



Transcendence in the Kinanthropology of Manuel Sérgio

Transcendência na cinantropologia de Manuel Sérgio

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Abstract: This article seeks to analyze the contribution of Portuguese philosopher Manuel Sérgio to Religious Studies. The author dedicated his long academic life to the study of sports, but with a peculiar humanistic perspective. Instead of focusing on performance, the author focuses on the Human being who moves. This is what he defines as “Kinanthropology”. Transcendence is a major element in this proposal. In this article, after presenting Sérgio’s fundamental anthropological framework and his understanding of “human kinetics”, three of his possible theoretical contributions to Religious Studies are explored: 1. in the way he sees the relation between transcendence and religion; 2. in the way he opens corporeity to transcendence; and 3. in the way he seems to rehabilitate motion as a topic for religious and theological discourse.

Keywords: Manuel Sérgio. Kinanthropology. Transcendence. Motion. Intentionality.

Resumo: Este artigo investiga o contributo do filósofo português Manuel Sérgio para as Ciências da Religião. O autor dedicou a sua longa vida académica ao estudo do desporto, mas com uma perspectiva humanística peculiar. Em vez de se focar na performance, foca-se no ser humano que se move. É isto que Manuel Sérgio propõe como cinantropologia. A transcendência é um elemento decisivo desta proposta. Neste artigo, após se apresentar o enquadramento antropológico fundamental de Sérgio e o seu entendimento de “motricidade humana”, são explorados três tópicos como suas eventuais contribuições teóricas: 1. na forma como ele vê a relação entre transcendência e religião; 2. na forma como ele abre a corporeidade à transcendência; e 3. na forma como ele parece reabilitar o movimento como elemento do discurso religioso e teológico.

Palavras-chave: Manuel Sérgio. Cinantropologia. Transcendência. Movimento. Intencionalidade.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, Portuguese philosopher Manuel Sérgio (1933) has been proposing Kinanthropology. “The word ‘speaks Greek’” – he says –: “*kinein* (to move) + *anthropos* (Human being) + *logos* (treatise). It means, in consequence, discourse, treatise, theory or Science of Human Kinetics (*motricidade humana*)” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 171). He took part in a broader movement in Sports Studies, which tried to overcome the idea of Physical Education, while proposing a more comprehensive anthropological approach to sports activity. This trend started during the 1960s in the USA and later spread to several European countries (cf. Renson, 1989, p. 236-244). Sérgio’s thought is fully aligned with this movement’s shift from the quantitative approach to human exercise, and, above all, from a reductive Anthropology of sport that tends to consider

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it just a physical activity. This line of thought, detaches the body from all other human dimensions, and, therefore, assumes a fundamental dichotomy in Anthropology: mind vs. body; soul vs. flesh. The relevance Sérgio gives to transcendence is, if not absolutely original, in the very least presents his singular philosophical Anthropology of sport. The decisive role transcendence plays in his Kinanthropology is the main reason why his work should also be analyzed within the realm of Religious Studies.

Particular attention should be given to the key topic in Sérgio's thought: "human kinetics (*motricidade humana*)". This topic emerged from an early age and can thus be found across his life's work. In fact, it is not only immediately recognizable in his most important work, *Para uma Epistemologia da Motricidade Humana* (first published in 1987; we use here a newer edition from 2018), but also in many others, such as: *Motricidade Humana: contribuições para um paradigma emergente* (1995), *Um corte epistemológico: da educação física à motricidade humana* (1999), or *Da ciência à transcendência: epistemologia da motricidade humana* (2019). The way Sérgio conceives "human kinetics" is pivotal not only for a general study of his work but also for the understanding of his very own considerations on transcendence. This is our specific goal: to make Sérgio's Kinanthropology the thematic subject of this study. In this article, we will focus especially on his work *Para uma Epistemologia da Motricidade Humana*. The purpose of this research is, on the one hand, to critically analyze Sérgio's understanding of transcendence, and, on the other hand, to identify some of his possible contributions to Religious Studies, thus deepening the interdisciplinary nature of this field of science.

This analysis of transcendence in the context of Sérgio's Kinanthropology is structured into four stages: 1. some linguistic remarks will have to be made in order to introduce the reader to his vocabulary; 2. Afterwards, and considering their great importance to our goal, we shall present some of the author's very fundamental anthropological views; 3. then, we will specifically analyze what Sérgio means when he speaks about "human kinetics"; and 4. finally some conclusions will be drawn, mostly trying to answer our main question: what can Sérgio's Kinanthropology contribution for Religious Studies be?

