meanings of friendship in Aristotle, such as revealed in *Etica Nicomahica*, and the theological vocabulary of friendship in the anthropology of Saint Maximus, the Maximian texts of reference for this topic being *The Four Century on Charity – Capita de charitate, Quaestiones et dubia* and *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*.<sup>2</sup>

## **The rhetoric of friendship in Greek patristics. *Philia*, the Greek model for *politeia***

The Greek model of friendship provided the prototype of a spiritual relationship based on which the first Christian communities took shape, this model being highly used in the definition of relationships inside the eremitic communities, especially those in the desert, where it was established as a pedagogical form passed on through direct experience. The ancient thought provided a deep reflection on friendship and suggested an ethical model which was embraced by the intellectual elite<sup>3</sup>, who were the origin especially of those who became hermits in spiritual communities separated from the mundane social community, the ethical and ascetic ideal being to reunite friends in a narrow group so they can dedicate to a life in accordance with "God's image and likeness." In the entire patristic literature the topic of friendship underlies the view of asceticism, which is a deification process eventually, being integrated throughout the discourse on virtues and the *paideia* accompanying this becoming.<sup>4</sup> The living community between the virtuous, founded on the principle of friendship, as defined by Aristotle and Cicero, is exemplarily illustrated by the Christian monks, this type of community being seen by a whole group of exegetes in the first centuries as "erudite monasticism."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Manuel Mirra Iborra, "Friendship in Maximus the Confessor," *Studia Patristica*, 68, (Leuven, Peeters, 2013): 273-80.

<sup>3</sup>J.P. Manoussakis, "Friendship in Late Antiquity: The Case of Gregory Nazianzen and Basil the Great" in *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship*, Eds. S. Stern – Gillet and Gary Gurtler, S.J. (Suny Press, 2014): 173-95.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Kimbriel, *Friendship as Sacred Knowing*, (Oxford University Press, 2014): 32. See Manuel Mirra Iborra, "Friendship in Maximus the Confessor," *Studia Patristica* 68, (Leuven, Peeters, 2013): 273-80; J.P. Manoussakis, "The Dialectic of Communion and Otherness in St Maximus' Understanding of the Will," in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection. Proceedings of the Symposium of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Bishop Maxim (Vasilievic) (ed.), (Belgrade: Sebastian Press and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology-University of Belgrade, 2013): 159-81. See Alan Soble, *Eros, Agape and Philia*, (New York, Paragon House, 1989); Jean Claude Fraisse, *Philia: la notion d'amitie dans la philosophie antique*, (Paris. Vrin, 1974); Paul J.Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, (Notre Dame University, 1989); Stanley Hauerwas, "Virtue, Description and Friendship," *Irish Th. Quarterly*, 62, Issue 2-3, (1996): 170-84.

<sup>5</sup>C. White, *Christian Friendship in the fourth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 164-92: "In several aspects, the ideal of friendships in Christian terms and the ideals of monasticism appear to coincide."

The first texts on spiritual friendship are those of Saint Basil the Great and of Saint Augustine, where we find, in both authors, a conjunction between the ancient model of friendship and the Christian monastic project. While Saint Basil the Great developed the project of a philosophical community based on a model from Aristotle<sup>6</sup>, Saint Augustine was influenced in turn not only by his preceding Greek Christian authors, but also by Cicero's view of friendship (*philia*).<sup>7</sup> Considering Augustine's itinerary, this proximity of the two perspectives on friendship meant their double and successive experimentation, the practice of life in a community based on *philia* being seen in a philosophical perspective even before his conversion.<sup>8</sup>

