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## THE PERSON AFTER DEATH IN HOLISTIC-CONFIGURATIONAL THEORY \*

*A pessoa depois da morte na teoria holístico-configuracional*

Wellistony Carvalho Viana \*\*

**Abstract:** The current debate between Thomists of the corruptionist view and the survivalist view revolves around the most appropriate interpretation of Thomas' texts about the persistence of the person after death. The present article criticizes both views, and offers a new interpretation of Thomas which is capable of resolving the problem. However, the main scope of the paper consists in offering an alternative theory to the hylomorphic view of the person, and introduces a more adequate and coherent theoretical framework to make explicit the ontological status of the human being and their place in the world. The result will be the explication of the holistic-configurational theory of the person from structural-systematic philosophy that shows how the personal configuration persists after bodily death because of its intentional-systematic location in the whole of Being, determined by the prime facts intentionally coextensive with Being.

**Keywords:** Hylomorphic view. Survival of the person. Structural-systematic philosophy. Thomism.

**Resumo:** o debate atual entre tomistas da visão da corrupção e da visão da sobrevivência gira em torno da interpretação mais adequada dos textos de Tomás acerca da persistência da pessoa depois da morte. O presente artigo critica ambas as visões e oferece uma nova interpretação de Tomás capaz de resolver o problema. No entanto, o principal escopo do artigo consiste em oferecer uma teoria alternativa à visão hilemórfica da pessoa, introduzindo um quadro teórico mais

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\* Artigo recebido em 09/05/2023 e aprovado para publicação em 13/07/2023.

\*\* Doutor em Filosofia pela Hochschule für Philosophie de Munique-Alemanha. Atua nas áreas de metafísica e filosofia da mente. Atualmente trabalha como professor na Pontificia Università Gregoriana-Roma.

adequado e coerente para explicitar o status ontológico do ser humano e seu lugar no mundo. O resultado será a explicitação da teoria holístico-configuracional da pessoa da filosofia estrutural-sistemática que mostra como a configuração pessoal persiste depois da morte corporal por causa do seu local-intencional-sistemático no todo do Ser, determinado pelos fatos primos intencionalmente coextensivos com o Ser.

Palavras-chaves: Visão hilemórfica. Sobrevivência da pessoa. Filosofia estrutural-sistemática. Tomismo.

## Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed a debate among Thomists (and even among non-Thomists) about the coherence of the hylomorphic view in Thomas' overall thought. The crux of this debate constitutes the role of the bodily dimension for the identity of the person after death. As the bodily dimension is destroyed at death, how can Thomas argue that the soul alone—only a part of the person—continues to perform functions proper to the person as a whole, such as having memories, uniting with God, knowing, and willing? In fact, the soul of St. Ignatius of Loyola, for Thomas, does not constitute the *person of* St. Ignatius and, strictly speaking, it should be said that this soul is *nobody's* soul until the moment of the resurrection of the body, when St. Ignatius himself will reassume his two essential parts, body and soul. However, such a view seems to be at odds with the overall thinking of the Aquinas, for whom it would be St. Ignatius himself who would be united with God in the intermediate period, after death and before the resurrection.

Contemporary Thomists strive to give a coherent interpretive response to Thomas' texts in order to reconcile their position on the bodiless soul with other passages that show the persistence of the soul to be a sufficient condition for the survival of the person. Our purpose in this paper is not only to highlight this debate among Thomists (topic 1), but to offer an alternative interpretation capable of illuminating the question within the Thomistic theoretical framework (topic 2). However, our main intention is not to corroborate the hylomorphic position, but to abandon it. The idea is to present a different and more adequate theoretical framework, capable of taking advantage of Thomas' intuitions, without assuming the whole of his referential theoretical framework (topic 3). The result will be the elucidation of the ontological status of the person after death in the *holistic-configurational theory*, which consists of a sub-theory of the systematic structural philosophy (SSP)<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the problem of personal

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<sup>1</sup> *Structural-Systematic Philosophy* finds its foundations in L.B. Puntel's book *Struktur und sein*, 2006. We quote the translation in English throughout the text: *Structure and being. A theoretical*

identity after bodily death will be reviewed in the holistic-configurational theory (topic 4), showing that the *deactivation* of the bodily dimension is not sufficient to annihilate the intentional-systematic location of the human person in the whole of Being.

### **1. The debate between the corruptionist and survivalist views**

Hylomorphism has a long tradition going back to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and is gaining attention in the contemporary debate about personal identity. Its basic thesis in the discussion about personhood is that humans consist of a composite of two essential parts, namely body and soul, which constitute the aspects of matter and form present in every particular being. Despite the conceptual unity, there is no consensus among hylomorphists regarding all the particulars of this position such as, for example, regarding whether or not the person survives after bodily death. Patrick Toner has divided the advocates of Hylomorphism into two opposing positions in this regard: those who hold the view of the corruption of the person after death (the corruptionist view) and those who argue for the survival of the person (the survivalist view)<sup>2</sup>. The first position accepts the traditional interpretation of Thomas Aquinas that the persistence of the soul is *not* a sufficient condition for the survival of the person; in other words although the soul continues to exist, the person is corrupted by the death of the body, to be reestablished only in the resurrection of the dead<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, the view of the survival of the person affirms that Aquinas should not be followed on this point, or that the traditional interpretation does not take into account the totality of Thomas' thought, which as a whole indicates that the persistence of the soul is a sufficient condition for the survival of the person after death.

