

*The Spirit within is the  
personal God of each mortal,  
and his only divine element*



## Man's dual soul is only semidivine

First published in *La Revue Spirite*, Paris, January 1879. Translation of the foregoing original French text re-published in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (ERRONEOUS IDEAS CONCERNING THE DOCTRINES OF THE THEOSOPHISTS) II pp. 14-24.

We insert this reply to Monsieur Rossi de Justiniani, but we express no opinion upon the doctrines expounded therein; our Smyrna brother may reply to Mme. H.P. Blavatsky. [Editor]

Criticism is easy; art is difficult!

— Destouches, *Philinte* I D, Act ii, scene 5

**T**HE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, founded in 1875, and later, according to the orders of its heads in India, entirely reconstructed, is established on the plan of every secret society. It is plain, then, that its doctrines cannot be common property. In spite of that, the American Press — above all the Spiritualistic papers — have incessantly dissected, criticized and turned them into ridicule, invariably setting up as doctrines of the Theosophists what are nothing but conjectures on their own part. The little that it was permissible to reveal to them, however, was done as clearly as is possible in the English language, which is rather poorly adapted to the expression of metaphysical ideas.

*Mirabile dictu!*<sup>1</sup> Not only did they turn a deaf ear to our explanations, but as soon as the criticisms of our opponents began to be crushed, the doors of the papers were politely shut in our faces!

It is indeed time, in this blindman's buff polemic, to throw a little daylight into this Cimmerian darkness where the light often has been extinguished — one would almost say by design. A criticism on "The Elementaries and the Elementals," published in the August number of *La Revue Spirite*, offers us an opportunity.

Yes, "for the New York Theosophists, man is a trinity and not a duality." But he is more than that, however; by adding the physical body, man is a *Tetractys*, or maternity.<sup>2</sup> But, supported as we are in this particular doctrine by the greatest philosophers of ancient Greece — as the author of the article remarks — it is neither to Pythagoras, nor Plato, nor the famous *Theodidaktoi* of the Alexandrian School, that we

---

<sup>1</sup> [Wonderful to tell!]

<sup>2</sup> [A misprint for "quaternity." — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

owe it. We will speak of our own teachers later on. We will first prove that the critic in *La Revue Spirite* strays from the facts in his article, concerning all that relates to the historical doctrines of antiquity, and that — quite innocently no doubt, and, as the result of judging only from abridged translations he disfigures ours.

First of all, he is deceived — according to us — when, believing himself to be correcting our notions, and having a moment before treated of “incarnated souls,”<sup>1</sup> he speaks<sup>2</sup> of a “plastic and *unconscious* mediator, or the périsprital fluid that serves to envelope the spirit.” Does he consider then, that the spirit and the soul are identical, or that the former can be incarnated like the soul? A strange mistake in our eyes! And if that plastic mediator is “unconscious,” according to the writer, in that case, the soul also, which he thinks immortal, and even the spirit, must be so, because further on we find him establishing the exact identity of the spirit and the soul. “The soul, isolated, is for us the périsprit,” he says. We will ask, first, how can it be that anything “unconscious” — hence, irresponsible — can be, in a future life, either rewarded or punished for acts committed during an unconscious state? Later on, towards the close of the article, the author tells us that, in an imperfect being, the *third* element, or the Spirit, cannot be annihilated, but for an indefinite period loses the consciousness of its greatness and may be degraded to the level of the brute. Here we completely fail to understand him! We do not know if these ideas are personal to the author or rather the expression of the teaching of the orthodox Spiritists in general.<sup>3</sup> No matter; for us they are monstrous and incomprehensible. How can the spirit, the supreme primordial essence, the uncreated and eternal monad, the direct spark from the “central Sun” of the Kabbalists, be no more than a third element, as fallible as the périsprit? Can it, like the vital soul — afflicted with a chronic unconsciousness, it would appear — become unconscious also, be it but temporarily? Can the immortal Spirit “be degraded to the level of a beast”? Nonsense! the author cannot have the least notion of our teachings; either he is ignorant of what we call “spirit,” because for him the spirit and the soul are synonymous — or rather, he is still more iconoclastic than ourselves. We hasten to repudiate those ideas. We have never professed anything like them.