Sérgio's concepts: some linguistic introductory remarks

Two initial remarks should be made to the study of Sérgio's Kinanthropology and to its openness to transcendence. One has to do with the translation of his central notion: "human kinetics – *motricidade humana*"; the other regards the need for a clear distinction between Kinanthropology and Kinanthropometry.

"Human kinetics"

Because Sérgio's work is written in Portuguese, one must firstly analyze the necessary task of its translation. If this can be said generically about all of his work, there must be a specific mention of his nuclear idea of "human kinetics" as the core of his epistemology. As a matter of fact, the Portuguese original expression used by him is "*motricidade humana*". There does not seem to be an immediate and obvious match

in English to the Portuguese word “*motricidade*”. This difficulty is not only merely semantic (it is difficult to find an adequate match), but also conceptual, since Sérgio also reshapes the meaning of the Portuguese word “*motricidade*” to suit his project of a scientific field that understands motion as a global anthropological phenomenon, and not only as a physical reality. Instead of “kinetics”, other English terms could be used in the effort to translate this technical expression. I think “motion” or “movement” should be immediately discarded because “motion” or “movement” are precisely used by Sérgio as the counterpoints of his proposed idea of “human kinetics”. Perhaps another English word could be considered, such as “motivity”, although its use doesn’t seem common within this field of study. Another possibility would be to simply accommodate the Portuguese word “*motricidade*” into English, presenting it then as “human motricity”. This solution has been tried out by some researchers (cf. Franco Puttini, 2016). Although it might be plausible, this translation option seems to find scarce reception within the English speaking academic environment. Here, instead, the word “kinetics” is assumed as a possible and suitable translation of “*motricidade*”. Since there is no obvious solution and that all options considered have problems of their own, it seems better to adopt an English term already commonly used in Sports Studies. It expresses the fundamental aspects of what Sérgio understands by “*motricidade*” and promotes the legibility of his work, even if along this study extra clarifications to that understanding will have to be made.

Kinanthropology

A distinction should be established, right from the start, between the notion of Kinanthropology and that of Kinanthropometry. Kinanthropometry is understood as “the study of human body size, shape and form and how those characteristics relate to human movement and sporting performance” (Eston, 1996, p. i). As the name reveals, this discipline is focused on quantitative hermeneutics of human motion, as it is mainly interested in measures, figures and ways to optimize its performance. Although Kinanthropology is sometimes also interpreted in a similar quantitative sense, thus becoming a synonymous of Kinanthropometry, it tends to suggest a different, rather, qualitative approach to human motion. It appeals to a *lógos* in human physical activity, not just to its metrics. The emergence of such an approach is, at the same time, a critique to all epistemologies of human motion that do not take into consideration psychological, social, political, cultural or religious aspects. In sum, and in accordance with Sérgio’s thought, Kinanthropology and Kinanthropometry here have different meanings: the first describes a qualitative approach to human motion; the second, a quantitative study of human body and movement.

Fundamental anthropological framework: beyond definition and reduction

It is almost impossible to read a page written by Sérgio without coming across an explicit or implicit critique to all efforts in defining what a Human being is and to the

existing tendency of dividing and opposing the constituent elements of the Human being. In other words, the author pushes for an Anthropology that goes beyond the definition and the reduction of its object (who is not, therefore, completely objectifiable). In i. and ii., it is possible to draw Sérgio's fundamental anthropological and philosophical framework. These generic and fundamental issues are decisive to his line of thought, and his proposal for an epistemology of "human kinetics" must be seen as a natural consequence of this anthropological framework. Moreover, the way he perceives an openness to transcendence in human motion is deeply rooted in these fundamental anthropological perspectives.

Beyond definition

It is significant that Sérgio, before establishing the epistemological foundations of his "Science of Human Kinetics", started by raising the fundamental question: "What is a Human being?". In this long opening section of *Para uma Epistemologia da Motricidade Humana*, he establishes a dialogue with different western philosophical views on the human condition, starting from the Greeks, then granting special attention to "Christian Anthropology", and finishing off with his remarks on several "New Anthropologies" (Existentialism, Structuralism, Biologism, just to mention a few).