The Augustinian or Basilian spiritual community is founded on the communion between virtuous people animated by the same ethical principle of friendship which also encountered in the ancient community. This convergence between two models is impressive and stands for a suggestive illustration of how Christianity managed to assume the higher aspirations of a previous culture, the type of relationship which became established in this case being that of community friendship. This ethical structure provides a basis for just and credible relationships between the members of a Christian community, who was most often composed of individuals from the educated and materially independent elite.<sup>9</sup> A distinction is therefore required in relation to the Aristotelian concept of *philia*, for which the essential aspect was represented by the act of choice: a singular choice based on confidentiality and mutual goodwill. Consequently, we can infer that this singularity is for our topic the key of the relation between friendship and love, as it appears in Saint Basil the Great. We find in his *Letters* a distinction between agape love (*agape*) and friendship (*philia*): while *philia* is described as a type of bodily or profane, worldly relationship, *agape* is seen as a spiritual connection between the members of the same Christian community (*Epistola* 133, 154). Therefore, Saint Basil the Great distinguishes two different types of social inclusion and appeals, in their definition, to elements of the social-political or ecclesial-political context; we can identify in the Basil's ethical discourse a new concept, that of *social inclusion*, which appears to be opposite to the Aristotelian notion of *philia*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>See Seraina Ruprecht, *The Rhetoric of friendship in Basil of Caesarea (Unpublished)*, In XVII International Conference in Patristic Studies, Oxford, 7-14 august 2015.

<sup>7</sup>See M.A. McNamara, *Friendship in Saint Augustine*, (Fribourg: The Univesity Press, 1958); J.-C. Fraisse, *Philia. La notion d'amitié dans la philosophie antique* (Paris: Vrin, 1994).

<sup>8</sup>Jean Marie Gueullette, "L'amitié dans la communauté: les enjeux théologiques d'une histoire complexe," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, (Tome 87, 2003): 261-91.

<sup>9</sup>J.P. Manoussakis, "Friendship in Late Antiquity: The Case of Gregory Nazianzen and Basil the Great" in *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship*, Eds. S. Stern – Gillet and Gary Gurtler, S.J (Suny Press, 2014): 173-95.

<sup>10</sup>See Seraina Ruprecht, *The Rhetoric of friendship in Basil of Caesarea (Unpublished)*, In "XVII International Conference in Patristic Studies, Oxford," 7-14 august 2015; Seraina Ruprecht, *Graeco-Roman Friendship and Episcopal Networks in Late Antiquity (Unpublished)*. In: "Episcopal

## Different meanings of friendship in Aristotle's *Etica Nicomahica*

At the beginning of Book VIII of *Etica Nicomahica*, Aristotle defines friendship as an ethical virtue: "friendship is a virtue or it is at least inseparable from virtue" (EN 1155a 5-10). As viewed by J.M. Cooper, the Aristotelian friendship is manifested amid a community with all its imperfections, being an aggregation of good rational desires and good actions based both on selfish and non-selfish interests.<sup>11</sup>

The analysis of friendship (φιλία) has at its heart an Aristotelian classification which divides this concept into three distinct species: a) τριῶν ὄντων δι' ἃ φιλοῦσιν (EN 1155b, 2-7), b) διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον, c) διὰ τὸ ἡδύ and δι' ἄρεάν – "the friendship for reasons of utility," "the friendship for reasons of pleasure" and "the actual friendship of the virtuous".<sup>12</sup> Describing friendship in this perspective of the three species, Aristotle debates on friends in terms of variants of pleasures or benefits as sources of happiness: "Friendship presumes therefore some mutual goodwill, each one wishing well to the other, and goodwill should not be overlooked by any of the two and should be based on one of the aforesaid reasons" (EN 1156a5).<sup>13</sup> This Aristotelian kind of goodwill becomes friendship only when it is "mutual" (EN 1156a30) and this is why it can only be encountered between virtuous people.<sup>14</sup>

The ethical vision of the Stagirite provides the concept of friendship with a dual character, as friendship is understood on one hand as an ethical virtue in line with its usual definition and on other hand as an

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Networks in Late Antiquity: Connection and Communication across Boundaries," Göttingen, 28-30. September 2016.

<sup>11</sup>J.M. Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amely Rorty, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 301-340. See Martha Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness: luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (second ed.), (Cambridge, U.K. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); J. Hook, *Friendship and Politics in Aristotle's Ethical and Political Thought*, (B.A.Thesis, Harvard, 1977); Julia Annas, "Plato and Aristotle on friendship and altruism," *Mind*, 86, (1977): 532-54; Julia Annas, "Self-Concern and the Sources and Limits of Other-Concern," in *The morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 249-90; Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (Sunny Press, 1995); Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Bloomfield Paul, *The Virtues of Happiness: A theory of the Good Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Marcia Homiak, "Moral Character," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Spring 2003 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2003/entries/moral-character>; Richard Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Summer 2001), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2001/entries/aristotle-ethics>.