One of the main representatives of the *survivalist view* is Eleonore Stump. For Stump, the traditional interpretation is nothing but "*theological gibberish*,"<sup>4</sup> because it explicitly contradicts important statements of Thomas regarding the so-called *novissimi*: judgment, purgatory, paradise, hell.

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*framework for a systematic philosophy*. University Park, Philadelphia, USA: Penn State University Press, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. TONER, P. On hylomorphism and personal identity. *European Journal of Philosophy*, v. 19, n. 3, p. 454-473, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the *Commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians*, 15, I.2: "[...] anima autem cum sit pars corporis hominis, non est totus homo, et anima mea non est ego."

<sup>4</sup> STUMP, E. Resurrection, reassembly, and reconstitution: Aquinas on the soul. In: NIEDERBACHER, B.; RUNGGALDIER, E., (Hgg.), *Die menschliche seele: Brauchen wir den dualismus? The human soul: Do we need dualism?* Frankfurt — London: Ontos, 2006. p. 158.

Stump offers a new interpretation of Thomas that purports to substantiate the persistence of the person after death, thereby reconciling such an interpretation with the whole of Thomasian thought. Her basic idea is that Thomas understands the human person as *constituted* in time by body and soul, and after death by soul alone. As constitution is not identity, the human person would not be identical with either element (body and soul) before death, much less identical with the soul after death. To say that the person is “constituted by the soul” and not identical to it would, according to Stump, solve the risk of confusing Thomas’ position with a Platonic–Cartesian view. As, for Thomas, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, Stump is justified in interpreting that Thomas argues that the person (the whole) is greater than the sum of its parts, whether it is the body and soul before death or the soul alone after death.

Toner raises a criticism of the survivalist view in general and Stump’s specific view, namely, his mereological confusion. As the soul is only a proper part of the person, Toner does not accept a composition/constitution with only one essential element, which would totally distort the concept of the *proper part* of the composite. In this case, according to Toner, the concept of composition/constitution would not apply to the situation of the soul after death, but only the concept of identity, that is: The person, in the survivalist view, would be identical to the soul and not composed or constituted *by* the soul. To support his critique, Toner invokes a weak supplementation principle (WSP) that states<sup>5</sup>:

$$\text{WSP: } (x < y) \rightarrow (z)((z < y) \ \& \ (zfx))$$

In the formula, the symbols “<” and “f” should be read respectively as “is a proper part of” and “is disjointed from”. Thus, the WSP states that if there is a proper part (*x*) of a compound (*y*), there must be another proper part (*z*) that is distinct from the first (*x*). Thus, the compound cannot be identical to any of the proper parts, but to the unity of all of them; or rather, there cannot be a compound with only one of the parts. Thomas, according to Toner, was well aware of this principle, and often pointed to the basic mereological principle that the whole is greater than (and not identical to) its parts<sup>6</sup>. That is, if Hylomorphism holds that the person is a substantial whole, composed of two essential parts, then one cannot understand why the survivalist view insists on claiming that after death the person is composed/constituted of only one part. There would be no sense in affirming that the totality of the composition is greater than its parts, as there would only be one part, the spiritual one. In fact, if the hylomorphic position defends the identity of the person with the spiritual

<sup>5</sup> Cf. TONER, On hylomorphism and personal identity. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 456.

<sup>6</sup> For example, in *Summa Theologiae* I, Q. 2, art. 1 obj. 2: “scito enim quid est totum et quid pars, statim scitur quod omne totum maius est sua parte.”

part, then it ceases to be hylomorphic and falls into the *simple view* that affirms the identity of the person with the soul (e.g., Plato, Descartes). In this sense, what relevance would the body still have for a hylomorphic view thus modified? Therefore, Toner argues that for Hylomorphism, there is only one coherent position, namely, the view of the corruption of the person after death, that is, Thomas' original position.

However, the main problem with Stump's conception (and with all forms of Hylomorphism) goes beyond this. In fact, Stump could escape Toner's critique by claiming that the mereological critique targets only a concept of composition understood as *identity* between the whole and its parts, but does not touch his interpretation that the substantial whole would be "something beyond" its parts, that is, understanding the substantial whole as *constituted of* its parts. However, Stump ends up falling into a major incoherence. In fact, Stump's fundamental incoherence is that the "whole" (i.e., the person) comes simply presupposed and constitutes an unintelligible entity. In fact, the subject or personal substance exhibits the properties of having a body and having a soul, but is not identical to either the body or the soul. Thus, one must ask: What, then, is the person beyond a body and soul? Or again, in Stump's case, what would be the *ontological status* of the person constituted by the soul? Stump does not present any intelligible characteristic of what the person is, she only presupposes it as an entity constituted by the body and soul (before death) and by the soul (after death). To better understand the problem, let us consider Baker's constitutional view.

