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GOD'S WORK THROUGH A HUMAN

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For many years, the Christian tradition has struggled with the idea of how the human body and soul interact with each other and how God is working through those in a person. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century, St. Augustine brought his understanding of how the physical body affects that soul and vice versa to the table in his theory of sensations. To Augustine understanding his theory of sensations allows one to begin to understand how he places values on the body.<sup>1</sup> This idea has become a traditional view when looking at the body, but is not something that has been taken to heart. Nancey Murphy came on the scene in the 1990's<sup>2</sup> bringing the idea of quantum theory.<sup>3</sup> This theory of how God is working at the micro levels of the human body. This research will explore how God is at work in the physical body and the soul and how the two interact with one another in a compare and contrast of the traditional Christian view through St. Augustine and Nancey Murphy nuanced view of it.

St. Augustine created the theory of sensations. According to Gilson when Augustine uses the term “sensations” he is referring to “any passion undergone by the body when the passion, of itself, neither remains unknown to the soul nor escapes its notice.”<sup>4</sup> This seems to be saying that the body is use to receiving the information and knowledge of something, but it takes the soul to interpret that knowledge and bring it to its full revelation to make it a sensation. If the soul was not to interpret the sensation with passion then it would merely be knowledge of an affect that an

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (Ann Arbor, Edwards Brothers) 9

<sup>2</sup> Nancey Murphy published a lot of different books, chapter to books, and journal articles during this time that relate and expand on the idea of God working at the quantum level of the human.

<sup>3</sup> “Nancey Murphy” Fuller Theological Seminary: Faculty Profile accessed March 30, 2015  
<http://fuller.edu/faculty/nmurphy.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (New York, Random House) 57

object had on the body.<sup>5</sup> To make things clear one must be aware of Augustine's definitions of soul and body; "the soul is;

An entity whose activities underlie the being and behavior of the body in such a way as to make the difference between merely physical activity, and the conscious, animated, purposive behavior characteristic of living human being."

The body is:

The 'part' of a man that is buried at death. It has physical characteristics and may be moved in various ways. But no psychological predicates may be applied to its behavior."<sup>6</sup>

The soul is everything that makes up man that is not actually physical. Therefore since the body is only physical it would make sense that it is only able to bring about a physical result of a sensation and nothing more.

Augustine would say that the body is inferior to the soul.<sup>7</sup> From Augustine's view one can look at the relationship with God and man at different levels. God to man, which in man it gets broken down into the soul and the body. "These things being premised and firmly established – that the rational soul is made happy only by God, that the body is enlivened only by the soul, and that the soul is a something intermediate between God and the body – There is nothing more powerful than this creature, which is called the rational mind, nothing more

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<sup>5</sup> Gilson expands on this idea by talking about smoke and fire. When one sees a fire they experience it through their sense of sight. This is the body at work experiencing the smoke. Once that knowledge comes in, one can then infer that because there is smoke there is a fire to go along with it. This is the soul adding to the revelation of the knowledge of the smoke being present. 57

<sup>6</sup> Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, 15

<sup>7</sup> "For a living creature or animal consists of soul and body, and of these two parts the soul is undoubtedly the better; even though vicious and weak, it is obviously better than even the soundest and strongest body, for the greater excellence of its nature is not reduced to the level of the body even by the pollution of vice, as gold, even when tarnished, is more precious than the purest silver or lead." Norman L. Geisler *What Augustine Says* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House) 112

sublime: whatever is above this, is but the Creator.”<sup>8</sup> It seems that Augustine is saying that the body is completely reliant upon the soul to have any sort of meaning. Without the soul, the body is merely just the physical that the soul is able to manipulate. Therefore, the soul seems to be the middle ground that brings the body and God into relationship and understanding. The soul has the ability to connect directly with God and therefore it can bring that understanding back to the body and relate it to knowledge within the body. Many have taken this idea and turned it into believing that one would not need to take care of their body if their soul is taken care of.

