

Corporeal Transcendentalism in Pierre Meinrad Hebga's Perspective of Human Nature

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Abstract

This paper focuses on an African pluralistic conception of human nature with specific reference to a Cameroonian Philosopher and Theologian Pierre Meinrad Hebga (1928-2008), whose thesis was developed as an attempt to resolve the problems raised by dualism. It should be recalled that the question on human nature since the 17th century had been dominated by Western dualism, in its diverse forms, and it was based on the dichotomy between two substances; a perishable material body; and the immortal soul. The dualist conception of human nature combines both materialist and immaterialist perspectives of human nature. However, it suffered from the dilemma of the dualist problem precisely to know which of the two substances controls the other and how two completely different substances can interact. From this dualistic conception, a question arises to know whether the human body is pure matter. It in this light that Hebga rejects the Western dualism and hence proposes a pluralistic and unified interpretation of human nature from an African perspective based on a tripartite division (a three in one conception); body, breath and shadow which co-exists with each instance representing an entire person viewed from a particular perspective. Likewise, the three instances are relational and cohabit as a composite. This implies that both the body and the soul that form a composite both subsist at death and are hence transcendental. The basic thrust to Hebga's thesis of this paper is that the human body is not just simple material entity, but material entity informed by breath (spirit), which subsists at death and goes beyond. Human beings are to be thought as beings distinct in kind from purely physical objects. Hebga's transcendental view of the body in particular and the other non-corporeal instances enable us to understand paranormal phenomena. Hence, throughout this paper our position shall be that of a pluralistic conception of the human being as a composite of the material body, the immaterial breath and shadow. I will further employ Hebga's tripartite division of human instances to explain paranormal activities as another dimension of human nature. A historical and critical analysis of various secondary sources including Hebga's philosophical works will help to bring to limelight that his philosophical approach on human nature falls within the armpit of the philosophy of postmodernism, and particularly, deconstruction, for it attempts to disclose the contradictions of classical philosophical concepts; and also tries to open up new and innovative human thinking.

Keywords: Transcendental, Human Nature, Dualism, Pluralism, Paranormal. Hebga.

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INTRODUCTION

Human nature is one of the most controversial issues in academics. There is hardly an agreement about what the notion signifies, whether any such thing is real and what its specific characteristics are. The desire to understand ourselves, to conceptually grasp our nature, the essence of who we are is as old as mankind. In ancient Western philosophy, Socrates taught the Athenians to seek first self-knowledge through the

famous maxim 'Man know thyself'. The term 'human' means pertaining to mankind and is the common name given to all the species referred to as *homo sapiens*, which include all living people. The term 'nature' in this usage means "the natural disposition of the mind of any person; temper; personal character; individual constitution; the peculiar mental characteristics and attributes which serve to distinguish one person from another." [1]. Human nature, therefore refers to the distinguishing characteristics of thinking, feeling and

¹ William Walker Atkinson, *How to Read Human Nature: Its Inner States and Outer Forms*, London, L.N Fowler & Co., p.10.

acting that humans tend to have. The question of human nature may not be an outdated academic issue as it is at the core of philosophy, and it actually proves to have some ramifications within the field of bioethics as it helps to refresh our minds with the following questions: Who are we? What makes us human? Do humans possess something that animals lack or do human lack other things that other animals have? Indeed, the concept of human nature is a key term in contemporary debates, especially those revolving around issues like generic engineering, abortion, homosexual rights or evolution in creation.

It is often supposed that a sound understanding of human nature is a necessary condition for success in much of our theoretical and practical reasoning. It is for this reason that philosophers have been enduringly concerned with determining distinctive features of human nature. Though a controversial concept, the discussion on human nature since the days of Socrates till the eighteenth centuries had been predominantly dualistic in nature. With regards to human nature, dualism admits that human beings are both material, perishable and immaterial beings or simply that human beings are a unity of body and mind. However, it suffered from the dilemma of the dualist problem precisely to know which of the two substances (body and soul) controls the other, and how two completely different substances can interact. The key question of this paper arises from this dualistic conception and attempts to know whether the body is conceived as pure matter.

It is against and within this dualistic philosophical background that Hebga's doctrine of human nature emerged. Influenced by his cultural, religious and philosophical background, Hebga responds to the lapses of dualism by proposing a pluralistic and unified theory of the human being which emphasizes on the multiplicity of metaphysical components of the human being. He upholds the view that there are three outstanding common elements or instance of the human being, namely, body, breath and shadow [2], which co-exists with each instance representing an entire person viewed from a particular perspective. Likewise, the three instances are relational or intrapersonal and cohabit as a composite. It is the thesis of this paper that the human body, from Hebga's perspective, is not just simple matter but matter informed by breath, which subsists at death and survives beyond. His transcendental view of the

body (that which lives beyond the physical) in particular and tripartite division of human nature, in general, serve as luminous statements to explain paranormal phenomena. This paper will take on a historical approach so as to focus on the origin of Hebga's ideas and which historical figures influenced the emergence of his philosophy. This would be followed by a critical analysis of the secondary sources of various secondary sources including Hebga's philosophical works will help to bring to limelight that his concept of human nature. Finally, Hebga's tripartite concept of human nature as an explanatory model of paranormal phenomena will be discussed.

1. Foundations of Hebga's Corpus of the Mind-Body Problem

It is always important when piloting a thorough inquiry of a critical thinker to uncover the context and the intellectual background that negatively or positively influenced the emergence of his/her philosophy. This is because no man surpasses history and no thought is radically ahistorical or developed *ex nihilo*. It is in this light that it is imperative to trace the historical figures and schools of thoughts that helped to nourish and nurture Hebga's notion of the soul-body relation. From the intellectual background of the author, Hebga was exposed and greatly influenced by the dualists. Generally, a critical reflection on our nature as human beings and our place in the universe has a long custom in philosophy throughout the world as well as in the history of Western philosophy. The question of human nature has been a main concern of philosophers since the time of Socrates. Theories on the nature of human beings can be traced back to the works of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Hume and Kant himself even produced a work on anthropology. *Primo facie*, who was Pierre Meinrad Hebga?

Pierre Meinrad Hebga [3], a Cameroonian Priest and Philosopher, was born on the 31st March 1928 in Edea, Sanaga Maritime Division of the Littoral Region and his parents were Christians. At the end of his primary and secondary education in Mission schools, he gained admission into Major Seminary in 1946 where he studied Scholasticism for two years. From 1948-1952 he studied Theology from the Gregorian University of Rome in 1952 and obtained a Maitrise. In 1962, he proceeded to France where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Sciences from the Catholic Institute of Paris. He

² Pierre Meinrad Hebga, *La Rationalite d'un discours africain sur les phenomenes paranormaux*, Paris, Harmattan, 1998, p.95. (The components of the human person vary in terms of numbers following African cultural traditions, nevertheless three of them can be considered to be common to all notably body, breath and the shadow) translation is ours.

³ Emile Kenmogne, *Compose humains et perspectives therapeutiques: A propos de « l'anthropologie*

africaine » et de la methode de Meinrad Hebga, quoted in Robert Ndebi Biya & Emile Kenmogne (eds.), *Pierre Meinrad Hebga: Philosophie et Anthropologie*, Paris, Harmattan, 2010, pp.75-76. Also see Jean Bertrand Amougou, *Pierre Meinrad Hebga(1928-2008): Un Maitre d'Afrique*, Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy/Revue Africaine De Philosophie (XXI :293-306), 2008, p. 295.

was later on admitted at the prestigious University of Sorbonne, Paris IV, in France, and studied languages, Psychology, Anthropology and Philosophy, where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Philosophy in 1963; and *Maitrise* Degree in Philosophy in 1965. He equally did internship in St. Anne's hospital in Paris on psychopathology. In 1968, he moved to Rennes to obtain his *Doctorat du 3eme cycle* in Philosophy. In 1969, he gained admission into *l'Institut des Sciences et Technique de Paris* where he studied Philosophy and Mathematical Analysis. In 1973, he studied and obtained a Diploma in Bantu Linguistics from the University of Duquenne, Pittsbburg, United States of America. In 1986, he returned to the University of Sorbonne to obtain his *Doctorate Degree* New Regime research work on "The Rationality of African Disourse on Paranormal Phenomena."