For Baker, person  $x$  is constituted by body  $y$ . Each of the elements of the constitutional relation has *derived* and *non-derived* properties. The former are those borrowed or received because of the constitutional relation to the other element, while the non-derived ones are those proper to the element<sup>7</sup>. For example, the derived properties of the constituted element ( $x$  or the person) are borrowed from the element  $y$  that constitutes  $x$  at a given time<sub>1</sub>. Thus, John's person has the derivative property of weighing 80kg because of the constitutive relation to John's body. Weighing 80kg is a non-derived property of John's body and a derived property of John's person. What then is the non-derived property, that is, the person-specific property of John? For Baker, the non-derived property of the person is his *first-person perspective* (FPP), which also belongs to John's body, but only in a derived way because of the constitutional relationship.

Even though there are a number of other inconsistent aspects<sup>8</sup>, Baker's constitutional view regards the *constituted* and *constitutive* elements as characteriz-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. BAKER, L. R. Unity without identity: A new look at material constitution. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, v. XXIII, p. 152, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> For a critique of Baker's conception, see VIANA, W.C. A Teoria holístico-configuracional de Pessoa na filosofia estrutural-sistemática. *Síntese*, BH, v. 48, n. 152, p. 601-623, Sept./Dec. 2021.

able and intelligible, and not just presupposed<sup>9</sup>. Person *x* is characterized by their FPP, while body *y* is characterized by its weight, height, color, and so on. The person is not constituted by the FPP, but is *identical* with it: that is, identical with the self-consciousness articulated by the intentional elements of intelligence and will. The problem with Stump's constitutional relation is that the person, after death, is *constituted* by the soul (spirit), but is not identical with it. However, what is the soul/spirit but the intentional elements of intelligence, will, and self-consciousness? If the person is constituted and not identical to their soul, one must ask what, then, is the person identical to, that is, what characteristic (Baker would say, what non-derivative property) does the person possess for Stump? In one passage, Stump states, "A human person is not identical to his soul; rather, a human person is identical to an individual substance in the species *rational* animal."<sup>10</sup> What does this mean? It means that the person would be identical to a substance with the properties animality and rationality. But what would be the intelligible characteristic of this substance beyond these two properties? As is evident in every ontology of substance, there is no answer to this question. The substance/subject constitutes a presupposed entity to support the unity of the properties, but it does not present any intelligibility.

To escape the problem of mereological confusion and unintelligibility, Stump would have two ways out: Either identify the person with the soul (in which case she would have to abandon Thomas and the hylomorphic view, and hold a Platonic–Cartesian view) or continue with the hylomorphic view, but assuming that the soul is not a sufficient condition for the survival of the person (leaving the survivalist view and assuming the corruptionist view). In the latter case, Stump could avoid the mereological confusion, but not the problem of the unintelligibility of the person, proper to the hylomorphic view, as we have seen. Our suggestion is that the theoretical framework of Hylomorphism itself needs to be changed, as we will propose below.

However, before that, it is worth asking whether the corruptionist view constitutes that most adequate interpretation within the Thomasian theoretical framework. In fact, there are texts of Thomas that explicitly confirm this interpretation<sup>11</sup>. However, how to consider this in the face of Thomas' general

<sup>9</sup> This does not mean that Baker does not fall into the same inconsistencies as does the hylomorphic view. On the contrary, Baker assumes the same language of compositional semantics when speaking of "properties," thus presupposing that *nolens volens* is an ontology of substance.

<sup>10</sup> STUMP, Resurrection, reassembly, and reconstitution: Aquinas on the soul, *loc. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> For example, in *Super Sent.*, lib. 4 d. 43 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 ad 2 : „Ad secundum dicendum, quod anima Abrahae non est, proprie loquendo, ipse Abraham, sed est pars ejus; et sic de aliis; unde vita animae Abrahae non sufficeret ad hoc quod Abraham sit vivens; vel quod Deus Abraham sit Deus viventis; sed exigitur vita totius conjuncti, scilicet animae et corporis; quae quidem vita quamvis non esset actu quando verba proponebantur, erat tamen in ordine utriusque partis ad resurrectionem. Unde dominus per verba illa subtilissime et efficaciter probat resurrectionem.»

conception that the person after death will be punished or rewarded? If the soul alone does not constitute the person, *who is* the person after death and before the resurrection? Nobody? What sense would there be in rewarding or punishing *nobody*? If the separated soul can think, and have will and memories, one can ask: Whose intelligence, will, and memories are these? One can clearly apply the criticism called *too many minds* to this conception, namely: If the soul after death can think by itself why couldn't it think by itself before death? Here we would have two "beings" that think—the soul alone and the person, without having definite criteria to know which one is myself. In any case, the original interpretation makes us wonder if a thinker as refined as Thomas could really hold that the separated soul is *nobody*, which invites us to find a more adequate interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Thomas' position revisited