Sérgio concludes this personal synthesis by recognizing that the human condition is, in practical terms, indefinable:

There is no reasonable doubt: defining the Human being is a risk. [...] In truth, how can one accurately determine human subjectivity?... And shouldn't it be said, taking another audacious risk, that Human being is a mystery, given that a part of it exists that exceeds our intellectual and pragmatic categories, but which is so real that before we think about it we have already experienced it? That the Human being has an experiential taste of reality, before a conceptual knowledge of it – that seems absolutely right to me! (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 68, our translation)

Sérgio also adds, as he quotes and echoes some of his intellectual references, French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin, Karl Popper, and Brazilian writer Alceu Amoroso Lima,:

It can be said that Anglo-Saxon epistemology from 1950-1960s discovered (rediscovered) that no scientific theory can intend to be absolutely right. Popper, a major craftsman of this evolution, transformed the notion of science, which no longer is synonymous of certainty, but is synonymous of uncertainty, or better said, of trustworthiness (*fiabilismo*). If there are no more certainties, I feel like saying as a prestigious Brazilian intellectual once said: "everything is mystery!" (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 71, our translation)

These two quotes show, in a rather clear way, how the introduction of mystery in Sérgio's speech is closely related to the indefinable character of the Human being. Going beyond the "risk of definition" implies the recognition of the mysterious essential character of humanity. This is at the core of his anthropological views and, naturally, lays down the basis for a "Science of Human Kinetics", which is structurally open to transcendence.

Beyond reduction

The sharp critique to what is abundantly described as the “Cartesian paradigm” should be considered one of Sérgio’s main anthropological statements. This critique is directed, at the outset, towards traditional epistemologies of sports and training: “[Since a very early stage] I have openly disagreed (and still disagree) with Cartesianism, with Positivism, with Physiologism, which were abundant in sports training and in the so-called “Physical Education”” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 201, our translation). This matter, however, goes much deeper than just training or sports performance. It is a far-reaching anthropological issue.

It fundamentally has to do with a divisive understanding of Human constitution *versus* a unified or integral understanding of it; the first, broadly described as “Cartesian”; the second being the one assumed by Sérgio. He bluntly criticizes all dualistic forms of Anthropology, whether they are those of body and soul, which he recognizes in several Christian authors; or recent ones, like those dividing mind and brain; or even those, like Descartes, that somehow oppose *res extensa* to *res cogitans*: “Descartes forges an idea of body completely reduced to a simple machine” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 115, our translation). To Sérgio, these different approaches to Human constitution tend to share one common problem: they do not value the physical dimensions of humanity, nor do they contemplate the creative interactions between these objective elements of humanity and more subjective ones (like psychological, cultural, social, political or religious elements of human life). Agreeing with Herbert Marcuse, he denounces a “time in which the technological reason has reduced Human beings to one-dimension” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 130, our translation).

According to Sérgio, the “Human being is not only a biological individual, lost in an eco-organization, but eminently a social being” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 167, our translation) and, also according to the author, the “division of reality into two spheres has led to a cultural schizophrenia in which nature is simply deemed just experimentally knowledgeable and technically usable” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 168, our translation). This division can be observed in the classic view of human motion studies that go by the name of “Physical Education”. This expression is reductive in a twofold manner: on the one hand, it reduces human motion to a physical phenomenon; and, on the other hand, it isolates the physical aspects of humanity from all its other elements with which they inevitably interact. Hence, the “Human being is a complex whole” and “human kinetics is not an isolated phenomenon, but a reaction and an expression of the Human being as a whole” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 168, our translation).

In sum, the focus of Sérgio’s critique lies on the fact that Physical Education is interested in human motion, while he instead (and his Science of Human Kinetics) is interested in the Human being who moves (cf. Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 201). This truly humanistic approach to human motion is surely among the most relevant and fruitful contributions of Sérgio to the fields of Hermeneutics and Anthropology of Sport. In this context, he frequently presents his proposal as an “epistemological cut” in Sports Sciences. He borrows this expression and idea from French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. “By the *cut* and with the *cut*” – Sérgio declares – “a new form of scientific knowledge

arises, which in turn causes deep transformations in Philosophy and Culture” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 180, our translation). This “epistemological cut” should be seen as the first step in the development of his “Science of Human Kinetics”. Through it, Sérgio signals both his refusal of all anthropological dichotomies, as well as his defense of a science of human motion that accounts for the Human being as a whole.

Human kinetics: motion, intentionality and transcendence

Up to this point this paper has focused mainly on Sérgio’s critical approach to common forms of studying sports and human motion, as well as on the fundamental anthropological perspectives that lie beneath them. In a more explicit and systematic way, it is now necessary to introduce Sérgio’s own positive proposal for a new scientific way to deal with human body activity. In simple terms, what does he mean when he pushes for a new “epistemology of human kinetics”?

The easiest way to answer this question is, surely, to begin by considering the descriptions of “human kinetics” presented by the author himself. He doesn’t do it all at once, as more Scholastic or Rationalistic thinkers would do, but tries over and over again to express it in different formulas. That is why several attempts to describe (more than to define) what “human kinetics” is can be found across his work:

The Human being appeals to transcendence and, as such, is a praxic being, who, *as a whole and through kinetics*, chases it [that transcendence] (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 85, our translation).