As concerns Hebga's professional life, he held many positions of responsibility within the Catholic Church within the South Region of the French speaking part of Cameroon. He taught Latin, Greek and philosophy in College Libermann Douala and later on became Rector of this institution. He later moved to the Institute Catholique d'Abidjan, where he taught Anthropology and Philosophy. He also lectured Theology at the Loyola University of Chicago, Western College and Havard Divinity School, Anthropology and Philosophy at the Gregorian University of Rome, Philosophy at John Carroll University of Cleveland, University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon and the Catholic University of Central Africa, Yaounde.

A thorough reading of Hebga's philosophical works will reveal that his conception of human nature and in particular his idea that the body subsists at death was greatly influenced intellectually by Aristotle's hylomorphism and Saint Thomas Aquinas. From these two philosophers, he borrowed the idea of a biological conception of the soul as well as the unified doctrine of transcendence. Indeed, Hebga's idea of the human nature though employing different concepts when scrutinized is Thomistic in most respects. Against Plato and other Platonists, he integrates Aristotle's unified concept of human nature thereby uplifting the status of the human body, which hitherto had been considered as evil and nuisance to the human soul. The philosophical study of human nature itself, according to Aristotle, started with Socrates who turned philosophy from the study of the cosmos to that of human beings. Hebga was certainly influenced by the dualists who espoused the idea of human nature as a substantial unity and he likens his conception of human to be closer to Sartre's existentialist and phenomenological conception of human being.

Indeed, in the early periods of Western Philosophy, we see that the philosophical interest on human nature was more tilted towards dualism and the biological conception of the soul.

The history of dualism can be traced as far back as to Plato and Aristotle. But until in the seventeenth century, it was precisely formulated and presented. The systematization of this concept we see it happening in the writings of Rene Descartes. In the philosophy of mind, dualism is considered to be any of these views about the relationship between mind and matter, which goes to claim that the two are ontologically different and separate categories. The first systematic theories of human nature in Western philosophical history were developed in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Plato is one of the earliest sources of the dualist view that the mind and soul are intangible beings that survive separately from the body. Focusing on the life and philosophy of Socrates, Plato developed a profound doctrine on the nature of the human being in which he conceives of a human being as a dual being composed of a material body and a spiritual eternal soul. The soul, according to him, is superior to the body and the body is nothing else but its shadow. He conceived the soul in the realm of forms or ideas. Moreover, Plato informs us that the soul is immortal and imperishable and will certainly live after death, while the body is a composite and perishable at death. The soul is said to be in the body not like matter in form but like a mover in the mobile body [4]. The soul is to the body what a captain is to a ship, that is, the captain governs the ship, but the captain is a being that is ontologically distinct from the ship and can exist when not on the ship. Plato describes the soul figuratively as a pilot of the body. He says that due to some mysterious fault, the soul became embodied in imprisoned in the body. The embodiment is the cause of all human miseries, for through it the pure souls lost their original perfection. The relationship between the body and the soul is understood in antagonistic or hostile terms. The body is prison of soul, and death leads to the joyful liberation of the immaterial soul, thus the spirit overcomes the slavery of the material body. Indeed, he argued that the immortality of the human soul will continue its existence after death and even before birth. Plato adopts the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which was defended by Pythagoras before him. Following this teaching, the soul exists independently of the body before birth and death. Therefore, human beings can remember their previous knowledge of the world through association. Plato clearly stated this *Menon* dialogue [5], by having an untrained slave solve complex mathematical problems from simple to more complex. In *Phaedo*, Plato's mouth piece Socrates says,

⁴ John Gabriel Mendie Udofia, "The Problem of the Mind- Body Dichotomy: A Critique of the Cartesian Approach", GNOSI, An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory And Praxis, Vol.,1(2), 2018, p.2

⁵ Plato, *Menon*, tr,Furkam Akderin, as quoted in Faith Ozkan, "Human Nature in Plato's Philosophy". Entetekya Logico Metaphysics Review, Vol 4, No., 2, 2020, P.169.

the body is an obstacle to the soul when they are associated in the search of knowledge. The soul when in the body is entrapped as it were and weighed down. The soul therefore reasons best when none of these senses troubles it [6]. So the soul needs total liberation from the body and this is obtained through death. Socrates considered dying as a process of liberation. Plato holds a pessimistic view about the body considering it evil as explicitly developed in some passages from *Timaeus* and *The Laws*.

A point of reference for the development of Plato's thought regarding his metaphysics, his ethics, epistemology and ontology is Socrates. Socrates, in the *Apology* argues that men should take special care of their souls rather than bodies because the soul is treated as what contains reason or the intellect [7]. This is due to the fact that Socrates' main concern is with the reform of moral life by true knowledge. His famous dialogue, *Phaedo*, contains the proofs in favour of the immortality of the human soul. Plato also provided the tripartite analysis of the soul which preserved the idea that the soul and body is a unity and yet accounts for some of the complexity of our mental, and emotional experience. It means the soul is not one but consists of three parts. The soul has a thinking aspect, which is the mind. And there are two more aspects of the soul, which make up the will and instincts. And finally, Plato states that the mind that resides in the mind is the supreme force governing the will, and in turn the will controls the instincts. Though Plato laid the foundation of substance dualism but failed to clarify the relationship between soul and body whose natures are quite opposed. In all, Plato was enormously a spiritualist and to a certain extent an idealist for he reduced human nature to a pure spiritual substance thereby denigrating the body. He is therefore accused of committing the error of existence whereby he relegates the body and removes it from the business of existence. In addition, Plato also made an important contribution to dualism, when he states that the soul appears as an independent substance which can exist apart from the body. It is this conception that was taken over by Descartes who referred to this substance sometimes as mind and sometimes soul. However, Plato's dualistic conception was rejected by Hegel as well as the denigration of the human body.

Besides Platonism, Aristotelianism had great influence on the development of Hegel's philosophy of the mind. Aristotle sets an outline of hylomorphism as a framework to determine what reality is. The theory of hylomorphism is the idea that every single thing is composed of two substances, the form and matter, in the

metaphysical sense. This means that every natural body that exists is composed of two different substances, matter and form, which is substance dualism. Hylomorphism presents us with the view that a thing cannot realistically, exist with just matter, or simply just the form of something. Matter itself cannot exist without being properly defined by its characteristics. And form, also, cannot exist by itself since the characteristics cannot be applied to absolutely nothing. They must be unified together, and with both of them, they create a substance. Everything that exists is just matter identified and shaped by form, they are a synthesis that create substances. In this light, Aristotle holds that the human being is a living substance, an animal composed of matter and form, that is, body and soul. The soul is seen as the form of the body. The soul is not a separate spiritual entity but the principle of life. In his book entitled *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says that the soul is the *entelecheia*, the first principle of life in those things that we live, the actualization of a living body. Just like Plato, Aristotle holds that it is the soul that animates the body. But for Aristotle, the soul is not a separate entity able to exist on its own; rather, he treats the soul as the form of the body, which is matter: soul is an actuality or formulable essence of something that possesses a potentiality of being ensouled." [8]. Being the act of the body, the soul is at the same time form, principle of movement, and end. The form of living things, following Aristotle, is their soul. A physiological sense is implicit in Aristotelian philosophy based on the form-matter relationship. The soul is seen as the unifying principle of organism and also as the origin of consciousness. The soul both animates matter and encodes the defining potentialities that distinguish one species from another. As he defines it, in *On the Soul*, "the soul is the first grade actuality of a natural body having potentiality in it." The 'first grade actuality' means the unrealized capacities characteristic of living things. The soul of a human, for example, contains the first grade actuality of learning how to think.

The body is for the soul, and every organ has its purpose, that purpose being an activity. For Aristotle, it is inconceivable to think of a soul without a body and vice versa. Hence, a soul without a body is not a human being and the soul cannot exist independently of the body. In his words, "the body is the subject or matter...hence the soul must be a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it." [9]. The body and soul are one single composite of matter and form. The composite substance, according to Aristotle, is a natural body endowed with life, the principle of this life being called the soul. Body

⁶ Plato, *Phaedo*, as quoted in Maria Giannakopoulou, "Plato on Soul and Body", A Dissertation for the PhD Degree, University of Glasgow, 2002, p.74.

⁷ Plato, *The Apology*, as quoted in Maria Giannakopoulou, *Ibid.*, p.11

⁸ Aristotle, *De Anima*, in Maria Giannakopoulou, *Ibid.*, p.228.