<sup>12</sup>Aristotel, *Etica Nicomahica*, Translation in Romanian by Stela Petecel (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988): 122-23.

<sup>13</sup>Aristotel, *Etica Nicomahica*, 122.

<sup>14</sup>Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," 304.

external asset, “friends” being those “external conditions” indispensable to the concept of a happy life.<sup>15</sup> This type of definition leads to the conclusion that friendship is a habitual disposition which involves a deliberate choice and makes people wish good things for those they love, for their own sake (EN 1157b, 30-35).<sup>16</sup> Approaching this meaning of the friendship determination in terms of the goodwill which becomes its “object” I shall refer to the dominant way defining the Aristotelian friendship from a methodological point of view. Aristotle’s view of friendship as a virtue proposes that true friendship is only the one founded on those “affinities between characters” (EN 1164a, 13) and a true friend is only the virtuous one, who is aware of the value of the other’s virtue, involving their “mutual goodwill” (EN 1156a, 5); this kind of friendship which relies on affinities between characters presumes a deliberate choice, namely to answer with friendship to friendship, in a selfless way (EN 1157b, 30).<sup>17</sup> J.M. Cooper calls the Aristotelian kind of friendship as being by excellence “friendship of the good” or “friendship of character” (ἡ τῶν ἡδῶν φιλία, 1164, a12, διὰ τὸ ἡθος φιλεῖν, 1165 b, 8-9, ἡ ἡθικὴ φιλία, EE 1241a10, 1242b36, 124 a 8, 32, 35 cf. ἐκ τῆς συνειθίας τὰ ἡθῆ στέρξωσιν, EN 1157a11). In his commentary, J.M. Cooper prefers the phrase “character friendship” because it provides more accuracy as concerns the role of character traits in the definition of friendship as *philia*:

I will here after adopt this alternative terminology. One should not, however, overlook the significance of the fact that Aristotle himself prefers to characterize the central type of friendship by concentrating almost exclusively on the friendship of perfectly good men for it is an aspect of the pervasive teleological bias of his thinking, which causes him always to search out the best and most fully realized instance when attempting to define a kind of thing. Aristotle does not himself mistake the perfect instance for the only member of the class, and there is no necessity for us to do. But because in this case I believe his readers have often been misled, it seems best in expounding Aristotle’s views to depart from his own preferred terminology.<sup>18</sup>

Summing up the Aristotelian doctrine of friendship as ethical virtue and following the planes on which an ethical vision is established, we can say that friendship is “that habitual disposition to deliberately wish well to the other due to the ethical excellence which is founded on a virtuous character.”<sup>19</sup> In his commentary, V. Mureșan shows that

<sup>15</sup> V. Mureșan, *Comentariu la Etica Nicomahică* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007): 277.

<sup>16</sup> Mureșan, *Comentariu*, 277-78.

<sup>17</sup> Mureșan, *Comentariu*, 277-78.

<sup>18</sup> Cooper, “Aristotle on Friendship,” 308.

<sup>19</sup> Mureșan, *Comentariu*, 277.

the average is here the “equality” in the reciprocal wishing well for the well, and not for a selfish interest or for one’s own pleasure (EN 1158a,1; b,1-5), as well as the proportional (to the merit) equality in case of friendship between unequal people (EN 1158b, 25-30).<sup>20</sup>

In chapter IX of *EN*, Aristotle debates on a friend’s ethical portrait and provides the concept of *philia* with some additional loading, friends being not just “tools” for acquiring happiness, but also those external assets that are necessary for a man to become virtuous (1099b). The vision offered by Aristotle is not interested only in the ethical issue of friendship, but in all aspects involved in the articulation of a happy life, the intimate discourse about associated friends complementing the ethical register of the virtue experience.<sup>21</sup>