Kinetics, as *acting intentionality*, is the superior expression of the body (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 107, our translation).

Adaptive, evolutive and creative process of a praxic being, in need of others, of the world and of transcendence. *Acting intentionality*, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The physical, the biological, the anthropological and the sociological are all part it, as a dialectics within a whole. As a *needy being*, the Human being is a praxic being, in which, therefore, kinetics is affirmed within an intentionality of choice. But human kinetics and, as a consequence and above all, culture – not the standstill culture from a lifeless erudition – are cultivated because they are practiced (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 182, our translation).

It is the energy of transcendence towards an intentional and team motion (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 201, our translation).

Intentional motion of transcendence or of overcoming (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 201, our translation).

This is obviously not an exhaustive list of all of Sérgio’s efforts to describe his understanding of “human kinetics”. However, it presents us with enough information to identify what is at the core of this understanding. In fact, it is not by chance that words such as “motion”, “intentionality” or “transcendence” abundantly occur in this kind of descriptions (cf. Sérgio, 2019, p. 80). These three notions are essential to understand the peculiarity of the author’s contribution to Sports Sciences. They are the backdrop of Sérgio’s understanding of “human kinetics”, which will now be presented.

Motion

Once again, another important distinction should be made, in this case between motion (or movement) and kinetics. Motion is here understood as just a physical reality. Every movement, Sérgio argues, “may be described as translation or rotation or some special combination of these two” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 74, our translation). Human kinetics, however, “cannot be confused with motion, because it is determined by what distinguishes the Human being from all other creatures: thought!” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 74, our translation). The reason why there’s a definitive difference between motion and kinetics pulls us to the notion of intentionality. For the moment, it is enough to signal this decisive difference between motion and kinetics. Motion is more closely related to movement as a mere physical and quantitative reality. Human kinetics, however, has to do with a deeper anthropological reach of human activity and is definitely a qualitative reality.

Sérgio keeps coming back to the idea that motion is common to all moving beings, while kinetics is characteristically human. For instance, “kinetics” is, alongside corporeity, communication, cooperation, historicity, freedom, culture, spiritual activity and transcendence, amongst the dimensions that make the Human being an “irreducible” being (cf. Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 71-82). One could argue that body motion is not an exclusively human phenomenon, but rather shared (at least) with all other animals, and therefore it should not be listed among those characteristics that properly describe human condition. This is where Sérgio’s view on kinetics plays a decisive role, given his non-reductive approach to the Human being. It is precisely because human kinetics is much more than just motion that he can talk about it as something typically human. Motion has, for Sérgio, a mere physical meaning, while kinetics goes much beyond that, naturally including a physical dimension, but also psychological, social, cultural, political and religious ones. That is why he can include kinetics (not motion) as one item of something singularly human.

The need to emphasize this distinction cannot deny that, even if human kinetics is more than motion, motion is an essential element of human kinetics. As redundant as it might be, human kinetics is necessarily kinetical. There must be motion in order to be able to speak about human kinetics. In its absence, all this discourse would lack its ground and, consequently, would simply fall apart. Physical activity, in all its multiple forms, is an indispensable element of this view on human kinetics. That is to say that corporeity is an essential element of it, since the “Human being is presence and space in History with the body, in the body, from the body, and through the body” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 71, our translation). As the great moving constituent of the Human being, corporeity is present in all human activity and it must be considered within the Science of Human Kinetics. But, coherently, Sérgio doesn’t reduce the human body to a mere instrument or to a strict object of our will or knowledge. Assuming much of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of the body*, he asserts: “the human body is not a thing, since it constitutes a means to express and communicate meaning. Nor is it an object, in the Cartesian sense of the word, since the human body is significant, it is origin and a source of meaning” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 73, our translation). Also with

regard to the body, one can sense this dialectic in Sérgio's work, balancing between the body as a physical reality, but not reducible to its physicality.

In conclusion, motion is an essential element of human kinetics. It is its necessary physical and bodily basis, even though it goes much further. That is why it should be considered the first fundamental ingredient of Sérgio's notion of "human kinetics".

Intentionality

This is where motion gains a proper anthropological quality. If motion, in Sérgio's lexicon, describes the physical element of human kinetics, the recognition that when a Human being moves, he does so intentionally, elevates his analysis to a higher anthropological level. A conscious Human being doesn't move chaotically, but with purpose. The movement of a free Human being isn't driven only by external factors, but also by an inner force. Hence, human motion is never just that; instead, it is always the expression of the whole Human being who moves. It is an intricate combination of objective and subjective dimensions. As Sérgio puts it, kinetics is "intentional motion".