⁹ *Ibid.*

cannot be soul, for body is not life but what has life. The soul is a kind of essence that cannot be distinguished from the body that it animates. Aristotle treats the soul as part of the body and as the formal cause of the body. The human soul is not separable and therefore the idea of human soul's immortality is meaningless. The soul is thus the realization of the body and is inseparable or it. The soul is thus the cause and principle of the living body both as a source of movement, as final cause and as the real substance of animate bodies. From the above description of the substantial union of the body and the soul, it can be stated that Aristotle dragged down Plato's soul from the world of Forms and had it united with body [10]. However, Aristotle recognizes at least one part of the soul that is capable of existing independently of the body, namely intelligence [11]. Similar to Plato's view about death, Aristotle also holds that death is the release of soul from the body, "the soul holds the body together, at any rate when the soul departs the body disintegrates and decays." [12]. In a nutshell, Aristotelian system considers the human being as the vital integrating principle. Hence, Aristotle's concept of human nature is neither dualist nor monistic but hylomorphic in that it stresses that one substance is composed of material and spiritual principles. Nevertheless, Aristotle allows a much closer union between soul and body than the Platonists who instead vilified the body as the tomb of the soul. To sum up, Aristotle argues for a rather complementary position by stating that, though human nature is made up of a subsisting soul and a corruptible body, the soul is the life-giving principle of the body and the body is the principle of individuation through which the soul achieves its basic function of intellection [13].

Apart from Aristotelianism, scholasticism and, in particular, Thomism profoundly influenced Hebga's concept of the mind-body problem. Hebga adopted Saint Thomas Aquinas who was greatly influenced by Aristotelian concept of hylomorphism expounded in his *De Anima* which is essentially based on substance dualism. By hylomorphism, Aristotle means that all things in the physical universe are a composite of form and matter. St. Thomas Aquinas is considered to be the one who adopted the central aspects of hylomorphism with a dualistic point of view. For Aristotle, the soul is the form and the body is the matter. Thomas Aquinas is one of the most important philosophers of the medieval period besides being a great Theologian. He is known for his ability to synthesize. He is able to combine Aristotelianism with Neoplatonism and blend them within a Christian framework. Following Saint Thomas

Aquinas, a human being is a person considered as a being that exists on its own with a specific nature, shared with all other rational beings. He also refers to human beings essentially animals, because through their material bodies they share certain important qualities with other members of the animal genus. This means that Aristotle sees human beings fundamentally in biological terms as animals like other animals. Indeed, Aquinas integrates Aristotle's view point of the soul as he writes that "the soul is the first principle of life of those things which live for we call living things 'animate' and those which have no life, 'inanimate'." [14]. The human being is a composite of soul and body, a corporeal substance linked to a spiritual substance. Indeed, Aquinas fundamental thesis of human nature is this view that human beings are not just bodies but bodies animated by a certain kind of form or the soul. Aquinas also states that there is no possibility for a body to be the first principle of life so far as nothing corporeal has the ability to be so. In this light, the soul is what actualizes the body but both are equally necessary as they constitute a human being. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Book VI, on man also known as the *Treatise on Human Nature*, he says that the essence of a human being is composed of body and soul. To this effect, Aquinas writes: "For as it belongs the notion of this particular man to be composed of this soul, of this flesh, and of these bones; so it belongs to the notion of man to be composed of soul, flesh and bones, for whatever belongs in common to the substance of all the individuals contained under a given species, must belong to the substance of the species." [15]. Whereas the human form actualizes a human being, its matter allows the form to be present in and interact with the natural world through various sensory facilities. When separated from the body, the soul could not exist in the natural world.

It is important to stress that the human soul and the material body of which it is the substantial form are not two separate existing substances but one actually existing substance. The intrinsic unity of matter and substantial form, body and soul in Aquinas philosophy is responsible for the unified existence of a human being. In this light, a human being is not merely an aggregate of body and soul but a genuine beings, and this helps to ensure our place as human beings among substances as genuine entities. A material human body and its substantial form are metaphysically distinct, but neither of them alone is a substance. A human being does not naturally exist without being composed of material body and a rational soul. A human being is therefore an individual substance brought about through a rational

¹⁰ M. Raskolnikov, "Body against soul: Gender and soulhele in Middle English allegory" quoted in Joseph Nietlong & Gideon Kato, "Aquinas on the Soul, Whether It is a Body, Whether It is Immortal and given these Why It is Fitting for the Body and Why It is Necessary", *Pinisi Journal of Art, Humanity and Social Studies*, Vol. 1 No.3, 2021, p.8.

¹¹ Maria Giannakopoulou, op.cit. p.229

¹² Ibid., p. 212.

¹³ John Gabriel Mendie Udofia, op.cit., p. 2.

¹⁴ *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd rev.ed., 1920, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, First Part, Question 75, Article 1

¹⁵ Ibid., First part, Question 75, Article 4

soul's informing the material body. This implies that a human being is not identical to her soul or her informed material body but is composed of her informed body.

Aquinas then proceeds to clarify how the soul takes the form of the body. Aquinas emphasizes that the form refers to the flesh and bones. The soul is separated from the body at death only materially, but there is no complete separation formally, and therefore form is more tied to matter in this conception. Form always contains notes referring to specific matter. Aquinas opines that the essence dictates what a human being is supposed to be composed of when actualized in the natural world, it is because of form that the human being has its particular nature. Aquinas discusses how the soul, nonetheless, is something that is separable from the body. He opines that: "For it is clear that by means of the intellect, man can have knowledge of all corporeal things. Now whatever knows certain things cannot have any of them in its own nature, because that which is in naturally would impede the knowledge of anything else." [16]. By this Aquinas means that if what receives knowledge was something corporeal everything we could know would be only seen through the lens of that particular kind of corporeal thing. It could not have knowledge of its things divorced from its nature. Though the corporeal parts of the body are necessary for experiencing of the natural world, they are not an organ of knowledge; as knowledge is not conditioned by any particular. As the question of whether or not the human soul separated from the body is, itself, made up out of matter or if it contains within it something corporeal, as a body does; Aquinas says that it is the soul that takes the shape of the body, but the body materializes and takes the shape dictated by the soul [17]. In pure Aristotelian terms, this means that the form both determines the body and is formally inseparable from it. As to the question to know whether the body is a necessary component of the human being since it does not survive death like the soul, Aquinas believes that when the body is separated from the soul, all sensory and nutritive powers indicative of having a body bound by matter are absent. He however thinks that "the whole soul is not separated from the body, but only the intellectual powers of the soul and consequently not the sensitive or vegetative powers." [18]. The operations belonging to the body are left with the body while the operations belonging to the soul, such as intellectualization and cognition, are separated distinctively. However, Aquinas holds that the sensitive and other like powers remain in the separated soul. This a human soul requires a material body to function

completely, that is, for all of its capacities to be actualizable. And after death, Aquinas thinks that the soul requires a resurrection to fulfill its purpose. He argues that the body is part of the essence of human being and since the material body is necessarily included within the form of a human being, true happiness will not be attained until the soul and the body are united. Thus, in order for the two to be in one union again after death, Resurrection must take place [19]. To round up, Aquinas account of the metaphysical nature of the human soul is really different from that of all other material forms. Yet he consistently applies the criteria for unqualified unity to corporeal substances, incorporeal substances, and the partly corporeal, the partly incorporeal human being. The corporeal and incorporeal subsistent parts of the human subsists in the same act of being provided by the soul as form [20].

