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**„The priority of form in the metaphysics of the human person. A contemporary defense of Aristotelian-thomistic hyломorphism”. PhD thesis by Christopher Caruana  
A review.**

The review has been prepared, because I have been appointed by the Institute of Philosophy in Catholic University in Lublin as a reviewer in the proceedings for awarding an academic degree Doctor of Philosophy by Christopher Caruana. The reviewer assesses whether the doctoral dissertation is an original solution to the problem and proves the general doctoral student's theoretical knowledge in the field of philosophy, as well as his/her ability to conduct academic work autonomously.

The dissertation of Christopher Caruana contains 242 pages, 5 chapters. His research is based on large number of references, related to the topic. The thesis covers the problem of metaphysics of the human person. Specifically, the Author attempts to defend the thesis that none of disciplines (such as sociology, psychology, legal theory, biogenetics or economics) do enough justice to “the deepest criteria that underly a theory of human nature” (p. 5). He presents his own standpoint: “One of the main philosophical lines defended in this thesis – in a varied number of both explicit and implicit ways – is that the realm of the mental, the intellect and of its related phenomenon, that of consciousness, is a mystery that biology can never solve, for the simple reason that it is not a biological mystery” (p. 172). Thus, he offers the alternative, i.e. “the right philosophical tool”, which would be the Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics of man *qua* being. In particular he accentuates the role of priority of form (formal cause) in the ontological framework of human person (p. 8). Thomas Aquinas is the key philosopher for the Author. The chapter devoted to Aquinas, as well as parts of the fifth chapter, in which the Author compares contemporary scientific concepts of the mind-body

relations and compares them with Thomistic hylomorphism, present the fullest and most extensive argumentation in favor of the integrality of the human nature.

Christopher Caruana adopts the metaphysical method based on explanation, analysis of causes and textual and conceptual analysis in line with the tradition of realist metaphysics (p. 11). He recognizes formal and material objects of his research: the formal object is the ontic status of the human person and material object is the human person taken in “metaphysical complexity in its own essence and in relation to the philosophy of the natural world (p. 12).

Since the thesis is thematic and not historical, Christopher Caruana lists five interpretative preliminary assumptions which “help bridge metaphysical, historical and thematic analysis” (p. 13): (1) *behind every metaphysics of the human person there is a philosophy of nature and a cosmological worldview*; (2) *every professional viewpoint has some philosophical commitment or other, whether explicit or hidden, it is the role of metaphysical analysis to expose it*; (3) *the predominance of scientific discourse should neither disqualify nor discredit the unique contribution of philosophical analysis*; (4) *philosophy has an obligation to be conscious of both inconsistencies committed within philosophy as well as in science, showing the peculiarity and limitations of both*; (5) *those metaphysical accounts that safeguard and guarantee the ontological unity and integrity of the human person will be preferred* (pp. 13-14). Due to the fact, that the PhD thesis is thematic and proposes the application of historical philosophy (Aristotelian and Thomistic) to analyze contemporary problems in sciences, these assumptions are indeed needed and helpful. In particular, assumptions (1), (2) and (4) constitute a methodological and justified framework that enables the comparison of modern science with the philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas, and within which the Author uses the theory of formal cause as an alternative to contemporary solutions. However, assumption (5) seems to be arbitrary because it already assumes the concept of man, whereas ontological unity and integrity remains to be proven. In short, I would appreciate Caruana's separate arguments in favor of the standpoint that the concept of the human person is accurate to the extent that it guarantees the integrity and unity of man (especially in the context of contemporary postmodern concepts of subjectivity, in which the human subject is fragmented and divided).

### **General remarks**

The structure of the dissertation is very clear and fully justified. In the first chapter it starts with the dualism about the ontology of human persons. Christopher Caruana presents



concepts of Plato, Augustine and Richard Swinburne. Chapter two concerns the philosophy of Aristotle, i.e. his account of identity and change founded on his concept of substance along his theory of causality. The Author examines how Aristotle shows the serious problems that are found in atomistic materialism. The third chapter covers anthropological doctrine of Albert the Great, and the fourth chapter deals with the Thomas Aquinas's concept of human person. In the fifth chapter the Author addresses the different hermeneutical strands traced through the preceding chapters, he aims to "give a voice to the urgent discoveries presented to the mind and body debate from the side of the natural sciences" (p. 17).