The purpose of this topic is to seek a more coherent interpretation of Thomas' texts within his own theoretical framework, before abandoning it altogether. Undoubtedly, both the interpretation of survival and that of the corruption of the person bring inconsistencies to Thomas' hylomorphic vision. If the former is correct, one must ask: If the person survives their bodily death, how can they still be a composite of body and soul? That is, if the person is only their soul *after* death, why deny such identity *before* death? If the second interpretation is correct, one must ask: If the person does not survive their bodily death, how can the soul be punished, rewarded, unite with God, have an intelligence, will, and memories, and not consist of the same person before death? Moreover, if it is not the person, but only part of him (his soul) to be purified, and united with God (in the case of the saints), what will happen to this "soul-of-none" at the person's return in the resurrection? Will it disappear to give way to the resurrected person? This last position seems to be at odds with Thomas' general conception of the *novissimi*.

In fact, both interpretations can be substantiated by evidence in Thomas' texts. However, both fail to attend to a fundamental issue, namely: The loss of the body does not annihilate the necessary connection of the soul with the body, for although the soul has lost the *actuality* of the body at death, it has not lost the *potentiality* for corporeality. This factor has an

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<sup>12</sup> Stump even claims that the interpretation of the corruption of the person is heretical, for if it is true that the person of Abraham was not waiting for Christ in limbo, then he was not saved, which goes against the truth of the Catholic faith, namely that Christ saved the patriarchs from the realm of the dead (cf. STUMP, *op. cit.*, 161s). Toner shows with some texts of Thomas that it was not the person of Abraham, but only his soul that comes to be called "Abraham" solely by custom (cf. TONER, P. Personhood and death in St. Thomas Aquinas. *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, v. 26, n. 2, p. 125, Apr. 2009).

important ontological significance for the debate at hand. Let us try to make this interpretation more explicit through a text by Thomas<sup>13</sup>.

In chapter 81 of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas answers some objections against the resurrection of the dead. In the answer to the second objection, he states:

Quod vero secundo obiicitur, impedire non potest quin homo idem numero resurgere possit. Nullum enim principiorum essentialium hominis per mortem omnino cedit in nihilum: nam anima rationalis, quae est hominis forma, manet post mortem, ut superius est ostensum; materia etiam manet, quae tali formae fuit subiecta, sub dimensionibus eisdem ex quibus habebat ut esset individualis materia. Ex coniunctione igitur eiusdem animae numero ad eandem materiam numero, homo reparabitur.

In this text it is clear that “nullum enim principiorum essentialium hominis per mortem omnino cedit in nihilum.” This does not only mean that *one* of the essential elements of the person—the soul—will subsist after death, as it might seem at first glance. In fact, Thomas states that “*none* of man’s essential principles are completely destroyed by death,” that is, not even the essential principle of corporeality. What does this mean? Thomas does not fully clarify this statement. However, it must be remembered that the soul constitutes the *forma corporis* insofar as it configures the prime matter by participating in its own act of being (*esse*) and making it *this* concrete human. The consequence of this is that corporeality must *somehow* be present in the soul; not only in the *actuality* of the body, but also in the separated soul (*absque corpore*) in a *potential way*<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, Thomas states, immediately following the text quoted above:

Corporeitas autem dupliciter accipi potest. Uno modo, secundum quod est forma substantialis corporis, prout in genere substantiae collocatur. Et sic

<sup>13</sup> Here I follow Puntel’s interpretation in an unpublished correspondence with Patrick Zoll.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Toner supports an interpretation that goes in this same direction, but pursues a very different purpose, namely, his intention is to show that it is possible to affirm a “gappy existence” in the Thomasian doctrine, followed by a restoration of numerical identity in the resurrection. His conclusion is as follows: “Things can return with numerical identity (1) if their principal parts survive in *some sense*, and can be gathered together and appropriately reunited; or (2) if their existence is directly entailed by the existence of things falling under (1), without need for any further forms or any causal dependence.” (cf. TONER, P. St. Thomas Aquinas on gappy existence. *Analytic Philosophy*, v. 56, n. 1 p. 95, March 2015 — emphasis added). To support this conclusion, Toner also analyzes questions 80 and 81 of book IV of *Summa contra Gentiles* and comments on Thomas’ idea that “*none* of man’s essential principles are completely destroyed by death.” His comment is that corporeality remains “*somehow*” in substantial form, and is not destroyed by death. Toner shows that Thomas’ idea is single: What becomes destroyed in death is the *composition*, that is, the *person* who will be restored in the resurrection. It is interesting to note how Toner is unable to draw out the radical consequences of the fact of “the non-total destruction of the essential parts” for his hylomorphic conception.

corporeitas cuiuscumque corporis nihil est aliud quam forma substantialis eius, secundum quam in genere et specie collocatur, ex qua debetur rei corporali quod habeat tres dimensiones. Oportet igitur, quod corporeitas, prout est forma substantialis in homine, non sit aliud quam anima rationalis, quae in sua materia hoc requirit, quod habeat tres dimensiones: est enim actus corporis alicuius.