Broadly speaking scholastics account of the soul-body relationship fall into two broad classes. First, there were those who treated human being as a composite of matter and a series of forms, so that the initial informed matter (prime matter or more literally 'first matter') is shaped by a corporeal form, and this form-matter composite is at the same time shaped by a further form, all the way up to the ultimate form, the rational soul [21]. A second class of theories held that the rational soul is the only substantial form of a human being that it both shapes the body and gives rise to all the capacities associated with life. This is the unitarian account of the soul-body relationship was first articulated by Thomas Aquinas. It was perhaps his most original and most divisive contribution to philosophy. It was even described as brutal error and was condemned by successive archbishops of Canterbury. There were perhaps several reasons Aquinas doctrine was so controversial. First, the substantial form was thought to fix the identity conditions of whatever it informs. That is, a body remains the same body only as long as it retains same form. But if a human being has only one substantial form, then the body goes out of existence at the moment of death when the soul and body separate. Indeed, the substantial form supplies the identity conditions for each body and its parts. Each part exists first as long as it is actualized by the form of the whole of which it is part. Moreover, the substantial form was understood to play a causal role in sustaining all the intrinsic properties of a substance. Substances have the enduring characteristics they do because of the distinctive underlying form. Therefore, if a human soul is the one substantial form of the human being, the body turns out to be indivisible

¹⁶ Ibid, First Part, Question 75, Article 1

¹⁷ Ibid., Article 2

¹⁸ Ibid., Article 1

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Joseph Nietlong & Gideon Kato, op.cit., p. 9

²¹ Robert Pasnau "Human Nature", in A.S. McGrade (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval*

Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, 2006, online publication at <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052/806038.010> retrieved on the 03/05/24, p.211

from the soul in the strongest term. Aquinas wholly endorsed this idea. The second worry with Aquinas' formulation is the problem of cogency. If the rational soul is essentially immaterial, then how can an immaterial substance be at the same time the form of the form of a material body? By identifying the rational soul as a human being's only substantial form, Aquinas invited considerable trouble for himself and the followers. A critical reading of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas reveal an aspect of the Unitarian account of the soul- body relationship which positively influenced Hebga's intellectual life.

The French born philosopher and Mathematician, Rene Descartes, was the one who brought the Mind- body problem to the focus through his psycho-physical dualism. The mind-body problem is a philosophical dilemma concerning the relationship between an immaterial soul influencing the material body. Descartes was one of the first philosophers to address this problem as well as laid down the ground rules for the discussion of the mind-body problem. Descartes is famous and is celebrated for his position and defence of the nature of the mind and body. Descartes maintains that there is only one substance, that is God, and there are two different kinds of substances (substance dualism) within the world: mental and material. The two exist independently of one another but ultimately both depend upon God. Each kind of substance has one primary attribute which constitutes its essence. The primary attribute of the spiritual substance is thinking and maintaining consciousness while the sole reason for the existence of the corporeal substance is spatial extension. At this level, Descartes uses property dualism to make the distinction between mind and body. In the sixth meditation, Descartes says that the mind and body are two different substances or rather two separate kind of substances each of which can exist without the other. And this distinction directly followed from the *cogito ergo sum* argument. The self is the mind and the body is the physical mechanism with which it is connected [22]. Descartes prefer the word mind to soul on the ground that he saw the latter as not only ambiguous but as often applied to something corporeal. Descartes goes ahead to expose his dualistic view of human nature essentially based on substance dualism. Hence, a human being is composed of a mind and a body. In his second meditation, Descartes begins to differentiate between the mind and the body but develops more the argument in the sixth meditation. A critical examination of the relevant passages of the sixth Meditation reveal that the mind is different from the body and there can never be a mind identical to a body. According to Descartes, the body is considered as an extended thing and have certain

dimensions, while the mind is viewed as the thinking and unextended thing [23]. Though they are two different substances, Descartes says that they nevertheless interact. Man, following Descartes, is essentially a thinking being, that is, man is essentially mind. Although, man has a body, yet the body is not part of his essence as man. Descartes describes the relationship between the mind and body as akin that between the pilot and the vessel. One thing a pilot does is to control the vessel; by steering, pilots cause vessels to do things, So Descartes thinks that minds sometimes cause bodies to do things, and this is what he thinks. There is therefore interaction between the body and mind and Descartes thus employs interactionism dualism. Essentially, the mind and body causally influence each other. When for example, I feel hurt says Descartes I feel pain. Consequently, the mind reacts to what happens to the body. Why is that what happens to the body also affects the mind? There must be a close connection and interaction between the two. He writes thus: "For if that were not the case, when my body is hurt, I, who am merely a thinking being would not feel pain, for I should perceive this wound by the understanding only just as the sailor perceives by sight when something is damaged in his vessel." [24]. For Descartes, there is the power of the soul with respect to the body and the power of the soul with respect to its passions. Not only does the body influence the mind, the mind too influences and moves the body. If the mind and body were distinct, how does this interaction take place? And how can a spiritual substances substance interact with a material substance? Descartes' response in the sixth Meditation is that the interaction takes place at the pineal gland which is situated in the innermost part of the brain. In other words, Descartes believed that the body was nothing more than a machine which the soul controls. The point of control over the body by the soul, he reasoned, was the pineal gland, a very small gland located roughly at the center of the brain between the cerebellum and cerebrum. His idea here seems to be that the relation between mind and body is not such that a physical state becomes a mental state, produces or causes a mental state, or vice versa; the mind is simply troubled by the organic processes. It is here that the mind comes into contact with the body through the animal spirits. Consequently, a mental event can be the cause of a physical event and vice versa. However, his answer is obviously unsatisfactory and contested by many philosophers including Hebga. In all, Descartes dualist view of the mind-body relationship can be summed up thus-- that the mind is not identical to the body, that bodies are things which have extension and that bodies sometimes cause effects in minds and minds sometimes cause effects in bodies. Descartes' basic line of reasoning is that though the soul and body

²² Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, quoted in Maria Giannakopoulou, p.222.

²³ Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, quoted in Frederick Copleston, *A history of Western Philosophy*, Vol.2, Doubleday, London, 1985, p.11.

²⁴ Ibid.

intermingle, the self is the soul while body is something altogether distinct. He strongly argues that the self is the soul, and subsequently he failed to provide one with necessary details for the required interrelation between soul and body.

Hebga lastly opines that his conception of human nature is much closer to Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist and phenomenological conception of the human being. In his book entitled, *being and nothingness*, Sartre begins with the analysis of phenomenon and human existence with the aim to determine the meaning of being. Realizing that being is phenomenon, he goes ahead to tell us that about the great advance made by modern thought, inasmuch as it allows us to reduce the existent to the series of appearances that reveals it. Thus, he says we attain the notion of phenomenon as it can be encountered, for example, in the phenomenology of Husserl or Heidegger. The existent is, then, what reveals itself. It is worth to note that being does not reveal anything within itself, it simply reveals itself. There is not something real inside it which the appearance manifests, its appearing is precisely what is revealed, the dualism of being and appearing can no longer have a rightful claim in philosophy, for here we are confronted with the phenomenon that is absolute. In this light, phenomenon is the real [25]. In all, phenomenology is a direct looking upon or inspection of the givens of sensory experience. Such inspection confronts one, first of all, with 'appearances'. In the senses that one is presented with them, these appearances are. They would not be appearances unless they appeared. But if these appearances are, then according to Sartre, we have located Being; for appearance is being. The only way of defining being is that it is.

Sartre in *being and Nothingness*, hence, states that "Being is simply the condition of all revelation." [26]. What then does phenomenon reveal? Well, if there is to be appearance there must be that which appears and that to which it appears; an act of being perceived and one of perceiving; the perceived and the perceiver, the object and the subject. In referring the components of these pairs one to the other, does the perceiving constitute the perceived so that the subject's *esse* would be *percipi*? To this question, Sartre raises an objection as he points out that every idealism seeks to reduce being to the

knowledge that it had of it, but to be well founded it should first establish the being of the knowledge on which being depends, and failure to that means the *esse est percipi* rests on nothing at all. Consequently, Sartre feels that in any sound doctrine, the being of knowledge must rest on something beyond knowledge, something that escapes the *percipi*. Otherwise, knowledge itself falls into nothingness. So to his mind the relation between perceiver and perceived must be an entitative or transphenomenal reference of object to subject, subject to object [27]. On the side of the subject, such transphenomenal dimension is constituted by consciousness 'in self', for as Husserl has stated it so well, that all consciousness is consciousness of and is intrinsically intentional. In short, the phenomenon implies an intentional subject, the so-called 'consciousness-self', which is the subject of the most concrete experiences but which is more truly identical with those experiences than related to them. It has nothing substantial about it, it is a pure appearance in the sense that the subject is a pure self-awareness identical with an awareness of [28]. Being or phenomenon also demands a subject and object intrinsically related one to the other, a being or phenomenon which is phenomenon because it is aware of itself in all appearing, that is, it is self-awareness or being for itself, and a being or phenomenon appearing to consciousness as a transphenomenal object of that consciousness but not reflexively aware of itself, that is a being for itself.