I evaluate the structure of the work positively. It is logical and accurate. Individual chapters are well planned, the argumentation is convincing, the views of historical authors are meticulously and reliably reconstructed. The thematic area of the PhD thesis proposed by the Author is very broad (from Plato and Aristotle, through medieval authors to contemporary positions). However, this range may raise questions about the justification for selecting individual authors.

### **Specific remarks**

In the first chapter the Author analyzes the substance dualist approach to the metaphysics of human persons. He examined three different versions of dualism, specifically he concentrates on Plato (*Phaedo*), St. Augustine and Richard Swinburne. The Author paid attention to some objections, for instance "the ambiguous likening of the soul". Also, Author presented St. Augustine's concept of the human person as a compound of body and soul and the concept of soul as the "spiritual principle of life and the focal center of consciousness, perception and cognition" (p. 49). He reconstruct Augustine's idea of urgency of the soul to free itself from the corporeal while defending the possibility of its eventual existence without the body. Finally, Christopher Caruana discussed the Richard Swinburne's philosophy of souls and bodies, mainly to show that "mind-body substance dualism is not dead" (p. 49).

However, some doubts arise. There seems to be no satisfactory justification for the choice of Plato, Augustine and Swinburne as representatives of dualism. Why did the Author decide to present these three philosophers? Descartes, with his division into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, would be a much more obvious choice, especially since Christopher Caruana refers to Descartes' philosophy in many places in his work (pp. 31, 35, 74, 127, 187, 191). Also, an argument for choosing Descartes as a representative of dualism may also be the fact that the Author understands the term "dualism" as "substance dualism". If the Author had taken into account the position of E. J. Lowe, who is a representative of substance dualism,



the dissertation would have been supplemented with an important voice in today's discussion on dualism (see E. J. Lowe, 'The problem of psychophysical causation', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1992, 70: 263–76; E. J. Lowe, 'The causal autonomy of the mental', *Mind*, 1993, 102: 629–44; E. J. Lowe, *Subjects of Experience*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; E. J. Lowe, 'Non-Cartesian substance dualism and the problem of mental causation', *Erkenntnis*, 2006, 65 (1): 5–23).

In the second chapter, the Author discussed Aristotle's theory ofhylomorphism of human persons set within the framework of a response against the materialism and in seeking to provide a metaphysical account of identity and change. The Author places Aristotle's views in the context of his discussions with atomists (materialists). In my opinion, these reconstructions are valuable both in historical and analytical terms. The Author correctly recognizes that "the core operative principles in Aristotle's account of nature and change are matter and form and this enables him to support his claims about substance and identity" (p. 87). The reconstruction of Aristotle's views is reliable, meticulous and accurate. Christopher Caruana mainly exposes Aristotle's voice in the historical discussion with ancient materialists. He declares that Aristotle's arguments forhylomorphism can be applied against reductionism in today's anthropology. (p. 87) However, the Author does not develop this idea further in the chapter on Aristotle. Thus, I wonder whether he would see the possibility of using Aristotelian arguments in a discussion with today's reductionists?

The third chapter is on Albert's the Great views on the human soul. He intends to investigate whether St. Albert's system ever fully embraced the implications of Aristotle'shylomorphism as constitutive of the human individual (p. 90). Firstly, the Author convincingly presents arguments for treating Albert's philosophical legacy as independent from Aquinas's. He carefully presents the positions of numerous researchers (A. de Libera, E. Gilson, I. Moulin, *et alii*) on this matter. One of the key issues discussed in this chapter is Albert's controversial ("confusing", p. 90) concept of the soul. Christoher Caruana points out that Albert claims that the soul is a complete nature which belongs to the category of substance. It might sound confusing, because according to this interpretation, the soul is not merely the perfection of a specific nature but *is itself* a perfect nature. In consequence, Albert's reader is faced with the problem of how the soul can both be a substance and a form (p. 97). Finally, the Author present more nuanced conclusion that firstly, Albert rejects that view, namely, that the soul is conjoined to the body essentially, for he thought that would restrict the soul to a merely bodily structural function. And secondly, that Albert's position could not, on its own, give an account of the *sui generis* nature of the human soul as viewed by Albert (p. 126). Christopher Caruana argues, that the reason Albert could not provide