Plato is quoted to us and, at the same time, what Plato taught is forgotten. According to the “divine” philosopher the soul is dual; it is composed of two primitive constituent parts: one — mortal, the other eternal; the former, fashioned by the *created gods* (the creative and intelligent forces in nature), the other, an emanation from the supreme Spirit. He tells us that the mortal soul, in taking possession of its body, becomes “irrational”; but between irrationality and unconsciousness there is a profound difference. Plato, finally, never confused the périsprit<sup>4</sup> with the soul or the spirit. In common with every other philosopher, he called it neither the *nous* nor *ψυχη*, but gave it the name *ειδωλον*, sometimes that of *imago* or *simulacrum*.

---

<sup>1</sup> p. 291

<sup>2</sup> p. 292

<sup>3</sup> There are no orthodox Spiritists but simply researchers, investigators who accept every demonstrated truth. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> [The illusionary, Middle Principle of the Theosophical Constitution of Man, or astral, animal, lower mind or soul (psyche), *i.e.*, the worldly, mortal man and his ephemeral “personality.” See Overview and Drawing in the same series — ED. PHIL.]

Let us try, then, to re-establish a little order in this confusion. Let us give everything its true name, and state precisely the difference between the opinions of our learned critic and our own. For all who have studied the Greek philosophers, it is clear that the author confuses terms. His question,<sup>1</sup> “Can the separation of the spirit, *ψυχη*, from the soul, *nous* or *périsprit*, ever be the cause of a complete destruction . . . ?” provides us with the key to the misunderstanding. He translates the words “spirit” and “soul” simply *vice versa*.

We do not know if the modern Greeks so translate those two nouns,<sup>2</sup> but we are able to prove that none of the ancient philosophers have ever defined them in that way. We will allow ourselves to quote two names, but those will suffice. Our pagan authority is — Plutarch; our Christian authority is no more and no less than Saint James, “the brother of the Lord.” In treating of the soul Plutarch tells us that while *ψυχη* is imprisoned in the body, the *nous* or the divine intelligence soars above mortal man, shedding upon him a ray that is more or less luminous according to the personal merit of the man; he adds that the *nous* never descends but remains stationary. Saint James is still more explicit. Speaking of the wisdom from below<sup>3</sup> he treats it as “terrestrial, sensual, *psychic*,” this last adjective being translated in the English text by the word “diabolical,” and he adds<sup>4</sup> that it is only the wisdom from above that is divine and “*noetic*” (adj. of the sub. *nous*).<sup>5</sup> So the psychic element never seems to have been in the odour of sanctity, either with the Saints of Christianity or with the Philosophers of Paganism. Since Saint James treats *ψυχη* as diabolical and Plato makes something irrational of it, can it be immortal *per se*?

May we be allowed a comparison, the best we can find, between the concrete and the abstract; between what our critic calls “the triple hypostasis” and we “the *tetractys*”? Let us compare this philosophic quaternary, composed of the body, the *périsprit*, the soul and the spirit — to the ether — so well foreseen by science, but never defined — and its subsequent correlations. The ether<sup>6</sup> will represent the spirit for us; the dead vapour that is formed therein — the soul; water — the *périsprit*; ice — the body. The ice melts and for ever loses its shape, water evaporates and is dispersed in space; the vapour is liberated from its grosser particles and finally reaches that condition in which science cannot follow it. Purified from its last defilements, it is entirely absorbed into its first cause, and becomes a *cause* in its turn. With the exception of the

---

<sup>1</sup> p. 292

<sup>22</sup> [Confusion brought about a general indifference to Ancient Greek teachings, the polytheism of which has been derided as paganism and heathenism by centuries of ecclesiastical dogma and sanctimonious dissembling, reigns supreme among modern Greeks. Some view spirit (*pneuma*) and soul (*psyche*) as fuzzy, “mysterious terms, judg’d as then best” (*Paradise Lost*, Bk. 9). Others locate the former outside and “above” us, and the latter within us. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* the Greek text, *General Epistle* iii, 15.