Hebga's Bio-Metaphysical Conception of Human Being

Hebga like St, Thomas Aquinas tend to argue for a biologically grounded account of human nature. He intends to preserve the Aristotelian substantial unity of the human person but in a pure pluralistic approach. This explains why Hebga first of all conceives of the human being as composed of three key instances. To this effects he writes:

L'homme est le vivant par excellence mais il est constitué de trois éléments, l'un visible, le corps edouwoulou, l'autre invisible, invisible L'âme, wuawua. Et le troisième élément qu'on appelle de double, (ihin). Edouwoulou signifier littéralement, « le peau du corps ». par extension, il vient à signifier le corps tout entier ; car il n'est pas seulement l'enveloppe matérielle, mais l'expression vivant de tout l'homme [29].

²⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, as quoted in Joseph P. Leddy, A critical analysis of Jean Paul Sartre; existential humanism with particular emphasis upon his concept of freedom and its moral implications, 1963, ElectronicTheses and Dissertations 6331, retrieved at <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/6331> on the 01/0/2024, p.28.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p.29

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Eugene Nevry, « La mort et ses croyances dans la vie des Aladian d'Addah », quoted in Pierre Meinrad Hebga, *La rationalite d'un discours.....* p.88 (Man is a living thing par excellence. He is composed of three elements: one visible, the body, *edouwoulou*, the other invisible, the soul, *wuawua* and the third element that is the shadow or double *ihin*. *Edouwoulou* literally means the entire 'skin of the body'. By extension, it signifies the entire body because it is not only the material envelope

He uses the term 'instance' to express the various levels of being or operations of the human person and also to avoid the classical dualistic dichotomy of man conceived as made up of corporeal and spiritual elements. Hence, an instance is not a component of the person but the entire person viewed from a particular perspective [30]. An instance, following Hebga is not a substance, thus, even at the level when separated an instance possesses only a virtual subsistence. Instances are not simple points of views of a person but constituents that are essentially related. The main issue here is to find out how Hebga conceives of the major instances of the human person, their modes of operation, their mode of union and separation, and the instances which endow the human person with the powers of paranormal activities. But the specific problem will be to find out if the human body as an instance by Hebga's 'interpretation is pure matter?

Hebga's three instances, the material body, the immaterial breath and the immaterial shadow co-habit and each instance is not considered as a component of the human being but as an entire human being from peculiar perspective [31]. Hebga's inquiry into what the human nature is, considered from the view point of the Central African sub-region, is conducted primarily through linguistic analysis. Citing his earlier research work based on the Bassa tribe of Cameroon, Pierre Meinrad had explained that:

Le corps (en bossa nyuu, en duala, nyolo et en ewondo nyol) désigne avant surtout l'apparence, la couleur, oppose a la chose meme, ensuite le corps vivant surtout le corps humain. Dans cette dernière acception, nyuu et ses équivalents ewondo. Et duala peuvent servir à exprimer sous ; nyuu yem = corps mien = moi [32].

The 'body' amongst the Bassa, Ewondo and Duala designates primarily an appearance and colour as opposed to the thing itself. It is only in a secondary manner that the term 'body' designates the physical living body. What does this imply? One can infer from these three communities that when they talk of the "body", it is a material entity, which includes the entire person both as a physical, social and metaphysical entity. In many ways, Hebga's idea of the body as a material entity is not unique, even the Platonists also held a similar view.

It is important to note that the body represents the entire functioning of the whole person which include

but the living expression of the whole man) Translation is ours.

³⁰ Ibid., p.92

³¹ Marc Bruno MayiHebga, « Philosophie et psychologie de la tradition égypto-nubienne », quoted in Robert Ndebi Biya & Emile Kemnogne (eds.), op.cit., p.167

³² Pierre Meinrad Hebga, *Le concept metamorphose.....*,op.cit., p.237

sensibility, nutritional, and it is also an opening to the external world. He perceives the body as the nucleus or central identity of all human being. It is through the body that each person's individuality is apprehended. It is through the body that each person is seen and accepted as existing in the world. Taken in this direction, Pierre Meinrad Hebga affirms that « *en ce sens, le corps est une abstraction, c'est-à-dire un être considéré indépendamment de ses conditions concrètes d'existence.* » [33]. In this light, Pierre Meinrad Hebga affirms that the body from a universal viewpoint may be considered as an abstraction, which is considered independently of all actual situations of existence. It is clear that for Pierre Meinrad Hebga, others may be considered as objects from existentialist and phenomenological perspective. What we are saying here is that Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist and phenomenological conception of the human being is closer to the African conception than Plato's conception. The Sartrean view is closer to the materialistic or phenomenal presence of man as upheld by African thought. Thus, the body is very important in making this experience possible as Jean Paul Sartre writes:

Thus, the appearance of the look is apprehended by me as the upsurge of an ecstatic relation of being, of which one terms as the "me" as for-itself which it is not and which is not what it is, and of which other term is still the "me" but outside my reach, outside my action, outside my knowledge [34].

It follows from the above African view point that the human body is that through which the individual is known, felt and identified in the world. The body is the medium, the actuality of the totality of the person physically, spiritually and socially. Now, what is the fate of the human body as perceived by African thought?

A careful study of the history of Western thought in the area of personhood may enable us to realize the fact that the body is seen alternatively as being evil, fragile or prison to the soul, and it is therefore destined for annihilation. Pythagoras and Plato consider the soul to be immaterial while the body is subjected to corruption. In Christian metaphysics, the body or flesh is seen is to be weak, but the soul is said to be immortal. The weak body disintegrates and decays, and can only be restored to being by the special grace of God through resurrection. But Hebga's perspective on the fate of the human body diametrically opposes the aforementioned views.

37 .The body in Bassa

³³ P M Hebga, *La rationalite d'un discours.....*, op.cit.,pp. 104-105

³⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness, An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (tr. Hazel E. Barnes), London, Methuen &Co., 1958, p.268.

According to Pierre Meinrad Hebga, the question of ascertaining the substantiality and destiny of human body is inescapable and this is a problem unresolved by the dualists. The dualists hold that after death there is no longer any human body, but a simple aggregate of chemical elements bound to decompose. Hebga objects this view and argues that if the human being is considered to be subsistent and unitary, one therefore must give an account of the end of the instances. Well, he raises this question prior to discussing the other aspects of man, namely, the shadow and the breath.

He acknowledges in response to the problem of the destiny of the human body and its immaterial counterparts that thinkers from Plato down to the Scholastics did not offer entirely satisfactory accounts as he writes: “*Ils n’ont pas surmonté le dualisme, au sens de la dichotomie, de la séparation de l’homme en deux moitiés hétérogènes, l’âme et le corps.*» [35]. Pierre Meinrad Hebga attributes the difficulty of establishing the destiny of the body to the fact that some thinkers erroneously think that there is such a thing as non-living body. Contrary to this fallacy at death, Western thinkers of the Platonist tradition opine that what remains thereafter does not qualify to be termed a body, but only an aggregate of chemical elements. Hence, there is no such thing like the body subsisting at death from such thinkers. Indeed, the problem of the subsistence of the body remains unresolved amongst the western dualists.

Contrary to the above Western conception of the destiny of the body, Pierre Meinrad Hebga argues that, “*le corps est tout la personne en tant que tombant sous les sens. Il faut donc lui reconnaître la subsistance unique qui prend des colorations différentes sous les espèces du corps, du souffle, de l’ombre.* » [36]. Indeed, Hebga presents a thomistic aristotelianism in which the body is conceived a unified totality in which the human being is considered as an entity. The three instances can be compared to ‘substances’ in pure Aristotelian sense of the word. Each instance, following Hebga, represents the entire person in its own respect. Considering the human being can only be complete, when he is composed of both the material and the immaterial components, does it mean that for the body to be considered as a complete human being it must contain within its being the immaterial constituents? This is just one of the several questions unanswered by Hebga. Nevertheless, the issue at stake for Hebga is to know what becomes of the human body at death. In opposition to dualists, Hebga implicitly defends a transcendental view of the body. As a whole, the notion of subsistence concerns the person and can take place under the auspice of any of the three different instances such as body, breath and shadow. It is important to note, for Hebga, the three instances

harmoniously coexist to form a human being. Considering that the subsistence can be through any of the three instances, one can draw the conclusion that the human body can be said to subsist at death and go beyond. It sounds as if even at death, the body does not lose its humanity. For even if it has lost its physical vitality, the metaphysical and social dimensions are still upheld. Indeed, Hebga simply advances the idea that what is seen as the mortal remains does qualify *stricto sensu* as the body. He however failed to explain nor defend his thesis.