account of the nature of the human soul seems to be his dependence on Neoplatonic sources. Although this conclusion is well recognized among scholars and is not an original contribution to the discussion on Albert's place in medieval philosophy, I must evaluate the third chapter positively. The author reconstructs Albert's position with historical accuracy and scrupulosity. His argument is systematic, well thought out, conclusive and convincing. He cites many Latin quotations and his translations are accurate.

However, I noticed a certain shortcoming in the use of secondary literature: although Christopher Caruana refers to important text by Stephen Baldner on the union of the human soul and body (Baldner, Stephen, "St Albert the Great on the Union of the Human Soul and Body", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol LXX, N. 1 (American Catholic Philosophical Associations 1996) 103-135), I regret he neglects to take another Baldner's work into account ( i.e. Baldner, Stephen, "Is St. Albert the Great a Dualist on Human Nature?" *Proceedings of the Catholic Philosophical Association*, 67:1993, p. 219-229). This is a little omission, but the above text should be taken into consideration in the dissertation on dualism of soul and body in philosophy.

Chapter four is on Thomas Aquinas and his ontology of souls and bodies. The Author intends to "take a look at what counts as a substance in his (i.e. Aquinas's) account and then move on to explore his human ontology" (p. 127). Thus, Christopher Caruana concentrates on Aquinas's concept of substantial form. According to him, "Thomas Aquinas's account of the soul is a philosophically audacious exercise which achieves a synthesis that has remained unique in avoiding the problems of both substance dualism on the one hand and of reductionist materialism on the other" (p. 160). According to the Author, the attractiveness of Aquinas's position is that he "defends the integrity of human nature as a composite of body and soul on hand and the immaterial nature of the intellective intellect that belongs to an individual human being on the other" (p. (160). He argues that the principle-form of being is also the principle of operations. Hence, the soul is the form of the body because it is its operative principle of sensation, understanding, and nutrition (p. 163). According to the Author, "the success of his (i.e. Aquinas's) argument, depends, therefore on his account of being in act as a principle which applies to all operations, including sensation and understanding" (p. 163). The purpose of the chapter is to show how Thomas's metaphysics secures human integrity. In my opinion, the argumentation presented by the Author in this chapter is convincing and conclusive. He has succeeded in showing that the concept of form and act allowed Aquinas to avoid both reductionism and dualism.

The problem of the immateriality of the soul is only mentioned in the final parts of the chapter (p. 167: "the part of the human substantial form that extends beyond matter is the



intellective part of the human being which is incorporeal. That part of the soul transcends the body and serves as the subject for the intellective principle and by means of it, is able to receive forms, that is species, that are intelligible and not material"). However, I wonder whether, in the Author's opinion, the concept of the soul as a substantial form and as a principle of operation will allow maintaining the thesis about the independent (substantial) existence of the soul after the death of the body? Thus, my question is: how can the Thomistic concept of the soul simultaneously hold the theses that 1) the soul is an act of the body and 2) the soul has an independent existence outside the body?

