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Peace be with you (John 20:21): St. Maximos the Confessor and calming the thoughts

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St. Maximos the Confessor, a seventh-century Greek monk, was a keen observer of human behavior. One of his primary interests was the human condition, namely, the predicament human beings find themselves in as a result of the primordial disobedience of Adam and Eve outlined in the book of Genesis (2:16-3:24) in the Bible. This disobedience manifested itself in a variety of ways, including the struggle regarding moral decision-making. Along with being removed from the Garden of Eden, the disobedience of the first two human beings affected the human will. The natural human will, originally aligned with the will of God, has been transformed into a “gnomic” will, a will that must deliberate when making decisions. There has been a fracturing of the cohesiveness of the two wills, divine, and human, and the consequence of this divide is an onslaught of thoughts (logismoi) that enter the human mind as it is trying to make a decision. These thoughts, which derive from different sources, plague and paralyze the monk. In order to combat the thoughts, Maximos has proposed a series of spiritual exercises whose purpose is to help clarify the decision-making process and “tame” the thoughts; acting on destructive thoughts could disrupt community life and wreak havoc in the life of the monk. This paper will examine the exercises and remedies outlined by St. Maximos the Confessor in his work the *Quaestiones et Dubia* to control and reign in the logismoi, what today might be called intrusive and obsessive thoughts. Is it possible the insights of a seventh-century Christian monastic writer regarding “thoughts” could be relevant to contemporary practices regarding the treatment of intrusive thoughts?

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