The primary goal for sensation is that the soul is able to make judgements about what the body needs. Augustine says that “the primary function of sensations: not to picture for the mind what things are like, but to warn the soul of changes in the body....Instead of being in the body to suffer and receive, the soul is there to act and to give.”<sup>9</sup> Though the soul is stuck within the body it is not all bad and suffering. Augustine seems to say that the soul is actively trying to make changes. Henry Gilson interprets Augustine and says that “sensation belongs entirely to the soul; the body does not experience it in any way.”<sup>10</sup> That being said it seems that the soul’s goal would be to make changes that bring a pleasing and positive experience. Those then would be / should be shaped by the knowledge that comes from God since the soul is the mediator. That would also allow for God to work and influence the soul to make changes and direct the body in a way that is what he would like for the human to do. That way the body will be able to really work and live for the Glory of God through the understanding and awareness that the soul brings to the table. From this it would seem that Augustine believes that God influences and works primarily through the soul. There would be no way for God to work through the body of man to

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<sup>8</sup> Norman L. Geisler *What Augustine Says* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House) 113

<sup>9</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, (Ann Arbor, Edwards Brothers 1979) 15

<sup>10</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (New York, Random House) 58

influence change or relationship with man. It has to be mediated through the soul for any change to happen.

Augustine seems to believe that the soul is the primary way that in which God communicates with the human body. Through sensations between the physical world and sensations that the soul experiences from God a human is then able to experience the work of God in their life. Nancey Murphy has come along and is adding a nuance to this idea of God working in the human body and soul and that God may actually be at work in the physical body all the way down to the smallest level.

When Nancey Murphy looks at God's divine action in the world she believes that if God is at work in all events then he must be involved in the most basic of natural events as well.<sup>11</sup> This is where Murphy has brought her quantum theory to the table and attempts to show how God is at work not only at the macro level of the human life and being, but all the way down to the smallest part of a human's physical body.

Murphy says there are two different ways that in which God can work: at the quantum level and through human intelligence and action.<sup>12</sup> At the quantum level, God is still restricted in what he can do. "God respects the integrity of the entities with which he cooperates – there are some things that God can do with an electron, for instance, and many other things that he cannot."<sup>13</sup> It seems that God has made creation in a certain way. This way that he has created has order and structure. Therefore with that order and structure there is a limit to what God can do among that creation because of its need to continue in the way that in which He intended for it

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<sup>11</sup> This theory is commonly referred to as the "bottom-up" approach. Nancey Murphy pg 326

<sup>12</sup> Nancey Murphy "Divine Action in the Natural Order" in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell (Notre Dame, Vatican Observatory Foundation) 339

<sup>13</sup> Nancey goes on to explain this and say that God would not be able to make an electron have a rest-mass of a proton, or a positive charge. 341

to function. “To create something, even so lowly a thing as an electron, is to grant it some measure of independence and a nature of its own, including inherent powers to do some things rather than others.”<sup>14</sup> Murphy seems to say that God has created things and given them power to do something. That something is its personal power to act and that God does not need to be there to make it happen. He will not govern that said action and event but allow for creation to make it itself. This seems to allow God to continue to work and sustain creation even though creation has its own ability to do something different than that of what God wants it to do.<sup>15</sup>

Murphy continues in her argument that though there are characteristics of acting that each creation has to make and do it is still not something that one can guarantee or predict when it will happen. The question that Murphy brings up and wants to answer is when those characteristics of acting happen how did they happen? Is it purely random? Is it internally determined by that creation itself? Is it externally determined by a relationship with something outside of itself? Or, is it determined by God?<sup>16</sup> Following this theory when looking at man one would be talking about the subatomic levels of the body. How is it that the smallest levels of the body continue to function and do their job?

Epistemological interpretations of quantum theory says that “there is no “sufficient reason” either internal or external to the entities at this level to determine their behavior”<sup>17</sup> They

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<sup>14</sup> Murphy “Divine Action”, 341

<sup>15</sup> Murphy “Divine Action”, 340-341

<sup>16</sup> To clarify here Murphy uses this helpful analogy that Bruidan has hypothesized “if a starving donkey were placed midway between two equal piles of hay it would starve to death for want of sufficient reason to choose one pile rather than the other. I am supposing that entities at the quantum level are miniature “Bruidans” asses. The asses have the “power” to do one thing rather than another (walk to one of the piles of hay). The question is what induces them to take one course of action rather than the other (or to take a course of action at a particular time rather than another or not at all). By hypothesis, there is nothing external to determine the donkey’s choice (no difference in the piles of hay). Also, by hypothesis, there is nothing internal (no sufficient reason to determine the choice.” Murphy “Divine Action” 341 Therefore Nancey is calling into light whether God is working at those subatomic levels to make choice happen when there is nothing internal or external to tell it otherwise.

