

The Astral Body

By Papus

Co-founder of the Traditional Martinist Order

From *L'Initiation*, September 1890, Volume 7-8, pages 502 - 516.

“Human beings are the Divine’s shadow in the body of an animal.”
- Eliphas Levi

The astral body is a frequent topic of discussion. With a large number of spiritualistic phenomena being assigned by schools of occultism to the action of this element, one can understand the interest tied to the knowledge of its faculties.

In the following preview, we are going to, first of all, quickly summarize the main theories put forward to explain the constitution of human beings, then we will develop an analogy that permits, in our opinion, a clear understanding of the mystical properties of the astral body as it is conceived by occultists. The pictures provided by this analogy may be naïve, but are, in our opinion, very suggestive. Our readers will be the final judges.

To understand the various theories taught about human beings, their past and future, it is, first of all, important to know the various principles that constitute a human.

Human beings are constituted in a very different manner depending upon whether one addresses the works of theologians and spiritualistic philosophers, or studies the works of materialists.

For schools deriving their teachings from religious thought, humans are composed of two opposing principles: the *body* and the *soul*. The body, subject of all temptations and reason for all decay; the soul, immortal and pure, origin of the conscience and psychic faculties. These theories have a defect in that they are not capable of explaining a large part of that which is produced by the human being, and that their application leads one to say that humans are consumptive because “they have a consumptive soul,” which is a little forced.

As always, it is to the materialistic school that we are indebted for the more solid work on the question of the constitution of human beings. This school only admits one principle: the *body*, but at least it is honorable enough

to seriously, and especially experimentally, study the theories that it advances. Exaggerated in the sense of reaction, materialism let itself succumb to a serious defect and now denies *a priori* all phenomena of premonition, remote viewing, and bilocation possible in human beings, etc. All these are frequently noted phenomena occurring under conditions which exclude deception.

However, browse the works of all initiates, address yourselves to the traditions of all peoples, and you will see that at all times it has been taught that humans were composed not of one, nor of two, but of three perfectly studied principles. Plato designed his three souls from it, localized in the three large segments of the human organism: head, chest, and stomach -- indeed, the real origin of these three principles.

Catholicism itself, in affirming on one hand that God made man in his image, and teaching on the other hand that God is one in three persons, allows for this constitution of the human being. This has already been presented by Saint Paul who taught the existence of the astral body¹.

THE THREE PRINCIPLES

The three principles designated by Occult Science as forming the Human Being are:

1. The body.
2. The plastic mediator (astral body).
3. The soul.

Occultism differentiates itself, therefore, from theology by admitting a new intermediate principle between the body and the soul.

It differentiates itself from materialism by teaching the existence and functioning of two principles, which escape, in humans, the laws of matter. It follows that the original side of the theories of Occult Science reside entirely in the study of this intermediate principle which has received various names:

Astral body — Perispirit — Life, etc., etc., but which is studied identically by all schools.

Eliphas Levi summarizes very precisely the human being's constitution in the following definition:

The human being is an intelligent and physical being, made in the image of God and of the world, SINGLE in essence, TRIPLE in substance, immortal and mortal. There is in him a spiritual soul, a

material body, and a plastic mediator.

If one fully grasps the interpretation of these principles, it can be seen that Life is the obligatory mediator; without it, the body cannot obey the provocations of the soul, and the soul cannot receive the impressions of the body.

Here is a theory brought up without fail, some philosophers would say. Unable to reconcile these two opposites: the body and the soul, unable to explain how the subjective becomes objective, you elude the question, you gentlepeople called “occultists,” by inventing a so-called intermediary principle perfectly endowed with all the properties necessary to prove your cause².

It is sufficient to open any treatise on physiology to learn that this principle, which moves our heart and our faith, in spite of our will, and safe from its influence, does indeed exist, no matter what the origin. The biggest mistake of occultists to date has been the desire to remain confined to their own domain without taking note of the discoveries of experimental science.