Thoroughly perusing through Hebga’s intellectual background, for no doctrine can be ahistorical, reveal his theological and church influences in the development of his idea that the body could subsist at death. By extrapolation, one can understand Hebga’s idea of the immortality of the body across Aristotelian hylomorphism which was adopted by St. Thomas Aquinas. The main idea from the hylomorphic view is that a human being is substantially a union of material substance, the body and immaterial substance, the soul; which though distinct is not separate. *Stricto sensu*, Hebga’s tripartite instances, which are the material body likened to Aristotle’s matter, and the immaterial breath and shadow likened to the form. Hence, they sum up to material and immaterial components of human being which is substance dualistic in disguise. Aristotelian hylomorphism presents us with the view that a thing cannot realistically exist with just matter, or simply just the form of something. Matter itself cannot exist without being properly defined by its characteristics. And form, also, cannot exist by itself since the characteristics cannot be applied to absolutely nothing. The two substances must be unified, and with both of them, they create a substance. A human being is therefore an individual substance brought about through a rational soul’s informing the material body. This implies that a human being is not identical to her soul or her informed material body but is composed of her informed body and the soul. This would mean that the body is more than simple matter since it contains its form, the soul. Which is immaterial in nature. Hebga’s tripartite instances are constituents that are essentially intrapersonal or relational [37], in other words, they are interconnected to each other in such a way the material body is related to the immaterial breath and shadow. In his words, Hebga imitates that the breath and the human body are closely related and interwoven to the extent that one cannot conceive them as separate entities. Consequently, the human being can no longer be considered as an aggregate but a complex being fused with both material and spiritual stuffs. The resultant is that the body as a composite is no longer liable to decomposition. Hence, what remains upon death often referred as the mortal remains logically does not symbolize the real body of the

³⁵ P. M. Hebga, *La rationalité d’un discours....*, op. cit., p.106.

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

human being. The best that can be said is that the soul is separated from the body at death only materially, but there is no complete separation formally, for matter cannot exist without form and vice versa.

The Western notion of reality presents an opposition between two levels of reality, which are the metaphysical and phenomenal reality. In this dichotomy, the human body is generally considered as matter. This conception of matter runs from Aristotle, through St. Thomas of Aquinas right up to Rene Descartes and his immediate successors. However, our discussion of the African conception of human nature is based on Hebga's perspective that points to the fact that the human body is greater than what is open to sight or phenomenal. In other words, he stresses that the human body transcends matter, and that explains why it is capable of carrying out paranormal activities. Moreover, he equally also conceives man as a shadow from purely a metaphysical perspective. By the end of his analysis, Pierre Meinrad Hebga made it clear that the human breath that includes the human body, the social representation and the intellectual, emotional and metaphysical attributes of man is a holistic substance. A similar view was held when he considered shadow as being another holistic substantial representation of the human being. In this way, affinity between the shadow and the body, the breath and the body are interwoven and inseparable from Hebga's perspective.

Pierre Meinrad Hebga seems to defend the view that the African conception of the human body differs sharply from the Western paradigm. While the Western paradigm equates the body to animate and even inanimate aspects of material universe, Pierre Meinrad Hebga points to the fact that the human body is superior to matter and, therefore, transcends it. It is in this light Hebga reiterates that body ought not to be considered as a quantifiable matter thus:

La décodification, on s'en doute, concerne avant tout le corps humain. Les êtres de l'univers étant des forces ou des énergies en interaction, il est possible de ne plus considérer le corps comme une matière quantifiée, située dans un espace tridimensionnel, mais plutôt comme l'épiphanie de la personne [38].

The human body from an African perspective is an epiphany, that is, just an appearance of something greater than what is actually physically perceived. Hebga moves ahead to affirm that:

Il y a corps humain lorsque la personne s'offre à la saisie sensible de soi par soi par autrui. Il y a corps, en général, quand une présence est saisissable, non seulement actuellement, mais même potentiellement. Par cette dernière précision, ce que j'appellerai désormais la conception épiphany du corps diffère de celle de

Berkeley : elle ne recourt pas à l'intellect divin pour garantir d'existence des êtres [39].

From an African point of view, we can speak of a human body whenever the person in question is open to sight, either being perceived by himself or by others. Hence, a human body can be perceived actually and even potentially. This implies that the human body exist insofar as each person can perceive himself or be perceived by others. Pierre Meinrad Hebga therefore differs from Berkeley in that he does not refer to a transcendental absolute such as God as a guarantor of the reality of the human body. This is because it is a self-evident fact.

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that Pierre Meinrad Hebga amongst others tries to minimize the weight of materialism in attributing reality to the human body. Though this body is certainly material, it is equally not limited to matter. At this level, Pierre Meinrad Hebga attempts to respond to potential critics who will accuse him for reducing the human body to an appearance. In response this is what he says:

Une autre objection faite à la théorie épiphany du corps est qu'elle réduirait ce dernier à une simple apparence. En fait, il n'en est rien. Il faut distinguer, en effet, entre apparition et apparence, entre corps appositionnel et corps apparent. Apparence s'oppose à réalité, tandis qu'apparaitre signifie se rendre visible et s'applique aussi bien aux êtres qui ne sont pas [40].

Hebga position is that the human body cannot be reduced to an appearance. This is because appearance is opposed to that which is true or real, whereas, to appear (epiphany) suggests to become visible, and it therefore refers both to real and unreal entities. He states that entities that can be rendered visible but which are not actual are found in the domain of psychopathology.

From the aforementioned positions, Pierre Meinrad Hebga concludes his conception on the actual nature of the human body vi-a-vis matter that:

Ce qu'il faut retenir, c'est que le corps humain n'est pas une chose, un certain volume et un certain poids découpe dans l'épaisseur du réel extérieur, et mus par un moteur qualifié d'immatériel ou spirituel, que l'on nomme esprit, âme, conscience ou psychisme. Le corps, c'est l'ablation de la personne à sa propre appréhensions sensible et celle d'autrui [41].

The human body is therefore not only matter but man's manner of being presented to the senses and others. Hence, the body from this description is a physical representation of the real human being who is not only physical but transcendental. What then is the

³⁸ Ibid., p.166

³⁹ Ibid., pp.166-167.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.167-168.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.168.

bond between the human body and its metaphysical basis?

The foregoing discussion clearly admits that for Pierre Meinrad Hebga the human body is an epiphany. The body is like an external representation of a hidden fact as he intimates: «*il a été définie comme étant l'épiphanie de la personne, comme la personne totale en tant que donnée à l'expérience sensible d'autrui et du sujet lui-même.*» [42]. Besides this, he affirmed that though the human body is equally matter, that is, it is the kind of matter that is condensed energy in the sense explained by Albert Einstein. It follows from this that the material aspect of the human body made up of chemical substances is subject to degeneration, corruption and decomposition.

Notwithstanding the above claims, the question about the difference between biological or organic life and the life imparted by the shadow or breath is yet to be answered. We had seen that breath is the life-giving substance of the human being. We were also informed that it is this breath, which enables the human being to perform its emotional, intellectual and even metaphysical aptitudes. Now, what then is the nature and even mode of operation of human breath?

In response to this worry, Pierre Meinrad Hebga first of all affirms that even the origin, nature and manifestation of biological life is yet to be totally demystified by the biological and related natural sciences in spite of the great discoveries in the area of *in vitro* fertilization, the manipulation of embryos, etc. He also says that sciences have been unable to completely render an explicit rational understanding of the nature of biological or organic life, hence, one should not expect philosophy to totally demystify the mystery of human nature. However, he maintains that philosophical thinking can nevertheless help to improve upon the understanding of the human being.

In African thought system, the question of whether the individual survives death in a disembodied form is partly resolved through the nature of the immaterial aspects of man. In African thought system that corresponds with that of Hebga, the common non-corporeal aspects of the human being are the human breath and shadow. Pierre Meinrad Hebga identifies human breath as the primary invisible 'substance' which sustains the individual. By breath, he is not referring to the ordinary breathing of the nostrils; rather, he is talking of the essence of breathing itself. This means that breathing as an aspect of the person is an abstract notion. Hebga illustrates the abstract notion of breath from the Greek and Latin conception of the immaterial substance:

Le grec psychê le latin anima, désignent l'haleine, le souffle, le vent léger, et par dérivation seulement l'âme. De même pneuma et spiritus signifient d'abord le souffle de l'aspiration, le vent, et dans un sens dérive, l'esprit [43].