He sees intentionality as one of the greatest contributions of Phenomenology, and particularly of Merleau-Ponty. These philosophical influences have helped him recognize that "all consciousness is the consciousness of someone or of something" and that "understanding, from the perspective of phenomenology, is "capturing again the whole intention"" (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 99, our translation). This way, fully understanding human motion must mean to fully embrace its intentionality. Disregarding this essential aspect would be to miss all the depth of human motion. Each conscious human act "is a signifying act that gives and finds a meaning" (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 99, our translation). If this can generally be said of any human action, it must also be recognized in human motion. This too reveals and creates meaning in life; this too is a way by which humanity tries to find and to bring what it is utterly looking for: meaning. The Human being who moves is fully invested in that activity, not only by way of their physical constitution but always as a whole, bearing the same purpose they seek and have in everything they do. That is to say, human kinetics is an intentional act or, as previously quoted, an "acting intentionality" (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 107, our translation).

By introducing intentionality in the Hermeneutics of human motion, Sérgio distances himself from more traditional views on this issue. For example, to Franz Brentano, one of the authors that reintroduced this term in philosophical and psychological discourse, "intentionality defines the distinction between the mental and the physical; all and only mental phenomena exhibit intentionality" (Dennett, 1999, p. 141). This segmentation between the mental and the physical is essentially what Sérgio critically addresses along his work. But more importantly, this is an initial intake on the understanding of what human physical activity really is. It is not just motion (quantitative), it is always kinetics (also qualitative), because it is always "acting intentionality"; it is always human intentionality that expresses itself both through body and movement. Intentionality is, therefore, a first fundamental concept for Sérgio's line of thought, one

that elevates human motion into human kinetics and which, consequently, establishes the possibility of Kinanthropology.

Here the spectrum of intentionality is much broader than just reason or will. Otherwise, our author would easily fall back precisely into what he tries to counter: a reduction of body and motion into mere instruments of reason. This field of study must also comprehend those human faculties more related to the sensorial and the experiential, with creativity and art, because these make other forms of communication possible. That is why Sérgio also uses the term “Kinefantasy (*cinefantasia*)”. This should be interpreted as a derivation or as an application of Kinanthropology to the particular realm of human creativeness and imagination. The author considers this realm an “unconscious motor” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 179, our translation) of human activity. On that note, he tries to make clear that

Human kinetics depends on a *decision* in which, in an unequivocal way, conscience and dream come together. Any movement we make, with the wings of imagination alone, sparks in us different sensations; and that same imagination allows for the existence of virtual movements, which are key elements to the resolution of different problems, including in sports. [...] The Human being, a praxic being, oriented towards transcendence, has always infinite *possibilities* in front of them [...]. Human kinetics [...] should not disdain this material, which is body language, with its coefficient of divination, of alchemy, of art (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 166, our translation).

Sérgio goes even further, underling the unique role played by what he calls “body language”. This language is able to express things that no other communication form can. The author explains:

The specific communication of body language is different from that of the rigorous and conceptual discourse, because it intends to form a new way of being and of being-in-the-world. With the alleged soul-body separation, we lived too much time without that communicative word that is body language, and therefore reach the core of our incommunicability. However, exactly because it reaches that core of incommunicability, body language brings itself and us closer to the peak of communication (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 167, our translation).

Turned towards living in the world, and not towards explaining it, this “body language” becomes crucial to all intentional acts. Intentionality, essential to Sérgio’s understanding of human kinetics and Kinanthropology, is here deeply connected to body and motion and in a dual way: on the one hand, because conscious motion is always intentional; and, on the other hand, because human intentionality needs this body language to fully express and develop itself. In conclusion, there seems to be a circle between intentionality and motion within Sérgio’s notion of human kinetics.

Transcendence

Sérgio brings transcendence into his discourse on multiple occasions. This is an obvious sign of the importance he gives to the matter. Human kinetics, as he understands it and as previously described, is “intentional motion of transcendence” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 201, our translation), that is, intentional human motion open

to transcendence, aiming towards transcendence. As he sees it, “being human is acting to become more” and the Human being is “a pathway *ad aliud, ad alium*. They cannot stop in themselves” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 82, our translation). Human life “doesn’t limit itself to logical truth”. On the contrary, “to *be more, knowing* more is not the only thing that matters; instead, it is to *love more*, in an integral praxis, in which every being moves towards love” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 83, our translation). That is why “being human is not a state, but a process of never-ending transcendence”; it is being “open to transcendence, where the horizons of life acquire the expression of the unprecedented and the absolute” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 83, our translation). In sum, it is clear that for Sérgio the Human being is a transcendent being. He states it himself: “a non-specialized and needy being, open to the world, to others and to transcendence” (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 126, our translation).