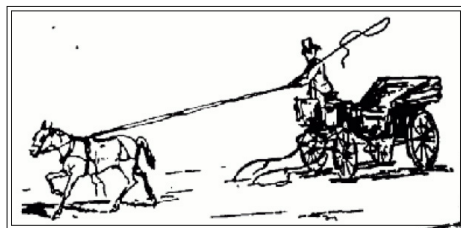
Mention to a physician: *the astral body* causes internal spasms, and he will look at you like a mad person. Tell the physician, on the contrary: organic life propels these organs, the physician will answer you: good Lord, yes! I know it well. Show the physician next that what he [or she] calls *organic life*, you call *astral body*, and the two of you will begin to get along.

When you want to be understood by a foreigner, you know very well that it is useless to speak your language to the person no matter how loud you shout. This elementary rule seems naive, but it still seems unknown to all sides!

In order to fully grasp the interpretation of these three principles, I will once again make a sacrifice to the mania which is so dear to me in using a very vulgar analogy. If you really want to understand the human constitution: go to the window and watch any carriage in the street pass by; you will see more clearly than reading every treatise cluttered with Sanskrit or Hebrew words.

A working carriage consists of three main elements:

1. The carriage;
2. A horse harnessed to this carriage and setting it in motion;
3. A coachperson guiding the horse.



The carriage. Analogical picture of a human being's three principles

The carriage is motionless by itself. It is incapable of moving without another element, therein lies the fundamental character of the *material body*.

The coachperson on his seat can attempt in vain to get things going, cracking his whip, shouting as loud as he pleases; if there is no horse attached, nothing will happen. The coachperson is the conductor, it is he who will navigate toward the indicated goal, but he requires an indispensable auxiliary: the horse. The coachperson shows us, by analogy, the general characters of a human being's superior element: the soul.

THE ASTRAL BODY

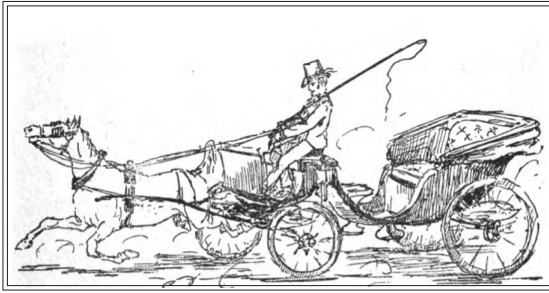
Bound to the carriage by the shafts, and to the coachperson by the reins, we see the general intermediate principle: the horse.

The horse is stronger physically than the coachperson, but the horse is guided nevertheless, in spite of everything, by this person holding the reins. When inquired by philosophers what good this astral body is, we can answer: to act in a human being as the horse acts for the carriage, that is to say to drive it all while being under the direction of the superior principle: the coachperson.

THE PASSIONS

The horse represents the life of the human being, center of the *passions*, as we will see later on. The common character of the passions is to choke the efforts of reason and to drag the entire being to its demise, in spite of the actions of the soul, which has become powerless.

Anger is, in this respect, especially remarkable. As soon as it takes root in a weak being, it seems that the blood stream localizes itself entirely in the head. A puff of heat rises in the face, the eyes cloud over, reason tries in vain to master the organic life which has become mistress of the land: a person *sees red*, one no longer knows what one is doing, one is capable of everything at this moment. The astral body has defeated the soul.



The horse gets carried away. Invasion of the soul by the astral body.

ANGER

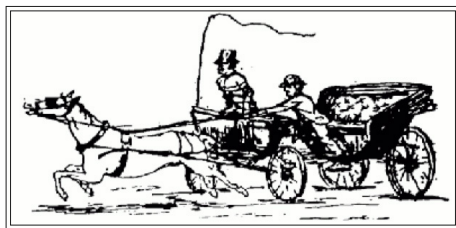
See, is this not precisely what happens to the carriage when the intermediate principle, the horse, no longer obeying the coachperson's efforts, gets carried away?