The first sense of “corporeality,” as mentioned in the text above, is present in the *anima rationalis* itself, which constitutes the substantial form of the body. The second sense to which Thomas refers in the continuation of the text is corporeality in the accidental form, which places the body in the genus of quantity or extension. In this latter sense, the body takes on its physical dimensions and becomes a concrete body. However, corporeality in this second sense is only possible because of corporeality in the first sense, that is: The first sense speaks of a corporeality that is only potential, found already in the actuality (*esse*) of the soul, while corporeality in the second sense constitutes the actuality of the body.

The ontological significance of this interpretation only appears at the post-mortem moment, for it is clear that soul and body are created together, and there is no sense in speaking of a potentiality of the soul to take on a body, as if the soul existed before the creation of the body. However, the question arises in the afterlife when the soul finds itself without an actual body. In this condition, one must reflect what death meant from an ontological point of view for the soul. That is, what does it mean to say that the soul is essentially *forma-corporis* if not to affirm that it possesses an intrinsic/essential potentiality to configure a body? Indeed, as Thomas states, one cannot say that the essential principle of corporeality has been “totally destroyed by death,” as it is found in the *anima-forma-corporis* as a potency. In short, the actuality of the body is destroyed by death and falls into nothingness, but the potentiality to configure a body remains in the soul. By no means does a potential corporeality constitute a nothingness-of-being, but rather it is a something-of-being to the extent of guaranteeing the necessary substantial union of soul and body in the post-death stage, before the resurrection.

It is worth pointing out that corporeality is equivalent to the dimension of animality in the human being. In fact, the classic definition that the human person constitutes a rational animal would cause problems for the so-called survival interpretation of the person, as death destroys animality, leaving only the rational soul. However, the interpretation offered above makes us think that the potentiality of the substantial form to configure the raw material cannot be totally extinguished. As the rational soul was created in and for animality, it is not possible for the soul to lose such ontological reference, as if it were a Platonic–Cartesian soul, free of any trace of animality. The conclusion is that the human person, after death, does not cease to be a rational animal by the fact of losing the actuality of

animality, as animality/corporeality remains *somehow* linked to the rational soul, as an intrinsic tendency/potentiality to assume it.

If this interpretation is correct, then the substantial whole must somehow continue after bodily death, leading to the conclusion that the person understood as a substantial composite of body and soul persists in a *sui generis* form, namely in a form in which the bodily dimension comes *deactivated, suspended, or outdated* until the moment of resurrection. The idea of “deactivating” a function is well known in computer science, in which a piece of hardware may have software installed but deactivated. That is, the software is there in the memory of the hardware, and out of action, but it can be reactivated with a simple command. In our analogy, the opposite is true. It is not the hardware (the body) that has software (the soul) installed and not active, but the software (the soul) has hardware (a body) installed, and it is not active or updated. This interpretation fits well with the hylomorphic theoretical framework because it does not consider matter as something extrinsic, added from the outside as if it were an element juxtaposed to form. If the hylomorphic view comprehends the body-soul composite as a substantial unity it is necessary to ground such unity from within, that is, intrinsically, which can be accomplished through the interpretation presented above. Moreover, one can better understand how corporeality depends on the soul and not the other way around. To be precise, the concrete body would be an actualization of a potency found in the substantial form that gives the *esse* to the body exactly as it actualizes a tendency/potency of the soul to configure the body.

This interpretation could even solve the problems of Thomas’ hylomorphic view in the post-death phase before the resurrection. However, this is not the only and most serious problem of this conception. In fact, the hylomorphic view brings with it more serious problems of coherence, which stem from a poorly elaborated and unintelligible *theoretical referential framework*<sup>15</sup>. As we have already indicated above, the major problem consists in the unintelligibility of the person, which is presupposed to give unity to its essential properties. This comes from the assumption of an ontology of substance used to articulate the essential notes of objects. When one reflects on the foundations of this ontology applied to the metaphysics of the person, one comes to the point where a subject (the person) is assumed to carry essential properties, such as animality and rationality. If we ask what this carrier/subject/person is beyond its essential properties, we will find no answer. An entity called substance/subject is simply assumed without any intelligibility. The second major problem comes from

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<sup>15</sup> This is not the place to fully substantiate such criticisms or to present a complete alternative theory, which I do elsewhere. Cf. VIANA, Teoria holístico-configuracional de Pessoa na filosofia estrutural-sistemática, loc. cit. Cf. also PUNTEL, *Structure and being. A theoretical framework for a systematic philosophy*, p. 262-290.

this same ontology—namely, it consists in the compositional semantics arising from this ontology, as the predication of properties happens assuming the same unintelligibility of the carrier subject. In the following topic, we offer a different and more adequate theoretical framework for thematizing Thomas’ not explicitly articulated intuition according to which “*nullum enim principiorum essentialium hominis per mortem omnino cedit in nihilum.*”

### 3. *The holistic-configurational theory of the person*

The first task for the elaboration of a more adequate theory of the person constitutes the development of a more coherent and intelligible *theoretical referential framework*. SSP abandons the theoretical framework of the hylo-morphic view altogether, mainly because of its incoherent ontology and semantics, and builds a holistic-configurational theory (HCT) in which the person is understood as a *configuration of primary facts*. These two terms need to be quickly clarified<sup>16</sup>. The term “configuration” is used in SSP to make explicit the interconnectedness of the ontological–linguistic factors involved in an individual, seen no longer as a property-bearing substance/object, but as a bundle of qualities clearly expressible by language. The configuration presupposes nothing below or beyond itself as a unifying factor of the primary facts. There are various unifying and individuating factors for the various types of configuration, ranging from a simple spatio-temporal location to more complex factors that ensure unification and individuation from an intentional reference to the whole of Being. This is the case for the person configuration, as we will see.