## **Illuminating friendship. The theological meaning of friendship in the anthropology of Saint Maximus the Confessor**

In the Maximian texts, *philia* (φιλία) is treated as a particular kind of relationship between those with a common identity and a distinguishing affective reciprocity. Based on the analysis of the few passages in which the term *philia* (φιλία) is used – in *The Four Century on Charity – Capita de charitate* the term *philia* (φιλία) appears ten times, in *Quaestiones et dubia* and *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* the term appears twice in both cases<sup>22</sup> – we find that Saint Maximus describes this concept in a very different way from Aristotle, who primarily emphasises the similarity which should exist between friends. Maximus lays more stress on their shared spiritual identity, saying that friends should be of the same nature, and moreover, they should demonstrate the same kind of ethical action, avoiding any confrontation. The harmony between friends is tainted by self-love, which triggers the individual desire opposed to the law of nature and leads to manifestations which are contrary to friendship. In Aristotle’s view, goodwill is the fundamental characteristic of friendship and this may refer to the kind of affection (στοργή) which Saint Maximus writes about. Even if Aristotle makes a distinction between the affection based on goodwill (the Aristotelian term is φίλεισις) and friendship (φιλία), he explains that it is goodwill which subsequently generates *philia*, even if this doesn’t happen all the time, a temporal distinction is found in the ethical interval including them both.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Mureşan, *Comentariu*, 278.

<sup>21</sup> Cooper, “Aristotle on Friendship,” 310.

<sup>22</sup> Ibora, “Friendship,” 275.

<sup>23</sup> Ibora, “Friendship,” 276.

Let's follow those passages in *Quaestiones et dubia* where the term *philia* appears twice, Saint Maximus referring indirectly to it. In *Quaestiones et dubia* 52, Saint Maximus analyses a passage from the *Proverbs* – “Do not give guarantees for your friend” (*Prov.* 6: 1; *Prov.* 22: 27)– and underlines with a biblical argument an aspect which is relevant to the notion of “friendship”: “calls the body ‘friend’ on account of the soul’s relationship with it” (Φίλον λέγει τὸ σῶμα διὰ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸ τῆς ψυχῆς σχέσιν).<sup>24</sup>

Saint Maximus offers an allegorical commentary on this passage holding that the “body” may be called a “friend of the soul” (referring in this context to the ascetic rules of monastic life, as the work *Quaestiones et dubia* is addressed to the monastic world). The relation between body and soul is in Saint Maximus’ view an organic one, where the soul cannot exist without a body and can only be defined through a body, and if the body does not support the higher activity of the soul and becomes a platform for negative influences, it can’t be called a friend. This interpretation indicates quite obviously that friendship is a relationship in the Maximian ethical vision and we can set apart in the text above a pessimist valence of friendship. In *Quaestiones et dubia* 149, Maximus looks at another text from *Proverbs*: “Do not put your food in your friend’s house often, lest he gets tired of you and ends up hating you.”<sup>25</sup> In commenting this passage, Maximus calls the body a friend and defines friendship again based on the analogy between body and soul seen as a union between nature and affection (Φίλον ἐνταῦθα τὸ σῶμα ἡμῶν λέγει διὰ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸ φυσικὴν ἔνωσίν τε καὶ στοργήν).<sup>26</sup>

The two passages above rely on biblical references to friendship, and their commentary is an allegorical one, designed based on the model of the ambivalence between body and soul, illustrating that the accomplishment of the soul is always the expression of an experience of the body engaged in an ascetic effort.<sup>27</sup>

## The power of friendship.

### The relation between *agape* and *philia*

The relation between “love for God” and “love for one’s neighbour” involves a common reference in the friendship vocabulary, marked by spiritual and ascetic formulas: spiritual love, brotherly love, spiritual friendship. In Saint Maximus’ view, those who are friends with God

<sup>24</sup> *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones et Dubia* (CCSG, 10), Edited by José H. Declerck (Turnhout – Leuven: Brepols – Leuven University Press, 1982): 52, 43-4.