Physical strength has invaded everything in this case. The coachperson, weaker but better armed, is defeated; the carriage rolls on with a frightening speed led by the horse, which became the master, until the moment when the horse, in its blindness, comes upon an insurmountable obstacle destroying, at the same time, the entire collection - itself, carriage, and coachperson.

The clarity given to most abstract questions through analogical methods, such as this figure of the carriage, which seemed naive at first, can be very useful to us in understanding certain theories of occultism concerning the mysterious properties assigned to the astral body. Let us note in passing the coachperson's actions stirring the pace of his horse by means of the whip, a striking image of the effect of stimulants (alcohol, coffee, etc.) on the astral body. A race horse that one beats too severely can lose its temper, in the same way an astral body too strongly stimulated by alcohol can drive the organism to its demise³.

MAGNETISM

Do you want to know how to produce the phenomena of magnetism? A stranger comes who makes it impossible for the coachperson (the soul, will) to take the reins (links of the brain to the astral body). It is this stranger (the hypnotist) who seizes the reins, and the poor coachperson, dazed, is the witness to the direction of the carriage by a will that is not his own and against which he cannot fight. The astral body (horse) will always obey the one who holds the reins, whether it is the owner of the carriage or a stranger.



The coachperson is tied to his seat. - A stranger seizes the reins and steers the carriage. - Magnetism.

However, the coachperson, although tied-up and incapable of acting effectively, can still make his voice heard and stop the horse cold, even though he holds no reins. This explains how, with some subjects to whom were given criminal suggestions, the conscience of the subject fights against the suggestion, and the individual vanishes (the horse rears and falls) rather than to execute the given order.

ASTRAL TRAVEL. MAGIC. SPIRITUALISM.

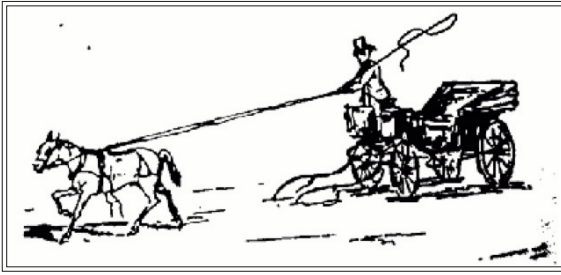
Another phenomenon, often mentioned in occultism, is clearly explained by this analogy. It concerns *astral travel*.

Several facts with supernatural appearances are explained by this action. Under the influence of a particular diet and the careful use of some PSYCHIC stimulants⁴, the human being enters into a mixed state containing both the waking state and the somnambulistic state.

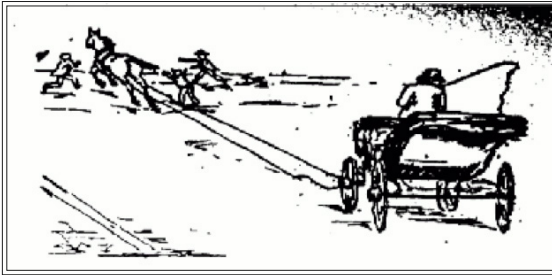
The astral body leaves the body momentarily as the unharnessed horse would leave the carriage. The cooled body remains immobile but the soul stays alert. It directs the astral body toward the place where it wants to go because time and space no longer exist for it.

The coachperson, whose reins can stretch out at will, and who could thus guide his unharnessed horse, gives us a rather correct idea of the *conscious departure* of the astral body. In this case, the body is absolutely immobile, the astral body being bound only to the soul.

In another case, the coachperson (the soul) falls asleep. The unharnessed horse (the departed astral body) freely has its way and heads toward adventure. It is no longer held by the shafts of the carriage which held him, but merely by the ties that connect it to the carriage (ties of the astral body to the physical body). According to occultism, it is the phenomenon which occurs in *mediumship* (unconscious departure of the astral body). The astral body is then at the disposal of the various influences which can seize it (spirits or suggestions)⁵.