Together with the terms “primary sentence” and “primary proposition,” the term “primary fact” constitutes the *termini technici* of SSP expressing the basic structures of its theoretical framework. Primary facts are “original occurring entities” structured from the semantic point of view by true primary propositions, expressed by primary sentences. Primary sentences have the general form “it is the case that *f*” and must be fully determined from the semantic point of view until one arrives at the ontological verification of a primary fact through the primary proposition “it is true that *f*.” In short, primary facts are occurrences in the world, expressed by language in its most descriptive or theoretical function. Thus, a primary fact configuration means an ontological–linguistic structure, in which all the integral components are intelligible and expressible by a theoretical language. To say, therefore, that the human person constitutes a configu-

<sup>16</sup> For a full explication of the terms see PUNTEL, *Structure and Being. A Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Philosophy*, ch. 3.

ration of primary facts is equivalent to saying that all the constitutive elements of the person are expressible by language, and are united in an original and irreducible whole.

In fact, in the person configuration, primary facts of various kinds are involved, divided in two ways: one modal and the other specific to the area<sup>17</sup>. According to the first division, the person configuration presents primary facts that are absolutely essential (intelligence, free will, and self-consciousness), relatively or historically essential (e.g., corporeality) and contingent (e.g., the fact of going to the movies on any Sunday). From the point of view of the second division, the primary facts belong to various specific ontological spheres: spiritual (mental), social, sensitive, biological, purely physical, and so on.

As stated above, in this theoretical framework, the person does not constitute an entity above or beyond the facts that configure them as happens in the hylomorphic view. The person consists in a configuration of primary facts and its identity core is found in the point of intersection of these facts, namely in the expression “I.”<sup>18</sup> The “I” constitutes the point of unity of the diverse primary facts, above all, of those that are absolutely essential (intelligence, free will, and self-consciousness), which is equivalent to what tradition has always called “spirit.”

Saying “I” should not only be understood as a linguistic phenomenon, nor as a psychological one, but as an ontological factor. This factor has to do with the primary spiritual structures/facts that constitute the person configuration, and are characterized by the *intentional coextensivity with the whole*<sup>19</sup>. Such intentional coextensivity does not occur because the person is

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 363.

<sup>18</sup> To address the problem of personal identity, one needs to differentiate between “qualitative identity” and “numerical identity”. This difference is fundamental and has been neglected in the debate, as Shoemaker has rightly stated (SHOEMAKER, S., *Personal Identity: A Materialist’s Account*. SHOEMAKER, S./SWINBURNE, R., *Personal Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984, p. 73). Persons can lose qualities through time, and one cannot demand a qualitative identity between  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , but a numerical identity (not in Leibniz’s absolute sense), which retains something essential through time between  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ . In this sense, P. Geach’s concept of relative identity constitutes the most adequate one for the problem of identity, namely: “*a* is the same *F* as *b*,” that is: *a* is identical to *b* with respect to *F*, some characteristic, some kind or quality. If things are this way, no theory will have to account for an absolute qualitative identity between  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , and each must offer its essential criterion or quality that endures over time, and makes something itself and not another. SSP presents the expression “I” as the core of personal identity because it constitutes the point of intersection of all the primary facts of the person configuration. Moreover, as we shall see, the expression “I” guarantees the unique *intentional-systematic location* of the person-configuration in the whole of Being.

<sup>19</sup> By itself, the factor of intentional coextensivity with Being guarantees a differentiated place for the human being, not occupied by other beings of nature. In this sense, the current debate about *transhumanism*, which seeks to equalize the human being with all other beings of the world, disregards an essential element: No other being in nature besides the human being (at least as far as we know) is capable of an intentional coextensivity with the whole

constituted by biological, or material, primary facts, but because of spiritual primary facts. Indeed, as a biological animal, primary facts such as having life, sensibility, and so on, do not guarantee an intentional coextensivity with the whole, but only with its “environment.” This means that the intentional radius of biological primary facts reaches only the horizon of their environment (which represents all the conditions of possibility for life). However, outside this horizon is a host of other beings and versions of beings (mathematical beings, other possible worlds, etc.) In contrast, the intentionality of spiritual primary facts, such as intelligence and will, reach “the unrestricted world,” “Being in its entirety.” Thus, the expression/concept “I” constitutes the *unifying point* or *point of intersection* of all the primary facts of the configuration, especially those spiritual ones that are intentionally coextensive with the whole of Being. An important element in this conception is that the saying “I” does not create, but expresses the fundamental unity of the personal configuration. As Puntel states:

[...] the spoken-“I” is the expression of a unifying point that is not the result of a unity that arises after the fact, but is instead the ontological starting point for the unity that experiences and understands itself as human individual, thus as human person<sup>20</sup>.