The issue at stake in the quotation is the identification of the immaterial element in man as perceived by Western thought. The above explanation from a purely linguistic point of view enables us to understand that originally, soul in Greek and spirit in Latin connotes the notion of breath. If granted, then one can affirm that from a linguistic point of view, both the Western and African thought system uphold the view that the invisible vital principle in the human being is breath or it is in the form of breath. What really do we mean by breath from an African perspective?

Writing in 1968, Pierre Meinrad Hebga argued that: *Le soufflé des narines n'est pas le soufflé vital, il en serait plutôt le signe. La vie ne tombe pas formellement sous les sens, mais à travers une série de signes qui l'annoncent plutôt qu'ils ne la montrent Elle se laisse deviner plus qu'elle ne se fait voir [44].*

Pierre Meinrad Hebga's view of breath is considered from a universal perspective and not from the daily meaning of breath. Rather, he is speaking about the living or vital breath. He insists that the visible breath through the nostrils is only a sign of this vital breathing principle. Moreover, life according to him does not generally present itself through the senses but through a sequence of signs that point to inner realities.

By the living or vital breath, Pierre Meinrad Hebga therefore has in mind the African equivalent of what ancient Greek and Latin thinkers held respectively as *psyche*, *pneuma*, and *anima* and *spritus*. These two leading Western civilizations abstracted this notion from soul and spirit. He insists that from the African perspective, the vital breath could have been called soul. However, he avoids using this term because it is associated to Platonic, Aristotelian and even it is in an effect to avoid such ambiguities that he prefers breath because it expresses directly and naturally the way human nature is lived in Africa.

In order to further justify his claim that breath is the essence of the human being from an African perspective, Pierre Meinrad Hebga claims that:

Les termes que l'on traduit d'ordinaire par vivre, vie, signifient en réalité survivre, durer, persévérer. En basaa nin, en ewondo, nyin, veulent dire avant tout survivre à une épreuve (maladie, famine, guerre, etc.), sortir sain et d'une situation qui mettait l'existence en danger et par conséquent continuer de vivre [45].

⁴² Ibid., p.188.

⁴³ Ibid., p.107.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.107-108

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.109

This means that the human breath carries with it the notion of subsistence, survival and duration beyond. This being the case, it is crucial for us to understand the nature and function of the human Breath.

In pure Aristotelian thinking, Hebga considers breath is the life principle of human nature. To this effect he says that “*le soufflé présente tout d’abord un aspect fonctionnel. Il est la fonction de la vie, de la persévérance dans la durée.*» [46]. And what does this imply? Hebga stresses on the organic function soul and includes amongst others the function of vitality, preservation and duration. It follows from this that the breath spoken of as principle of vitality could be likened to what Rene Descartes calls a thinking substance. At a secondary level, Pierre Meinrad Hebga insists that this breath is essentially an autonomous movement that is, resulting from the subject himself and performs diverse functions such as nutrition, growth, reproduction, locomotion, etc. In addition, he maintains that the vital breath is sensible or capable of reacting to internal and external situations.

If one understands the functions of breath that sustain the human being, one may make an analogy with the Aristotelian notion of the soul. In Aristotle’s most celebrated work on the human soul, *De Anima*, he claims that the soul has powers of self-nutrition, sensation, thinking and motive. For Aristotle, the soul has vegetative, sensitive and intellectual capacities. Hebga’s explanation about the human breathe based on life function points to the fact that it also performs the above three functions Aristotle ascribed to the soul. Hence, Hebga’s description of the nature of breath has organic or biological inclinations. Normally in metaphysics, the various functions of the human breath outlined by Pierre Meinrad Hebga are referred to as the attributes or qualities of a thing. An attribute or a quality is that through which that thing is known. In other words, an attribute or quality is that through which the actual existence of a thing is manifested. This means that through the functions of nutrition, movement and intellectual, one can better discern the essence of what human breath is all about.

We must therefore verify to what extent human breath may qualify as substances. A substance in its Aristotelian conception refers to anything or entity capable of individual existence. The Aristotelian notion of substances does not fully separate material substances from its immaterial counterpart. According to Rene Descartes, there are two types of substances, the immaterial or thinking substances and the physical or extended substance and the physical or extended substances.

In response to the question of whether human breath is a substance or an attribute, Pierre Meinrad Hebga argues firmly that the human breathe is of the same status with the Aristotelian and Cartesian substances as explained above. This is why he affirms that: «*.... le soufflé est, selon notre hypothèse, la personne tout entière considérée sous l’angle de la vie. Et nul ne prétendra que la personne soit un simple prédicat, un accident.*» [47]. Indeed, Hebga underscores the fact that since human breathe represents person in his totality, metaphysical, social and physical, it follows that it cannot be a mere representation or predicate. Rather, breath is a sort of ‘substance’ in the full sense of the term as held by Aristotle and Rene Descartes. Strictly speaking, Hebga avoided the word substance as part of his intellectual vocabulary as a means to dodge from Aristotelianism. How does Hebga distinguish between human breath and body?

In spite of the fact that Pierre Meinrad Hebga argues that the breath represents the human being in all possible dimensions such as physical, metaphysical, social and even paranormal, he nevertheless also asserts that breathe is not identical to the body. He begins this investigation on the distinction between the two by questioning whether human breath could be considered as an initial stage in the evolution of the body. In response, he puts aside all sociological and hierarchical considerations based on the fact that they are not very instructive. This objection is founded on the ground that the latter incorporates the theory of emergence that defends organic evolution by authors such as Bonoure, Grasse, Goldstein, Woodger and Teilhard de Chardin. These thinkers are of the opinion that in the tree of evolution, each being undergoes a sort of re-structuring of the antecedent stage and embraces a new stage in a totally new manner.

Considering the above position, Pierre Meinrad Hebga insists that the theory of emergence in no way cannot be applied to human beings because human breath does not replace the human body; though it co-exists with it. From this point of view, he concludes that breath by its very nature is an appropriate solution to evolution. This means that the breath and the human body are so tightly related and interwoven to the extent that one cannot conceive them as separate entities. It is worthy to note here that an outstanding weakness of Western view of human nature is based on the body and soul dichotomy. With such a separation, there arises the problem of interaction. Another aspect of the immaterial component of human nature is the shadow.

In most traditional societies, the human shadow, just like blood and names are held to be sacred due to the fact that they are believed to represent a person

⁴⁶ Ibid.(First of all, breath has a functional life aspect. It is the life function principle, of perseverance in time.)

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.110.

even though trees and other animals equally have shadows, Pierre Meinrad Hebga affirms that the human shadow has a certain metaphysical peculiarity. In relation to this, he writes :

Or, me semble-t-il, ce n'est pas au niveau de l'ombre elle-même en tant qu'image silhouette du corps qu'il faut placer la différence, mais à celui de l'être représenté et qui est lui-même invisible. De même que le souffle des narines manifestait la présence de la personne aux sens de l'ouïe et du toucher, de même l'ombre portée la révèle à la vue ; alors qu'elle est elle-même invisible [48].

Hebga upholds the view that though all physical items may be represented as objects, man however is superior because it is not representing only a physical item but a metaphysical entity. He says that this must be understood in the same way as the human breath is not just the air flowing in and out of human nostrils but an essence that represents man metaphysically, physically and socially. In order to better illustrate the distinction, Pierre Meinrad Hebga alludes to Mujyna Nimisi who made a separation between the two. According to Nimisi, there are two types of shadows, which are the internal shadow and soul shadow. The internal shadow is metaphysical whereas the soul shadow is abstract, which represents physical things due to the apparition of the sun or light. Pierre Meinrad Hebga insists that in the inquiry into human nature we must go beyond the physical images or representations so as to perceive the spiritual being represented by the physically present. But what is the essence and function of the shadow?

In African thinking, the shadow represents the transcendental aspect, that is, it represents the entire person beyond. As for what is the function of the human shadow, Pierre Meinrad Hebga says that:

L'ombre interne, c'est toute la personne vue sous l'angle de la mobilité, de l'agilité, de la maîtrise de l'espace, de ce qu'on nomme immatérialité, c'est-à-dire, en fait, du passage à la matérialité; c'est l'homme en tant qu'il échappe à la pesanteur et à la saisie par les sens [49].