<sup>4</sup> iii, 17

<sup>5</sup> [This sentence and explanation are somewhat confused. King James’ version gives the following text for chapter iii, verse 15: “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.” The Greek text shows the words: *epigeios*, *psychikē*, and *daimoniōdēs*, which are translated as “earthly, soulical, daimoniacal” in a literal translation of the Greek text. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

<sup>6</sup> [In keeping with Blavatsky’s preferred orthography of certain ambiguous terms, Ether here should have been spelled Æther (with the grapheme æ, the Latinised form of the Greek diphthong *ai*) for Æther is spiritual and supernal, while Ether is physical and infernal. See “Æther and Ether” in our Confusing Words Series. “Kosmos and Cosmos” is another pair of polysemantic terms. — ED. PHIL.]

immortal *nous* — the soul, the *périsprit* and the body, all having been created and having had a beginning, must all have an end.

Does that mean that the individuality is lost in that absorption? Not at all. But between the human *Ego* and the wholly divine *Ego*, there is an abyss that our critics fill in without knowing it. As to the *périsprit*, it is no more the soul than the delicate skin that surrounds the almond is the kernel itself or even its temporary husk. The *périsprit* is but the simulacrum of the man.

It follows that Theosophists understand the hypostasis, according to the old philosophers, in a very different way from the Spiritualists. For us, the Spirit is the *personal* god of each mortal, and his only divine element. The dual soul, on the contrary, is only semidivine. Being a direct emanation from the *nous*, everything it has of immortal essence, once its earthly cycle is accomplished, must necessarily return to its mother-source, and as pure as when it was detached; it is that purely spiritual essence which the primitive church, as faithful as it was rebellious to the Neo-Platonic traditions, thought it recognized in the good *daimōn* and made into a guardian angel; at the same time justly blighting the “irrational” and fallible soul, the real human *Ego* (from which we get the word Egoism),<sup>1</sup> she called it the angel of darkness, and afterwards made it into a personal devil. The only error was in anthropomorphizing it and in making it a monster with tail and horns. Otherwise, abstraction as it may be, this devil is truly personal because it is identical with our *Ego*. It is this, the elusive and inaccessible personality, that ascetics of every country think they chastise by mortifying the flesh. The *Ego* then, to which we concede only a conditional immortality, is the purely human individuality. Half vital energy, half an aggregation of personal qualities and attributes, necessary to the constitution of every human being as distinct from his neighbour, the *Ego* is only the “breath of life” that Jehovah, one of the *Elōhīm* or creative gods, breathed into the nostrils of Adam; and, as such, and apart from its higher intelligence, it is but the element of individuality possessed by man in common with every creature, from the gnat that dances in the rays of the sun to the elephant, the king of the forest. It is only by identifying itself with that divine intelligence that the *Ego*, soiled with earthly impurities, can win its immortality.

In order to express our thought more clearly, we will proceed by a question. Though matter may be quite indestructible in its primitive atoms — indestructible, because, as we say, it is the eternal shadow of the eternal Light and co-exists with it — can this matter remain unchangeable in its temporary forms or correlations? Do we not see it, during its ceaseless modifications, destroy today what it created yesterday? Every form, whether it belongs to the objective world or to that which our intelligence alone can perceive, having had a beginning, must have an end. There was a time when it did not exist; there will come a day when it will cease to be. Now, modern science tells us that even our thought is material. However fleeting an idea may be, its conception and its subsequent evolutions require a certain consumption of energy; let the least cerebral motion reverberate in the ether of space and it will produce a disturbance reaching to infinity. Hence, it is a material force, although invisible.

---

<sup>1</sup> [As opposed to the Higher Ego or Spiritual Soul, which is the paradigm of Altruism inspired from the Immutable Law of Universal Sympathy and Sacrifice. — ED. PHIL.]

And, if that is so, who would dare to affirm that man, whose individuality is composed of thoughts, of desires and selfish passions, which are peculiar to him, and which make him an individual *sui generis*, can live in eternity with all his distinctive traits, without changing?