<sup>17</sup> Murphy “Divine Action” 341

seem to be saying that at the smallest level the entities that God has created have to power to do their job, but have no reason to. Therefore, they seem to either act out of random act of acting or act out of divine reaction. Here Murphy goes on to say that the hidden variable in the acting is that of God's intervention and causation. "My proposal is that God's governance at the quantum level consists in activating or actualizing one or another of the quantum entity's innate powers at particular instants, and these events are not possible without God's action. This is the manner and extent of God's governance at this level of reality."<sup>18</sup> It seems that Murphy is arguing that God is merely making things happen at the quantum level. He is activating the action and letting the entity do the acting on its own off the action to act was given. God would not cross that line of integrity with the entity and force something, even though God has the power to do so. Jürgen Moltmann states that Murphy is right in her quantum theory in that she has acknowledged "God's continuing action in the created world in terms of sustenance, providence, guidance."<sup>19</sup> Here Moltmann is backing Murphy and stating that God is really sustaining man when he is at work at the quantum level.

Along with the idea of God, working at the quantum level Murphy does not discount that God is also working at the soul level as well. In the book, *whatever Happened to the Soul*, Murphy is in agrees with Warren S. Brown in his claim of the human soul and says "the most important functions of the soul involve personal relations: the capacity for self-relatedness, relations with other humans, and relation with God."<sup>20</sup> It seems that Murphy agrees with this statement and seems to say that yes, God is working at a soul level and the souls job to have

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<sup>18</sup> Murphy "Divine Action" 342

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Moltmann. "Reflections of Chaos" in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* Ed. Robert John Russell (Notre Dame, Vatican Observatory Foundation) 208

<sup>20</sup> Nancey Murphy, "Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues", in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, ed. Warren S. Brown (Minneapolis, Fortress Press) 27

relationship with God and other souls as well. This allows there to be a connection between the work at the quantum level as well as the soul level.

She expands on this idea in her chapter “Nonreductive Physicalism: Philosophical Issues.” In there she states that nonreductive physicalism “denies the existence of nonmaterial entity, the mind (or soul) but does not deny the existence of consciousness (a position in philosophy of mind called eliminative materialism) or the significance of conscious states or other *mental* (note the adjectival form) phenomena.”<sup>21</sup> Here Murphy seems to be counteractive to her previous statement and challenging the idea of the existence of a soul. She does not discredited that there is something other than the physical body that is becoming aware of reality around it like the souls job was. Murphy is challenging that it is through the conscious rather than a soul. The job that both the soul and conscious have are the same and the conscious seems to marry with science better than a soul does. Through the conscious human is able to experience and have relationship with God “religious experience supervenes on cognitive and / or affective experience in the context of an encounter with God.”<sup>22</sup>

Murphy seems to be trying to bring down religious experience and say that it is not something as far out and abstract as some make it to be, but rather that it is an experience that one has at a cognitive and physical level something that the conscious would be able to interpret rather than a soul would need to. This ties in with how God is working at the quantum levels already. It seems that then through this work God is able to really make a change in human, because of the connection that a conscience has to a body versus a disconnected soul. These

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<sup>21</sup> Nancey Murphy, “Nonreductive Physicalism: Philosophical Issues”, in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, ed. Warren S. Brown (Minneapolis, Fortress Press) 131

<sup>22</sup> Murphy “Nonreductive Physicalism” 147



thought of nonreductive physicalism has to be married with God working at the quantum levels otherwise, it is then left at a lower level of the hierarchy chain.<sup>23</sup>

All together Murphy seems to say that God is working at the quantum level of man's physical body. He is putting things into action to make sure that man functioning and working like it is supposed to. This brings in a view of God working with the body of man, taking care of, and sustaining his life. Murphy then goes on to and challenges whether or not there is an actual soul stating that it is through the conscious of man that God is at to work. Because God is at work in the quantum levels then he would also interact in a more physical way than just divine interaction at a macro level. Murphy seems to have challenged the traditional Christian view of how God is at work in human's at the physical body level and in the soul. It brings an all-encompassing view of the body and the "soul" or conscience and that they are able to work together to bring man an understanding.