The innovative part of his take on this issue can, surely, be found in the way he sees human transcendence in human kinetics. In his words, it’s about “*moving*” towards transcendence (cf. Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 84). Indeed, in accordance with his unitary anthropological fundamental views, Sérgio cannot ascribe transcendence just to the human soul or the human reason. That would be contradictory to his basic anthropological framework. It is quite the opposite, as body and motion are also active in that human capacity for transcendence. Body and motion are also pathways for transcendence. Consequently, human kinetics also has in transcendence one of its essential elements. That is why he sees transcendence not only as one of the “dimensions of the Human being” (cf. Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 71-83), but also amongst the “pre-assumptions of human kinetics” (cf. Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 126). This tension towards what is beyond manifests itself in intentional motion and through intentional motion. This too is a vehicle of and to transcendence. Kinetics is one of its agents. The “appeal to transcendence” inscribed in the Human being comprehends the Human being as a whole and, therefore, also comprehends “human kinetics” (cf. Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 85).

This emphatic rooting of transcendence in human kinetics is, at same the time, a vigorous critique to all anthropologies deprived of transcendence, or to those that narrow it down just to reason or spirit. Here arises the scope of Sérgio’s “Science of Human Kinetics”, where the openness to transcendence plays a decisive role in this small revolution in what traditionally is understood to be just “Physical Education”. He summarizes it into two sets of three postulates:

[A Science of Human Kinetics] denounces:

- the *postulate of the primacy of reason*, where there’s no place for love, for celebration, for poetry, for game, for free and liberating corporeity;
- the *postulate of progress defined only by economic criteria*, with no reference to the fundamental and transcendent project of life;
- the *postulate of the priority of performance*, that generates a one-dimensional Human being [...].

And, at the same time, announces:

- the *postulate of transcendence*, as fulfillment of the needy being, such as the Human being [...];
- the *postulate of relativity*, as a prophetic postulate, since nothing we can do or say is ultimate, but always an unfinished task;
- the *postulate of kinetics*, as openness to relation and hope, since every true human act is a fruit of freedom (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 184, our translation).

Although only the first among the second set of postulates refers explicitly to transcendence, all three have something to do with that. The first openly holds the view that Human beings are transcendent. The second points out the limited and, therefore, always perfectible character of all human action. In this sense, all human activity is bound to transcend itself. Here transcendence and action, and by extension transcendence and kinetics, are already brought together. This is even clearer in his third and last postulate, where kinetics and “human acts” are seen as “openness”, which conveys an expression of transcendence.

These three elements – motion, intentionality and transcendence – describe what Sérgio means when he speaks about “human kinetics”. They are its peculiar elements, typical of the author’s thought and discourse. In an overall view, they tend to translate the author’s fundamental anthropological and philosophical perspectives into a Hermeneutics of human motion (in all its forms, and not just in sports). This allows for an understanding: 1. of motion as a fully anthropological dynamics; 2. of motion as intentional act and, consequently, not just an objective and measurable reality; and 3. of motion as a way and an expression of human transcendence. This broad understanding of human motion is what Sérgio calls “human kinetics”.

Kinanthropology and transcendence: conclusive remarks

Kinetics and Anthropology engage here in an unusual dialogue with transcendence. This conjunction is commonly seen as one of Sérgio’s main contributions to Sports Sciences. In fact, with a public mostly composed of researchers from the field of sports, this is what is usually said about his work. But, at the same time, bringing these three notions together should also be seen as a major contribution to Religious Studies. This perspective is, perhaps, less frequent and, therefore, should be emphasized.

After this summarized journey across some essential elements of Sérgio’s thought and work, it is now possible to grasp the role that transcendence plays in his Kinanthropology. This way, we get closer to the goal set at the beginning of this article: analyzing his understanding of transcendence and glimpsing its positive reach for Religious Studies. The critical hermeneutics of Sérgio’s notion of transcendence, aimed for in this study, will now be systematized in the three following topics.