<sup>25</sup> *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones et dubia*, 149, 105-6. For this passage is a relevant commentary in Verena Epp, *Amicitia: Zur Geschichte personaler, sozialer, politischer und Beziehungen im frühen Mittelalter* (Hiersman Stuttgart, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones et dubia*, 149, 105-6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibora, “Friendship,” 277.

demonstrate spiritual friendship in relation to their fellowmen. Saint Maximus is aware of the seriousness of vicious behaviours that affect the spiritual friendship inside a community and suggests an ascetic manner to approach the interrelation, based on solitude and silence, so as to recreate the conditions which are favourable to harmony. Charity love is characterised by the openness of the virtuous person to any otherness and is normative, and in this respect, Saint Maximus develops an ethical reflection built on the relation between *agape* love and *philia*. The patristic phrase “friends of Christ” is relevant on this line, underlying a spirituality of friendship based on how Christ calls the Apostles “his friends.” This kind of friendship is a relation marked by exclusivity and is not dependant on the particularities intervening in human friendship, which knows tensions and disharmony. We are going to consider in this analysis the internal relation between *agape* and *philia* in the definition of the friendship vocabulary.

The ideal of friendship for Saint Maximus takes shape in terms of knowledge of the Divine which transfigures the devotees in friends of Christ, and they become the model friend by excellence. This is the meaning of spiritual friendship, such as established by the Cappadocians and by Evagrius Ponticus, the first author who uses the term “spiritual friendship.”<sup>28</sup>

The critical aspect of friendship is the false friendship and we can see in Saint Maximus a standing similar to that in *Etica Nicomahica*. The performance of a false friend’s affection is a more serious harm than the wrong done by a friend who only hurts to avoid a worse one. Similarly to Aristotle, who shows in *EN IX 3, 1165 b* how we try to correct a friend who departs from virtue, in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium 49*, Saint Maximus says that we try to correct the wrong caused by a friend.<sup>29</sup> This commentary does not indicate a negative view of Saint Maximus on friendship; it is true that we see in Byzantium a utilitarian approach to friendship, according to which a friend owes solidarity in case of hardship. So, Saint Maximus will incline in his epistles towards an attitude of solidarity offered to a friend in need, and any departures in this respect mean a corruption of friendship which indicates a lack of norms related to ethical behaviour. Such a conduct is incompatible with the patristic ideal of friendship, which presumes that the gift of friendship is a spiritual experience having the union with the Divine at its heart.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “L’amitié spirituelle est en effet la science de Dieu dans laquelle les saints reçoivent le titre d’amis de Dieu. Les Christ en effet a dit: “Je ne vous appelle plus serviteurs mais amis,” in Évagre le Pontique, *Scholies aux Proverbs*, trad. P. Géhin (Paris, Éd. du Cerf, “Sources chrétiennes,” 1987): 340.

<sup>29</sup> *Quaestiones ad Thalassium 49, 152-60*, in *Maximi Quaestiones ad Thalassium 1. Quaestiones I – LV una cum latina Scotti Eriugena iuxta posita*, (CCSG 7), Editet by Carl Laga and Carlos Steel (Turnhout – Leuven, Brepols – Leuven University Press, 1980): 359.

<sup>30</sup> Gueullette, “L’amitié,” 271.

An ethical distinction is required between the Saint Maximus' view of friendship and that of Aristotle: if to Saint Maximus the proof of loyal friendship is a proof founded on the compliance with the divine law, to Aristotle only the virtuous man can cultivate a genuine friendship.<sup>31</sup> In *Capita de charitate*, Saint Maximus offers a series of reflections on friendship which show that he does not give it a privileged place and pleads for a personal relation with God to invest it with an appropriate content.<sup>32</sup>

Devotion to God is to Saint Maximus more valuable than friendship, and devotion makes affection for friends much stronger and makes it decline as devotion diminishes. This aspect warns about the risk of worshipping friendship or friends, attaching to them some kind of dignity possessed only by the Divine. At the same time, we should notice the emphasis Saint Maximus puts on valorising friendship and which is grounded in the role played by friendship in one's engagement in relation to God, and this is manifested as goodwill towards one's friends.<sup>33</sup>