The point of unity is not an element that unifies the primary facts in a later way as if it were a psychological factor that becomes aware of all its primary facts and therefore understands itself as one. The point of unity is prior to any self-consciousness, and thus saying “I” does not even signify a fact that happens after the person has acquired natural language. In fact, the point of unity is a presupposition and condition of possibility for any such subsequent unity. This is because the point of unity or intersection of primary facts constitutes a *systematic* point. That is, it is situated in a well determined location in the whole of Being, from which it *can*<sup>21</sup> cast an intentional ray (of intelligence and will) into the whole of Being. Such a location in the System/the whole of Being makes it impossible to reduce

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of Being. Obviously, this ontological factor does not authorize any depredation of nature, not even an ontological anthropocentrism. Despite their special dignity, the human person constitutes neither the center nor the summit in the hierarchy of Being.

<sup>20</sup> PUNTEL, *Structure and Being. A Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Philosophy*, p. 277.

<sup>21</sup> This potentiality constitutes an ontological factor in the personal configuration, and its existence does not depend on external conditions for its development, that is, even if the necessary and favorable conditions for its blossoming are not (yet) present, such absence does not cancel its existence. In fact, “I” does not constitute something ontologically posterior, but anterior even to the manifestation of consciousness/self-consciousness, that is: It is not these that constitute “I”, rather, they only manifest it. Although “I” is manifested only in consciousness/self-consciousness, it is already present as a unifying factor to the extent that it takes its place in the systematic whole. Put another way, the fact that consciousness/self-consciousness is not present in *act* says nothing against the existence of its *potentiality*. The potentiality for such development and all the dignity it contains already rests in the primary facts of the personal configuration, even in its most coactive phases, as is, for example, the phase of the fetus.

the person to any other place lower or higher than the one they occupies. If we wanted to reduce them to a purely material being we would have to remove them from his location and deny their capacity for intentional coextensionality with the whole of Being, as stones, molecules, and so on, do not possess this capacity. If we wanted to elevate their position to a pure spirit we would have to deny biological, temporal, and primary facts, which make it impossible for there to be a pure intelligence. In short, their systematic location includes dimensions that determine them as a bodily-spiritual being.

In this way, it can be said that the configurative factor of the person consists in their *intentional-systematic location* in the whole of Being. This idea can be explained analogically in the following way: Let's imagine a square in which a point casts rays that touch each of the points of the lines that make up the square. The square represents the universe of Being as a whole, and the points located within it represent personal configurations that cast an intentional ray to any other point in the universe (including oneself) by means of the primary intentional facts of intelligence and will. Because of the configuration's intentional coextensiveness with the whole, it is guaranteed a unique and unrepeatable intentional-systematic location.

The spiritual primary facts and their intentional-systematic location are the factors that guarantee, first, personal identity in time and after death. The intentional-systematic location can be further understood with the idea of "spatio-temporal point." In fact, a material object is individuated by its spatio-temporal location, as, by the law of impenetrability, two bodies cannot assume the same point in space-time. If the statue of Apollo is located in space-time<sub>1</sub>, there cannot be a statue of Aphrodite in the same space-time<sub>1</sub>. The same is not true for ontologically different entities, which can overlap in the same space-time. The figure of Apollo, for example, can be located in the same space-time<sub>1</sub> as the marble of the statue of Apollo. The figure and the marble are ontologically different and irreducible, but they are located in the *same* space-time<sub>1</sub>. The idea of the intentional-systematic location is more comprehensive and does not take into account only space-time in the individuation of a configuration, but considers the whole of Being. That is, a configuration with such ontological diversity as the person has a unique place in the whole of Being, guaranteed by the intentional connection of the point of unity ("I") to the whole.

However, what about the other primary facts of the configuration, what role do they play in the individuation and identity of the configuration? If the absolutely essential primary facts are those that guarantee the intentional-systematic location because of their intentional coextensivity with the whole, what about the relatively essential primary facts like corporeality? This is the moment to again take up Thomas' intuition in this new theoretical framework.

#### 4. *The personal configuration after death*

In fact, all the elements of the configuration have a greater or lesser weight for the identity of the person. Let us now take the case of the relatively essential primary fact of corporeality. The SSP, like the hylomorphic view and the simple view, also advocates the irreducibility of spirit to matter and its consequent incorruptibility. But what happens to the personal configuration after the death of the body? The first thing that must be said is that the absolutely essential primary facts continue to guarantee the same intentional-systematic location that the person was in before death. In other words, they continue to guarantee his individuation and identity in the whole of Being, even if the primary fact of corporeality is no longer actualized. This means that the intentional-systematic location is maintained by the primary facts that do not depend intrinsically on the material and space-time dimension, as are the primary facts of spiritual order or those acquired in history, but conserved in the spiritual dimension such as memory, psychological traces, and so on.