Transcendence and religion

Transcendence and religion, in Sérgio’s thought, bind together in a complex form of relationship. On the one hand, they are not the same thing. Moreover, in the context of his Kinanthropology, transcendence may not be religious at all. There are many different ways to transcend. But, on the other hand, transcendence and religion aren’t dialectically opposed notions. If it is true that transcendence may not be religious, it is also true that transcendence is not a substitute for or a deviation from religion. On the contrary, they can coexist and even lead to one another. Therefore, a strict connection between transcendence and religion may not be affirmed, nor might a possible relation between them be denied.

Transcendence is, to Sérgio, a plural anthropological phenomenon. This means that the Human being is a transcendent being in several ways. He acknowledges religion as an active human way to always “be more”, “know more”, and “love more”. He also recognizes it in other anthropological dimensions, such as the human condition as a social, cultural and artistic being. These are also forms of human transcendence. The appeal (and perhaps the originality) of his proposal is, however, in the inclusion of the body and intentional motion among the ways by which human transcendence is active and present. Associating religion or culture, society or art, to transcendence is, surely, more common than to associate it with the human body and the conscious movement. Also by intentionally moving their body, the Human beings are actively tending towards transcendence. That’s because all their “acting intentionality”, and not just their rational activity, seeks to become more. This is where Sérgio’s description of Human kinetics as “intentional motion” touches the issue of transcendence. Because it is “intentional”, it is always loaded with that transcendent dimension that is also characteristic of the Human being. The author even goes to the rhetoric extreme of asking if the “champions” in sports shouldn’t be considered the one true mystics: “Who else transcends themselves like they do?” (Sérgio, 2019, p. 82, our translation).

If “transcendence” isn’t identical to religion, it is, however, open to it. In other words, this human kinetical transcendence can also push the argument towards religion and, in consequence, towards the field of Religious Studies. One could even ask the author: to reach its full potential, shouldn’t human kinetics reach some kind of religious configuration? In Sérgio’s discourse this isn’t an issue as such, but he is rather explicit when admitting “faith” or the quest for “God” or the “Absolute”:

Transcendence is also an act of faith on the part of a being who is not “something”, but “someone” capable of overcoming the reflex of the world they live in and of creating the movement of a project where God poses as the founding reality. Indeed, in nature nothing arises finished and definitive. But from everything emerges the mystery (Sérgio, 2019, p. 82, our translation).

But what does transcendence mean? To me, transcendence tells us that the Human being is not an imitator, but a creator; and, given that nature, they are capable of overcoming, [...] of opening to the Absolute (Sérgio, 2019, p. 81, our translation).

Quotes like these are good examples of showing how the author doesn’t see religion as the only outcome of transcendence in human kinetics, albeit not denying that possibility. To a certain extent, they also seem to contradict some assertions that Sérgio’s vision on transcendence and “spirituality” is purely “non metaphysical” (Real, 2017, p. 15). In fact, his references to “faith” or “God” are rather religiously neutral, but not necessarily non-metaphysical. They can include both religious and non-religious interpretations of it, as they can assume metaphysical and non-metaphysical meanings. In fact, he is less focused on religion and more on transcendence, which seems to open up to Metaphysics even when that transcendence is not religiously understood. This metaphysic possibility within Sérgio’s system, however, must always include Physics. In other terms, Metaphysics here cannot mean an exclusion of Physics; instead, it must go through Physics to reach what might be beyond it, which, lacking of a better word, the author calls “mystery”.

In conclusion, more than religion or Metaphysics, transcendence is what Sérgio is really concerned with. Although he frequently interacts with Christian authors and uses Christian symbolism (for example, he sees Jesus Christ's resurrection as the highest symbol of transcendence – cf. Sérgio, 2019, pg. 82), his Anthropology of transcendence could be considered religiously neutral, that is, neither religious nor anti-religious.

Transcendence and body

Sérgio's second contribution to Religious Studies has to do with how to reach an integral approach to humanity that fully embraces corporeity and body. This is not a new perspective in Philosophy, with several voices having claimed for a more holistic understanding of the Human being for some time. Many of these voices had a relevant and positive impact on Sérgio's work. It is neither a totally new issue to Religious Studies, an area always quite attentive to the bodily circumstances of all religious experiences. That is why this can hardly be seen as an original aspect of his contribution. It should rather be seen as a reinforcement of something that was already into force within the scientific community dedicated to study religious phenomena.

Sérgio's contribution is here much more at a theoretical level. He helps build and consolidate an epistemic basis for the study of the body and for the study of all embodied experiences. Since religious experiences are also embodied, here lies this second aspect of his contribution to Religious Studies. His fundamental anthropological framework is (or can be seen as) a valid theoretical basis for all studies regarding religion and body. This doesn't mean that he had that purpose in mind, and even less that he seeks to engage in the hermeneutics of body in religious contexts. Nevertheless, a researcher on religion will find relevant information and insightful stimuli to go deeper in their research on body and religion. Even if unintended, this reinforces the interdisciplinary nature of Religious Studies. In the work of Manuel Sérgio, a researcher of Religious Studies can find a relevant source of information coming from an unsuspected scientific area: Sports Studies.