The last (i.e. fifth) chapter is entitled "Brains, Sensations and the Hylomorphic Unity of Persons". The chapter attempts to "harmonise hylomorphism of the Aristotelian and Thomistic kind with the scientific world of empirical research which brings not only its discoveries and new data but also its own philosophical assumptions and claims" (p. 170) and "the acquisition of a sharper focus on those lines of philosophical engagement between philosophy and contemporary science which directly impact upon the accounts defending the unity, integrity and accurate account of human nature, viewed both through its being as well as through its operations" (p. 208). The Author lists various forms of contemporary "reductionism": behaviorism, eliminative materialism, all kinds of "physicalism". The Author critically presents various approaches proposed by reductionism and points out their fallacies. Instead, he proposes hylomorphism as an alternative solution for mind-body integrity. He formulates an interesting and original argument against reductionism, and in defense of hylomorphism, that it is not the brain that performs the actions of the entire being, but the entire being is involved in performing its tasks ("it is not the owl's brain that hunts and pursues a hibernating squirrel or a squirrel's brain that is afraid of the predatory grip of the owl", p. 181). He also argues that "hylomorphism enables us to analyse animals in all their physiological and psychological complexity while providing reasonably defensible accounts of their behavior as sentience-mediated responses in view of their survival and flourishing" (p. 190-191).

Some questions arise when the Author discusses the problem of the immateriality of the soul. He limits himself to presenting arguments in favor of the thesis that the soul (mind) is irreducible to matter (body). To put it simply, the Author's argumentations can be reduced to the thesis that since the immaterial intellect is part of the soul is, the soul goes beyond the boundaries of the body. However, in the philosophy of Aquinas, the thesis about the immateriality of the soul also appears in a theological context, as a condition for the soul's survival after death. Therefore, there are two concepts of the soul in Aquinas's work: 1) the

Aristotelian one, according to which the soul is the substantial form of the body and the principle of operation, 2) the "theological", according to which the soul can possess an independent existence. I wonder if, based on Aristotelian hylomorphism, the Author would see consistency between these two concepts?

### **Doubts/questions**

Even though I evaluate the doctoral thesis definitely positively, some more general doubts and questions have arisen:

1) My doubt concerning the formulated thesis: Metaphysics is a general theory of being, it seems too broad to explore the specificity of human nature. Because metaphysics studies being as being, it provides a description of man as being; it provides a description of man that is too general to bring out the specificity of human being. I agree that metaphysics provides the integral a comprehensive and general concept of human being, but on the other hand I do not see how metaphysics can replace particular sciences (sociology, legal sciences, etc.) in the description of all human activities.

2) The Author criticizes reductionist concepts of the human mind and he offers alternative solutions within metaphysics. Perhaps, another area of philosophy that could provide tools for rejecting reductionism would be contemporary philosophy of mind. I wonder whether the Author would think of, for example, emergence theories as allies in rejecting reductionism?

3) The concepts of soul-body of both Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas were formulated on the basis of Aristotelian hylomorphism. Therefore, these are similar concepts, but they differ in nuances. The PhD dissertation lacked a more detailed comparison of these two concepts, the Author does not indicate slight differences between them. I wonder how he would argue that Thomas's concept does not fall into similar difficulties (i.e., the soul is not merely the perfection of a specific nature but is itself a perfect nature) to which Albert's concept is exposed?

### **Final conclusion**

In my opinion, the review PhD thesis *The priority of form in the metaphysics of the human person. A contemporary defense of Aristotelian-thomistic hylomorphism* by Christopher Caruana presents an original approach to the topics widely discussed today.



Research motivation, questions, objectives, scope of the study and structure of dissertation are clearly explained in Introduction. In my opinion, the writing style is very good not only for experts, but also for non-specialists who attempt to deepen their knowledge on the philosophical anthropology, mind-body controversy and philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

In the light of the analysis and assessment of the doctoral dissertation by Christopher Caruana in the context of the criteria provided for by Polish law that must be met in order to obtain doctoral degree, it must be stated that **these criteria have been met.**

The doctoral dissertation submitted for review is **an original solution** to several important issues/problems arising from metaphysical problem of soul-body dualism, theory of forms, hylomorphism.

Moreover, the analysis contained in the work proves in-depth general theoretical knowledge of Christopher Caruana in the field of philosophy, as well as his ability to conduct independent academic work (philosophical analysis and argumentation). The dissertation is valuable, interesting, and at a high substantive level. It definitely deserves to be published.

To sum up, **the reviewed dissertation meets all the criteria appropriate for doctoral dissertations, which justifies submitting an application for acceptance of a doctoral dissertation and admission for its public defense.**

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