Undoubtedly, after death, corporeality no longer constitutes an *actual* primary fact, and the personal configuration will present a crucial modification that will, however, be unable to erase its intentional-systematic location. The personal configuration will lose the actuality of the body, but not its ontological reference to the body, because once it is essentially and historically configured by the corporeal dimension, the personal configuration does not lose the potentiality or the *conatus* to assume *actual* corporeality. In other words, an “ontological space” not fully filled/not actualized/not determined appears in the personal configuration after death, but it is always a space partially filled by the potency of corporeality. As some beliefs profess, such an ontological space of corporeal potency will once again be fully filled at the moment of a (re)actualization of the body (for Christians, at the resurrection). Just as a pronoun always refers to a name in a sentence, so the space filled by corporeal potency holds the ontological place for a (re)actualization of the body after death.

In order to understand the ontological value of potentiality in the holistic-configurational theory of the person, it is necessary to clarify the general theoretical framework of SSP, especially that contingent dimension of Being as a whole that is called *Entity*<sup>22</sup>. In fact, SSP defends a two-dimensionality of Being as a whole, constituted of an absolutely necessary dimension and another contingent dimension, called the Entity dimension<sup>23</sup>. The basic

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<sup>22</sup> The term “Entity” (with a capital “E”) means (from the extensional perspective): the totality of beings (of all kinds) and (from the intentional perspective) the connection between all beings. Entity is then fundamentally distinguished from (the dimension of) Being.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. PUNTEL, L. B., *Sein und Nichts: Das ursprüngliche Thema der Philosophie*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022, p. 552ff.

relationship between the two dimensions consists in the total ontological dependence of Entity on the absolutely necessary dimension. In addition to this connection, the Entity dimension is characterized by a fundamental factor: All entities in this realm possess a minimal determination of being a *not-Nothing* or a *something-of-being*. In fact, the dimension of Entity constitutes the background from which appears all ontological diversity or all kinds of contingent beings, which can be regrouped into four main scopes, namely: 1. the sub-dimension of actual-concrete or actual-positive beings; 2. the sub-dimension of possible beings; 3. the sub-dimension of actual-abstract beings; 4. the sub-dimension of fictional beings<sup>24</sup>. Although they are entities with different ontological degrees, they all have something in common: They are a non-nothing or a something-of-being. Thus, for example, the difference between actual-concrete beings and possible beings is the character of *actualization* of the actual-concrete beings and not their basic characteristic that makes them participate in the dimension of Entity, that is, their character of being something-of-being. In this sense, there is no difference between actual and possible beings as both have a basic ontological value of belonging to the dimension of Entity and, ultimately, to the dimension of Being as a whole.

This clarification helps to explain the value of the “ontological space of potentiality” in personal configuration after bodily death. In fact, the intentional-systematic location of the configuration is guaranteed by the spiritual primary facts, which since their appearance in Being have been intrinsically and necessarily connected to other essential primary facts, such as the fact of having a body. Thus, the interdependence of the essential primary facts is not annulled by the destruction of the body, for although the bodily dimension is not actualized, it has not simply fallen into absolute nothingness, but only into a relative nothingness, as there remains a potentiality of the spirit capable of assuming a new actualization of the body. Again, one can say that the bodily dimension has been deactivated in the personal configuration, but that all the potentiality to actualize this dimension remains in it as a tendency or a real *conatus*.

## Conclusion

Our journey took us from the discussion among Thomists about the ontological status of the person after death to an interpretative revision of Thomas’ texts, and to the point of finding in this interpretation an

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 279ff.

important but undeveloped intuition of Thomas that “*none of man’s essential principles are completely destroyed by death.*” Our idea was to take advantage of this intuition in an entirely different and more appropriate theoretical framework, namely, in the holistic-configurational theory of the person. In this new theoretical framework, Thomas’ intuition would be utilized as follows: *None of the essential primary facts (either absolutely or relatively/historically essential) of the personal configuration are completely destroyed by death; this means that the personal configuration after death no longer presents the bodily dimension as an actual entity, but that it nevertheless will always present the bodily dimension as a potential entity.* In this way, corporeality always constitutes an indestructible ontological point of reference, as it constitutes a relatively essential feature of the configuration and cannot simply vanish or fall into absolute nothingness. As the intentional-systematic location of the person is guaranteed by the spiritual primary facts, the deactivation or outdating of the bodily dimension does not cause the person to lose his identity and his unmistakable place in the whole of Being. The personal configuration persists after death in its ontological place, even if it presents ontological spaces that are not fully, but only basically filled, as is the case with the bodily dimension.

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VIANA, W.C., A Teoria holístico-configuracional de Pessoa na filosofia estrutural-sistemática. *Síntese*, BH, v. 48, n. 152, Set./Dez., 2021, p. 601-623.

Endereço do Autor:

Via Aurelia, 527

00165 Roma – Italia

E-mail: w.carvalho@unigre.it