His perspective on transcendence is surely at the core of his contribution to Religious Studies. In the first place, transcendence is understood in and through the body, and not in spite of it. Therefore, and in accordance with Sérgio's Kinanthropology, religious transcendence can also be reached from within and across the body and through "intentional action". This is not an assertion made by the author, but a conclusion to which any researcher on religion will draw if they engage in a dialogue with Sérgio's thought and work; if they embrace Sérgio's Kinanthropology as a theoretical basis for their own research. Secondly, in Sérgio's proposal, "transcendence" is always "of extreme subjectivism and of objectivism" (Sérgio, 2018/1987, p. 100, our translation). Once again, a researcher on religion may find in Sérgio's work an epistemic and anthropological compass to drive him beyond two reductive extremes: religion considered just an objective reality or just a subjective phenomenon. As a complex combination of objective and subjective elements, religion will be better studied by a Hermeneutics able of integrating that complexity. Some relevant ingredients of that hermeneutic can be found in Sérgio's Kinanthropology.

Transcendence and motion

Sérgio's view on motion is certainly the most original element of his thought and a third aspect of his possible contribution to Religious Studies. Motion is, in fact, present across the religious phenomena. By seeing it not just as a physical reality, but as "intentional action", he opens it up to transcendence and makes possible a whole new understanding of almost all religious acts (such as ritual acts, prayer, dance, chant, or pilgrimage, just to mention a few).

But, for a very long time, motion was frequently present in religious discourse. It is certainly not by chance that religious arguments built on the issue of motion can be found in old Greek philosophers or in more recent theologians. We can trace them as far back as Anaximander, to whom motion was an "eternal agent of the cosmos" (Jammer, 1972, 396), or as Aristotle and his famous "eternal mover" (cf. Aristotle, 1996, 258b). Not surprisingly, the theme reemerged in Christian ancient and medieval Theology. Thomas Aquinas can easily be listed among the great authors that also integrated motion into their Philosophy and Theology. In his *Summa theologiae*, he develops an "argument of motion (*motus*)" (the first way to prove the "existence of God") and concludes by asserting the existence of a "first mover (*primum movens*)", which is what "everyone understands to be God" (Aquinas, 2003, q. 2, a.3, resp.). Later on, to Modern thinkers and scientists, motion became the object of a new discipline: "Kinematics". It focuses on making a mathematically rigorous description of moving bodies. With this new approach to the understanding of motion, it is understandable that religious discourse progressively lost interest in it. Motion had no longer that metaphysical quality that made it suitable to religious and theological thinking.

This is where the Kinanthropology proposed by Sérgio mostly shows its pertinence. In fact, by centering his thought on "human kinetics", he can help reintroduce the theme back into the Hermeneutics of religion and into Theology; and by broadening the concept of motion as to include intentionality and transcendence, once more, he sets the theoretical basis for a reassessment of motion within religious and theological discourse. In reality, his idea of "human kinetics" renders possible a phenomenological approach to the theme, freeing it from the dialectic between a metaphysical and mathematical understanding of motion which, to a large extent, explains its disappearance from the current religious and theological discourse. In other terms, this allows for the argument to go beyond any objective reduction of motion, whether metaphysical (qualitative) or mathematical (quantitative). Phenomenally speaking, the focus is more on intentionality, since this is the specific quality of motion as "kinetics". Intentionality and transcendence introduce a subjective element in "kinetics", without falling in the opposite end, which would be depriving it of any trace of objectivity. In this balanced way, Sérgio's proposal seems to overcome the described dialectic and to make available a new approach to the theme. In synthesis, it allows for the development of an understanding of motion as "kinetics" suited for Religious Studies and for Theology.

After going through an essential part of Sérgio's work, some elements enable us to answer the fundamental question that motivated this article. In conclusion, his positive contribution to Religious Studies should be recognized. Besides his establishment of

interconnections between transcendence, body and motion, one last precious contribution should also be added. Manuel Sérgio's thought is deeply humanistic. This feature determines all his reflections. Maybe that is his greatest, ever-present peculiarity, even if not always explicit. His humanistic approach to all subjects (humanity, sports, motion, or transcendence) is much more than just an element of his intellectual production. It is a feature of his intellectual style. This too should be included among one of his greatest lessons.

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