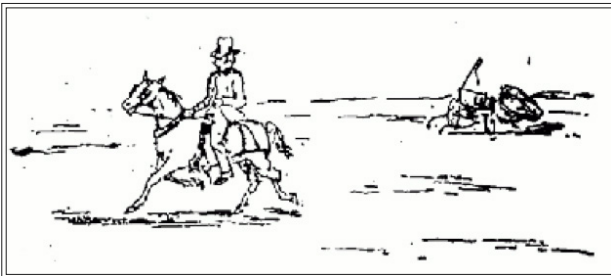
The reins stretched. The unharnessed horse continues its race guided by the coachperson. (Conscious astral travel).



The coachperson sleeps. The ties that attach the horse to the carriage are stretched out. The horse wanders about no longer under the coachman's direction. The beings prowling around the horse are looking to seize it. (Unconscious astral travel.)

DEATH

Finally is a phenomenon that interests us all more or less, because we are called to study it closely: *death*. The carriage (the physical body) is broken and lies on the road, the coachperson (the soul) mounts the horse and the horse (the astral body) departs for the journey beyond.



Abandonment of the carriage by the horse and coachperson. Abandonment of the body by the astral body carrying the soul. (Death).

We have chosen an image that we believe to be very lucid in spite of its innocence to explain the game of the three principles that constitute the interpretation of human beings according to occultism. The analogy provided by this example is so exact that one could apply it to all parts of philosophy. One of my friends G. P. made me notice that it responds to, rather spiritually, various philosophical opinions. Materialism generates the horse from the carriage and the coachperson from the horse.

Pantheism puts the horse in the carriage and makes the coachman drag it.

Finally, Catholicism, like the spiritual philosophy of the University, places a coachperson on the carriage but without admitting the existence of the horse. The body and the soul must be sufficient to all. Unfortunately, in this famous principle, supposedly invented by occultists for their own needs, the horse is so necessary that nothing works without it, at the Sorbonne or on the most ordinary of our roads.

ENDNOTES

(1) The Trinity made human beings in his image and in his appearance. The human body is double and its ternary unit is composed of two halves; the human soul which is also double; it is animus and anima, it is spirit and tenderness. It has two genders: The paternal gender in the head, and the maternal gender in the heart. The achievement of redemption must be therefore double in humanity. It is necessary that the spirit by its purity redeem the errors of the heart. Then it is necessary that the heart, by its generosity, redeem the egotistical coldness of the head. GUILLAUME POSTEL

(2) See. *Philosophical Dictionary of Franck*, articles Paracelsus and R. Fludd.

(3) Drunkenness is a temporary madness and madness is permanent drunkenness. Both are caused by a phosphoric obstruction of the nerves of the brain that destroys our luminous balance and deprives the soul of its precision instrument. The fluid and personal soul is then taken away by the fluid and material soul of the world (like Moses on the waters). The soul of the world is a force which always tends toward balance: it is necessary that the will triumph over it or that it triumphs over the will. ELIPHAS LEVI.

(4) Among others - magical prayer.

(5) The substance of the plastic Mediator is light, part volatile and part fixed. Volatile part - magnetic fluid. Fixed part - fluid or aromal body. The plastic Mediator is formed of astral or terrestrial light and it transmits to the human body double magnetization. The soul, in acting on this light by its volition, can dissolve it or coagulate it, project it or attract it. It is the mirror of the imagination and dreams. It reacts on the nervous system and thus produces the movements of the body. This light can dilate itself indefinitely and can communicate its image to considerable distances, it magnetizes the bodies submitted to human beings' actions and can, by constricting itself, attract them. It can take all shapes evoked by thought and, in the transitory coagulations of its beaming part, appear to the eyes and even produce a sort of tactile resistance. ELIPHAS LEVI.