Love for God is not opposed to love for one's friends, because those who are friends with God may demonstrate some genuine philanthropy in relation to any otherness:

The friends of Christ love all sincerely, but are not loved by all; the friends of the world neither love all nor are loved by all. The friends of Christ preserve the bond of charity (τὴν συνέχειαν τῆς ἀγάπης) until the end; the friends of the world until they are in conflict with one another for things of the world.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most suggestive distinctions which appear in the discourse on friendship is that concerned with *agape* (ἀγάπη) and a relation between friends. A paragraph in *Capita de charitate I 71* is representative in this regard:

Perfect charity does not split up the one nature of men according to their various dispositions; but always looking to that nature, loves all men equally, the zealous as friends; the bad as enemies. It does them good and is patient and puts with the things they do. It reckons no evil at all but suffers for them, if opportunity offers, in order that it may even make them friends, if possible; if not, it does not fall away from its own intention as it always manifests the fruits of equal charity for all men.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ibora, "Friendship," 278.

<sup>32</sup> Ibora, "Friendship," 278.

<sup>33</sup> Ibora, "Friendship," 279.

<sup>34</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor. *The Ascetic Life, The Four Centuries on Charity*, Translation by Polycarp Sherwood, (Westminster, MD and London, 1955): IV, 95. Translated in romanian by Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae in *Filocalia*, vol. II, *Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, Cuvânt ascetic, Capete despre dragoste, Capete teologice, Întrebări, nedumeriri și răspunsuri, Tâlcuire la Tatăl nostru*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003): 142.

<sup>35</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor. *The Ascetic Life I.71*.

We can speak, based on this paragraph, of a theology of friendship in Saint Maximus, where the relation with the Divine lies at the heart of his friendship vocabulary conferring to this spiritual experience some sort of solidity, a stability which no other human sentiment can offer. We find in Saint Maximus' view the equivalence of *agape* and *philia*, as well as the homologation he proposes between *agape* and *eros*. To Saint Maximus, as to Saint Thomas Aquinas, the love founded on a mutual relationship with the Divine is ethically equivalent to friendship. But he equally holds that human friendship – the meaning is never that of mundane friendship, but spiritual friendship – means love for and reciprocity with the Divine. Ideal friendship is the accomplishment of “charité” as *agape*, a work which is highlighted by the double command of love, that ethical platform reuniting the otherness in a common denominator. Saint Maximus appeals to “enemies” in this paragraph to offer a quite distinctive ethical touch to the meaning of *agape*, his intention being to convert his enemies into friends through the act of deifying love.

Saint Maximus considers that there is an inseparable relation between *agape* and *philia*, insofar as the one who is devoted to Christ integrates everybody in an ethical and ontological unity represented by the spiritual community whose purpose is given by *agape*. This is illustrated by Saint Maximus in another passage of *Capita de charitate*:

The things that separate from the love of friends are these: to envy or to be envied, to cause or suffer loss, to insult or to be insulted, and suspicious. May you never have performed or suffered any such thing (Μήποτε οὖν ἔδρασας τι τούτων ἢ πέποντας) to separate you from the love of your friend.<sup>36</sup>

The sapiential perspective offered by this Maximian passage illustrates the internal relation between *agape* and *philia*, the phrase designating this aspect being ἡ τῶν φίλων ἀγάπη.

## Conclusion

The typology of friendship in the anthropology of Saint Maximus is founded on the interiority between *agape* and *philia* in an ethical perspective which does not allow for their separation and aims to convert the soul. The conclusion indicative of our analysis is that Saint Maximus describes friendship as a relationship of love between those who have the same spiritual experience. It appears from this formulation that his vision is different from that of Aristotle who emphasises the friendship of the virtuous, seen univocally as the relationship between those who practice virtue. However,

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<sup>36</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor. *The Ascetic Life* IV.21.

the foundation of friendship in Saint Maximus is biblical, as the source for most of his reflections is the Scripture, and the ideal community is that of the monastic model always faithful to God's Embodied Word. The image of "friend of God" becomes necessarily the image of the friend who is the subject of a shared identity and a receptacle of the Divine at the same time.

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