Human Nature and the Philosophy of the Soul

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Augustine on the Soul

On the Customs of the Catholic Church
[= De moribus ecclesiae catholicae], I, 4, 6, PL 32, col. 1313.

Therefore, let us ask what is better than man. That of course will be hard to find out, unless we first consider and discuss what man himself is. I do not think a definition of man is now demanded of me. What seems to be asked of me at this point is rather the following: since there is almost universal consensus – or at least it is agreed on between me and those I am now dealing with, and that suffices – that we are composites of soul and body, what [then] is the man himself? Is he both of the things I [just] mentioned, or the body alone, or the soul alone? For although soul and body are two things, and neither would be called a “man” if the other did not exist (for neither would the body be a man if the soul did not exist, nor in turn would the soul be a man if a body were not animated by it), nevertheless it can happen that one of these should be regarded as the “man” and called [such]. Therefore, what do we call the “man”? [Is he] soul and body, like a “team” [of horses] or a centaur? [Is he] the body alone, which is being used by a soul that rules it, like a “lantern”, [which is] not the flame and the container together but only the container, although we call it [a lantern] because of the flame? [Or] do we call nothing but the soul the “man”, but on account of the body it rules, just as we call a “rider” not the horse and the man together but only the man, yet [only] insofar as he is suited to governing the horse? It is hard to decide this issue. Or if it is easy to figure out, [in any case] it requires a long explanation. We do not have to accept and take on that job and delay [here]. For whether both, or only the soul, takes the name of ‘man’, the best thing for the man is not what is best for the body. Rather what is best for the soul and body together, or for the soul alone, that is best for the man.

I, 27, 52, PL 32, col. 1332.

Therefore man, as he appears to man, is a rational, mortal and earthly soul using a body.

On the Size of the Soul
[= De quantitate animae], 13, 22, PL 32, col. 1048.

The De quantitate animae is a dialogue between Augustine and Evodius. In the present passage, Augustine is speaking.
But if you want to define the mind for yourself, and so ask what the mind is, it is easy for me to reply. For it seems to be to be a certain substance, partaking in reason, and fitted to ruling the body.

On Music

[\textit{De musica}, VI, 5, 9–10, PL 32, cols. 1168–1169.]

\textit{The De musica is a dialogue between a “Master” and a “Disciple”. The Master does all the talking in this passage.}

\textit{Master}. I will say directly what I think. Either follow me, or even go ahead \{of me\} if you can, if you notice that I am delaying or hesitating. For I do not think this body is animated by a soul except by the intention of the maker. Neither do I suppose \{the soul\} undergoes anything from \{the body\}, but rather acts on \{the body\} and in it, as if \{the body were\} subjected by divine order to \{the soul’s\} domination. Yet sometimes \{the soul\} operates with ease, sometimes with difficulty, according as the bodily nature yields to it more or less, in proportion to its merits. Therefore, whatever corporeal things are imposed on the body or hurled against it from outside, they produce something in the body itself but not in the soul. \{The body\} either resists its task or else agrees with it. And so, when \{the soul\} struggles against the resisting body, and with difficulty forces the matter subjected to \{the soul\} into the ways of its own task, it becomes more attentive because of the difficulty of the action. This difficulty, when it does not pass unnoticed, is called “sensing” because of the attention. And this is called ‘trouble’ or ‘labor’. But when what is introduced or applied \{to the body\} is agreeable, \{the soul\} easily turns all of \{the body\}, or as much as is needed of it, to the paths of its own task. And this action of \{the soul\}, by which it conjoins its body to an agreeable external body, does not pass unnoticed, because it is carried out more attentively on account of that extraneous factor. But, because of its agreeableness, it is sensed with pleasure. . . . And, lest I go on too long, it seems to me that when the soul senses in the body, it does not undergo anything from \{the body\}, but rather acts more attentively in the midst of \{the body’s\} passive processes \{passionibus\}, and that these actions, whether they are easy because of an agreeableness or hard because of a disagreeableness, do not pass unnoticed by \{the soul\}. And all this is what is called “sensing”.

On the Size of the Soul

[\textit{De quantitate animae}, 23, 41, PL 32, col. 1058.]

\textit{Augustine}. Pay attention, then. For I think sensation is that what the body undergoes does not pass unnoticed by the soul. . . . \{10\} Ibid., 25, 48, PL 32, cols. 1062–1063. Augustine. Now turn your mind to that definition of ours, and when you have considered it more expertly, fix it. For we had found that, although it was supposed to be the definition of sensation, it included something else that was not sensation. Hence \{the definition\} is not true when it is \{logically\} converted. For perhaps ‘Every sensation is a passive process of the body that does not pass unnoticed by the soul’ is true, just as ‘Every man is a mortal animal’ is true. But, just as ‘Every mortal animal is a man’ is false, because beasts are also that, so \{too\} ‘Every passive process of the body that does not pass unnoticed by the soul is a sensation’ is false. For my nails are now growing on me, and that does not pass unnoticed by my soul, since I know it. But I do not sense it. Rather I know it by inference. Therefore just as ‘rational’ is added to the \{above\} definition of man to complete it, \{and\} when it is added, the beasts
that were contained [in the definition] together [with man] are excluded, and we include
nothing besides man, and every man, in such a [revised] definition, do you not suppose there
is something to be added here too, by which the foreign element [our proposed definition
of sensation] contains may be separated out and nothing understood in it except sensation,
and every sensation? Evodius. I do suppose so, but I don’t know what can be added. A. Every
sensation is certainly a passive process of the body that does not pass unnoticed by the
soul. But this proposition cannot be converted, because of that passive process of the body
by which it either grows or shrinks while we know it – that is, so that it does not pass
unnoticed by the soul. E. That’s right. A. What? Is it through itself or through something
else that this passive process does not pass unnoticed by the soul? E. Through something
else, obviously. For it is one thing to see bigger nails, and another to know that they
are growing. A. Therefore, since growing is itself a passive process that we do not come
in contact with by any sense, while the size that we do sense is produced by that same pas-
sive process [but] is not that passive process, it is clear that we do not know such a passive
process through itself, but through something else. If therefore it were not through
something else that it did not pass unnoticed by the soul, would it not be sensed rather than
inferred? E. I understand. A. So why do you doubt what is to be added to the definition? E.
Now I see that [sensation] must be defined as follows, that “Sensation is a passive process
of a body that through itself does not pass unnoticed by the soul.” For both every sensation
is like that, and everything like that, I think, is a sensation.