And if he changes during infinite cycles, what remains of him? What becomes of that separate individuality that is so much prized? It is only logical to believe that a person who already on earth, forgetting his precious *self*, was ever ready to sacrifice himself for the welfare of others; who, in his love for humanity, has made himself useful in the present life and necessary in the future life, for the great and ceaseless work of Creation, of Preservation and of Regeneration; and who finally, aspiring to the infinite and striving to progress morally, individualizes himself with the essence of his divine intelligence, and is, thus, forced into the current of immortality — it is but logical, we say, to believe that he will live in spirit eternally. But that another person who, during his probationary exile on earth envisaged life but as a long series of selfish actions, who was as useless to himself as to others, and pernicious as an example — should be immortal like the former — is impossible for us to believe! Nothing is stationary in nature; everything must advance or fall back, and an incurable drunkard, a debauchee wholly immersed in materiality, having never made the least effort towards the good, dead or living, will never make progress! He will have to submit to his fate, even his divine soul not being able to save him. The *Ego*, or terrestrial psychē, has free will, and, moreover, the mysterious counsel of its guardian here on earth, which speaks through the voice of conscience. Being unable to follow the brutalized man in his rapid descent toward the abyss of materiality — the man who is deaf to his conscience, blind to the light, and who has lost the power of raising himself towards it — the Divine Essence, like the guardian angel of the naïve woodcuts of our childhood, spreads its white wings and, breaking the last link between them, re-ascends towards its own realms. Can the purely material individuality live in the world of spirits if abandoned to the laws of matter alone? We say no; no more than a fish can live outside its natural element. Laws are universal and immutable.<sup>1</sup>

“That which is above is like that which is below,”

said the great Hermes. The new-born child cannot live if it lacks vital force, and dies without having seen the light; neither will the *ego*, entirely deprived of spiritual force, have the strength to be born or to exist in the region of spirits. If it is only weak and withered — it may survive — “as it is on earth, so it is in heaven.” But, it will be said, the evil souls do not remain unpunished. Ages, thousands of ages, perhaps, of suffering are surely a sufficient punishment. We say that such a punishment would be at the same time too much and hardly enough. It would be disproportionate even to the greatest crimes committed throughout the whole of a long human life; it would be diabolical and unjust. On the other hand, with eternity before the suffering soul, and an absolutely certain eternity, such a punishment would be merely a bad joke. What are thousands of ages in infinity! Less than the wink of the eye.

It may be that this teaching — like every other plain truth — seems repulsive to many people. As for us, we believe it. Sentimentality has no place in our ranks; he

---

<sup>1</sup> This should be meditated upon and discussed. [EDITOR]

who does not feel ready to sacrifice his dearest personal hopes to the eternal truth may become a member of the Theosophical Society, but will never belong to our Esoteric Circle. Without forcing our opinions on anyone, we respect those of others without sharing them. And yet our Society reckons thousands of Europeans and Americans in its ranks.

It is said that this doctrine of conditional immortality was circulated among the masses only “to terrify low and depraved souls.” Still another error. It has never been a popular doctrine; either in India, Greece or Egypt. Its proofs were given only to the neophyte, during the great Mysteries, when a sacred beverage enabled him to leave his body and, soaring in the infinity of worlds, observe and judge for himself. To divulge what he then saw was certain death; and terrible were the oaths that were demanded of him, at the supreme *Epopteia* when the grand Hierophant offered him the *Petroma*, or stone tablets on which were engraved the secrets of initiation.<sup>1</sup> Plato alone spoke of it, in veiled terms, but he did speak of it. If in one sense he said that the soul is immortal, in another he positively denied that *each* individual soul had pre-existed or that it will exist afterwards and for eternity. The same thing was taught in every sanctuary. Modern Egyptologists have all the proofs of it. Mariette-Bey translated several passages in the *Book of the Dead* and from inscriptions in sarcophagi where conditional immortality and complete annihilation are in store for the wicked. One hymn to Osiris says of the defunct:

“He sees by Thee, he lives in Thee and it is only by Thee that he can escape *annihilation*.”

The Egyptians taught the masses that the animal soul, belonging to the body and independent of the immortal soul, would not rejoin it until after a certain lapse of time passed in the mummy. But to the initiate, they said that complete annihilation awaited the depraved souls which had not succeeded in becoming *Osirified* or Divine. F. Lenormant declares this, as also does Mariette-Bey. Gotama,<sup>2</sup> the Hindu philosopher, says in his *Nyāya-Sūtra* (Tarkalamkara):

“The seat of the knowledge of the self (or individuality) is in the human soul (jīvātman), which is dual, but the supreme soul (paramātman) is the only one that is omniscient, infinite and eternal.”

To finish with the question, the objection is brought against us that those who *have faith* in immortality as a general law, regard our opinions as “in every respect contrary to divine justice.” We answer:

“What do you know of that justice? Upon what do you base your ideas in supposing that the laws of the invisible world are any different from those of this world, entirely laying aside the well-established scientific law of the survival of the fittest, which would certainly be of no small consequence in our argument?”