Both Augustine's and Murphy's view are great and hold grand value. In comparison, these two views are showing how God is at work in the human body physically and nonphysical. In one way or another God is actually at work trying to reach out to human beings. He is active in man's day-to-day life trying to reach out and draw them into relationship with him. Even though there is a difference language usage between Augustine and Murphy there still seems to be a similarity in their thought. Augustine seems to say that God works through sensations of the body that only the soul can interpret. Whereas Murphy seems to be saying that, it is God's work at the quantum level. These both show that there is some sort of action from God, which even the physical action is done to communicate. Both theologians also believe that there is a step in the interpretation. Man does not merely feel something and is able to understand it, but that it must

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<sup>23</sup> Murphy "Nonreductive Physicalism" 147

go through either the soul (Augustine) or the conscious (Murphy) for it to have its full meaning and understanding revealed.

They would agree that God is at work in the human, but the way that man interprets that is different from each. Murphy seems to believe that God's physical work at the quantum level is there to make sure that man is continuing to stay in action. Whereas Augustine believes the body is much more inferior to the soul and makes it seem that the body is merely a capsule that in which the soul resides in.

Though Murphy and Augustine seem to have the same idea of sensations and physical happenings to the body that God is want to communicate through there is difference in the interpretation of those sensations. For Augustine the soul is then what actually does the interpretation of that sensation and gives meaning to it. The soul then acts as mediation between the body and God so that there can be a connection for man. Murphy challenges this view of a soul and states that there does not need to be a soul, but that man is able to interpret those sensations through the conscious. There is a physical action and therefore the physical body is also able to interpret that action and make sense of it and put the same value on it as Augustine's view of the soul does. For Murphy this seems to work because God is already at work at the quantum level. She is putting more value on the physical body and God's ability to work through that to make connection and relationship rather than leaving it purely up to the conscious or even soul to make that connection on its own. For Murphy it becomes and all human work to have a relationship with God rather than Augustine in which it takes only the soul to do so.

Even though these two theologians come from two very different eras, they still have the common themes and understandings. The traditional view does not mean that it is the only and always correct way, because just like Murphy has done science has brought some new

understanding to the table to open the discussion up a little more with a different view. It seems as though one could take some each of them and marry their thoughts to make a cohesive understanding. Like Augustine, say there is a soul within man. Many people would agree with this traditional view. This is something that science will not be able to fully explain, at least in today's ear, because of the abstractness of the concept of the soul. Yet Murphy really shows a valued point of how God seems to be working at the quantum level of human beings. God is sustaining humans in make sure that at the smallest level of the body it is function and working properly. There at that level the body is able to experience sensations. Just like Augustine seems to say there a knowledge that comes from the soul and what the soul then receives from God in being able to interpreting those sensations. Once one could become aware of God working in some of the smallest places of their life maybe then one would be able to see some of the bigger macro times that God is working as well. Maybe marrying Murphy's value of the body with Augustine's value of the soul and its ability to handle the body would bring a greater value to man as a whole. Value the body, because it seems that it is still under the work of God and yet appreciate one's soul because through that God is still trying to talk to man. It is not that the soul is unhappy within the body, but is trying to help it do the work of God to bring the Father glory in all that it does. It is all the ways that in which God is trying to communicate and come into a deeper relationship with man.

Here we have looked at Augustine's theory of sensations, and how physical body interacts with the soul. He states that through the mediation of the soul God is able to interact with the physical body of man. The soul has much more value than the body does as it is merely a space that in, which the soul is residing in. Murphy has brought a new view to the traditional Christian view on the physical body in that God is at work at the quantum level of them to

sustain their being. She also believes that it is not necessarily the “soul” that is the connecting point that brings knowledge and understanding from God, but the conscious. Through that conscious, one can also interpret the sensations that God has set around to communicate to them. Pulling them together there is value taking the emphasis from both and marrying them. Maybe it is not so much of the soul’s work to communicate or just merely the bodies’ job, but both of them have the ability to communicate and experience God. Maybe Nancey Murphy can add a little something to the traditional view of that Augustine set, but not discount all that Augustine set forth.

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