We ask only for valid proofs in support of the contrary. Possibly we may be told that it would perhaps be as difficult for us to prove the truth of our doctrines as for our

---

<sup>1</sup> [Cf. “The Eleusinian Mysteries” in our Buddhas and Initiates Series. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>2</sup> [Akṣapāda Gautama]

critics to prove theirs. Agreed! We instantly confess that, in believing them, we know only what we have been taught. But our teaching rests at least on philosophy and on experimental psychology (such as that of the system of the Hindu *Yogis*), results of long ages of research. Our Masters are Patañjali, Kapila, Kanāda, all the systems and schools of Āryāvarta (archaic India) which served as inexhaustible mines for the Greek philosophers, from Pythagoras to Proclus. It is based on the esoteric wisdom of ancient Egypt, where Moses, like Plato, went to learn from the Hierophants and Adepts; it was therefore developed by sure methods that do not proceed by inference, but decide by strict analogy alone, are based on the immutability of universal laws, and proceed by induction. May we be allowed to ask our opponents to show us their authority? Is it modern science? But learned science laughs at you as it does at us. Is it the Mosaic Bible? We doubt it because it does not breathe a word of it, and in spite of all the tortures applied to its text during long centuries of research, and notwithstanding all its *revised* and *corrected* editions, remains mute on the subject. But in several places, touching upon the survival of the soul, it cuts the ground under our feet. In *Ecclesiastes*<sup>1</sup> the Bible gives man no pre-eminence at all over the brute; as the one perishes, so does the other, for the breath that animates them both is *the same*. As to Job, that illustrious sufferer declares to us that man, once dead “disappears like a shadow, and — *continues no more*.”<sup>2</sup> Is it the New Testament? That book offers the choice between a philharmonic paradise and a hell which is far from being a real one. It gives us no irrefutable proof, it prohibits us from reasoning, and insists upon *blind faith*. Is it the phenomena of Spiritualism? Here we are! Now we are on firm ground, for the proofs are palpable, and it is “spirits” who are our teachers. Theosophists believe in the manifestations and in the “spirits” as much as the Spiritualists. But — when you have finished demonstrating to the whole world, including sceptical science, that our phenomena are produced by the souls of the departed — what will you have proved? *The survival of man* at the utmost; his immortality you will *never* prove; neither as a general law nor “as a conditional reward.” Thirty years of experience with the “spirits” have not given us an impression in favour of their veracity as a “general law”; you have nothing more, then, to confute us than your *blind faith*, your emotions, and the instinct of a minority of humanity. Yes, a minority, for when you have set aside the 450 millions of Buddhists, who do not believe in immortality and dread as a terrible calamity even the survival of the soul; and the 200 millions of Hindus of all sects, who believe in absorption into the primordial essence, what remains of this universal doctrine?

Our doctrine, you say, “was invented for low and vulgar souls.” We are in a position to prove to you, statistics in hand, that these “low and vulgar” souls predominate in the civilized and Christian countries where immortality is promised to everyone. We refer you to America, puritanic and pious, which promises every criminal it hangs an eternal Paradise, if he will believe; and that immediately, because, according to the Protestants, there is less than one step from the foot of the scaffold to the foot of the Eternal. Open a New York paper; you will find the first page entirely covered with

---

<sup>1</sup> iii, 19. [i.e., “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity.” KJV]

<sup>2</sup> *Job* xiv, 2



CONSTITUTION OF MAN SERIES  
ERRONEOUS IDEAS CONCERNING THE DOCTRINES OF THE THEOSOPHISTS

news of the most atrocious, the most unheard-of crimes committed by the dozen, every day, and from one end of the year to the other. We challenge anyone to find anything like it in pagan countries, where people do not trouble themselves at all about immortality, and where they ask only to be absorbed forever. Is immortality then, as a “general law,” rather a stimulant to, than a preventive against, crime for every “low and vulgar” soul?

We close believing that we have answered all the accusations of the author of the article on “The Elementaries.”<sup>1</sup>

If our teachings interest the reader we will try to be more explicit in a future number.

H.P. BLAVATSKY



---

<sup>1</sup> [For a thorough review of the subject, see “Blavatsky on Elementals and Elementaries” in our Blavatsky Speaks Series. — ED. PHIL.]