Hebga's point is that the human shadow is the entire person taken from the perspective of mobility, agility, the mastery of space immateriality or spirituality. In other words, the human shadow points to the individual capacity to escape the limits of space and time. Pierre Meinrad Hebga's reflection on the shadow sounds very crucial, practically speaking, because there are many testimonies cases of mystical killing of human beings using simply their shadows in African milieu. This means that probably, the views of Pierre Meinrad Hebga are closer to reality than any view hitherto presented by Western thinkers.

Hebga goes further to bring to buttress his theory on human shadow by critically reviewing some anthropological studies on this issue notably by Edgar Morin and Frazer. According to Edgar Morin, primitive people saw in human shadow a manifestation, a substitute for the human double. Edgar Morin goes ahead to affirm that in prohibiting human being from allowing their shadows to appear on foods, meeting with the shadow of a primitive woman or that of the mother-in-law, points to the fact that the shadow of a human being was not ordinary. This is because the primitive people believed that whatever attacks the shadow will surely befall the corresponding living body. On the other hand, following Frazer's analysis on the coming together of shadows in the above-prohibited cases permits one to be bewitched using the shadow of the prohibited category.

Hebga says that prohibitions related to shadows exist in almost all traditional societies. He points out this fact that while taking note of magical potentiality of shadows, Edgar Morin and Frazer apparently left out the anthropological and metaphysical dimension of the shadow. In relation to this Hebga states that:

Ils n'ont pas compris que, si l'homme est vulnérable à travers son ombre portée il demeure pourtant, en son fond, inaccessible, insaisissable, inaccessible à l'autrui. Le meilleur de lui-même échappe à son agresseur, tour comme l'ombre matérielle échappe au pied qui se pose sur elle [50].

By extrapolation, Pierre Meinrad Hebga attempts to stress the fact that if through the shadow the individual can be destroyed by the enemy, it follows that the shadow carries the greater substances or essence of the person. The implication of this statement obviously reveals that the real person is not directly accessible to the senses, thus, the human shadow is like a covering, a true representation of man's metaphysical or spiritual self. Pierre Meinrad Hebga brings in another illustration on the essence of the shadow from the Rwandan thinker, Mujiyuna Nimisi elaborates on the power of the shadow to be able to quit the body and hovers around. To this effect, Nimisi writes:

Les Bantu affirment que, pendant le sommeil, le principe appelé igicucu peu quitter le corps du dormeur et s'en aller errer au loin..... En dehors du corps, l'igicucu reste une réalité active ; aussi tout ce que nous croyons voir, entendre, sentir etc. ; aussi tout ce que nous croyons voir, entendre, sentir etc., pendant les rêves est dit vrai, en ce sens c'est notre âme-ombre, notre igicucu qui le voit, l'entend ou le sent, au cours de ses multiples pérégrinations qui l'amènent parfois dans des régions que nous n'allons jamais vues [51].

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.112.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.112-113

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Mujiyuna Nimisi, *L'homme dans l'univers bantus*, 1978 quoted in P M Hebga, *ibid.*, p.70

Nujiyna Nimisis expresses the view that the Bantu people think that during sleep, one of the metaphysical principles in the human being named *igicucu* or the shadow leaves the body and hovers around as it sojourns through several territories both physically and metaphysically. He claims that what the person believes to have “seen” or “heard” during a dream is true because it is this soul shadow or *igicucu* that apprehends the reality. Consequently, the *igicucu* entity cannot be considered to be fallible since it witnesses such a reality in an “out of body” phenomena.

Hebga greatly upholds the views of Nujiyna Nimisi, which according to him portray a deeper understanding of human nature based on the notion of subsistence of the human shadow. In this way, the human shadow is not only an ephemeral entity but also a substance. He further states that in most African cultures, it is claimed that the human shadow is a subject of attribution. This implies that it has conceptual independence that makes it capable of being perceived separately from other physical instances of the person.

It follows from the above presentation of the shadow, which represents man’s ultimate spiritual self, that man can transcend material paraphernalia in that the human being is not just the physical body. Human person can now transcend the physical thanks to the spiritual nature represented by the shadow. It is not only the space that is transcended but equally time because, in a dream state, the mind can revisit the past and even projects itself into the future.

Hebga’s Tripartite Division of Human Nature as Explanatory Model of Parapsychology

Parapsychology, a field of contested knowledge and controversial academic standing, is the scientific investigation of paranormal and psychic phenomena; phenomena in which information or energy seems have apprehended or transferred without the operation of the known senses or logical inference. Cardena *et al.*, considers it as “the study of these phenomena, and it includes consideration of both common psychological explanations as well as explanations in which mind may be basic, irreducible aspect of reality may transcend the perceived limitations of the body.” [52]. Paranormal activities of the mind yet constitute another dimension of human nature. The suffix ‘para’ stands for after or beyond for it transcends the physical limitation. This

renders the term ‘paranormal traits’ to mean the dimension of human nature that goes beyond the materialistic and empirical study. It is the capacity of the human being to initiate nonphysical, metaphysical and physical causal connections. Indeed, it is the ability of the human being to spiritually or psychically affect human states (physical or spiritual) positively or negatively without any physical contact. These paranormal phenomena include telepathy, clairvoyance, divination, incantation, miracle, apparitional experiences, psychokinesis, levitation, near death experiences, reincarnation, witchcraft, and so forth. These paranormal activities help to demonstrate the influence and the relationship that the human spirit has with and over the body.

A question arises to know how the human body, from an African perspective, is capable of exercising metaphysical or better still an extra-phenomenal powers. Indeed, Hebga puts forward the tripartite division of human nature as luminous statements to explain paranormal activities. This point is reinforced by Dominique Folsched when he states that Hebga tripartite division of human person has two main advantages:

il ne donne, d’une part des outils pour réfuter des explications qui n’en sont pas, et il nous offre, d’autre part, une anthropologie dotée d’une plasticité suffisante pour tenter de rendre raison de phénomènes que la rigidité substantialiste et même chosiste des discours philosophiques classique rendent a priori impossibles [53].

Following Hebga, some specific categories of parapsychological activities include “multilocation”, “bilocation”, apparitions, distance activity and human metamorphosis into animals or other creatures. We will be sincere to state that only few have selected randomly and explained out of a number of paranormal activities fully exposed by Pierre Meinrad Hebga in his academic publications. Some other accounts of Hebga’s study of paranormal activities could be consulted from Alice Salome Ngah Ateba’s article, “La “sorcologie”, une extra science de la sante et du salut” and Jean Bertrand Amougou’s text books, *Reflexions sur la rationalite....*, Tomes 1 and 11 [54].

The position adopted by Pierre Meinrad Hebga is that if we can understand the two metaphysical

⁵² Cardena, E., Palmer, J., and Marcusson-clavertz, D., (eds), *Parapsychology: A Handbook for the 21st Century*, as quoted in Isaac Hughes, *Repertoires of Resistance: A Discourse Analysis of the rhetoric of Parapsychologists*, University of York, 2016 (Unpublished), p.12.

⁵³ Dominique Folsched, « L’esprit de l’anthropologie et anthropologie de l’esprit » as quoted in Robert Ndebi Biya & E mile Kenmogne, (eds.), *op.cit.*, p.3

⁵⁴ Alice Salome Ngah Ateba, « La « sorcologie », une extra science de la santé et du salut », in Robert Ndebi Biya & Emile Kenmogne, *op.cit.*, pp.101-126, Jean Bertrand Amougou, *Reflexions sur la rationalite : Variations culturelles d’un theme chez P.M Hebga*, tome 1, Paris, Harmattan, 2016, pp.159-176 & tome 11, pp.27-38.

dimensions of human being, that is, human breath which is the vital force and the shadow which is the person in the manner of stability and mastery of space and time, one will be able to better understand why and how from an African perspective, the human being is capable of activities that are not physical but metaphysical. Indeed, as Hebga says, the metaphysical essence of man with its three instances enables him/her to manifest paranormal activities. Levitation is a well-known and widespread phenomenon in the world since antiquity. Pierre Meinrad Hebga définit lévitation as: “*Phénomène dans lequel un corps est soulevé du sol et se maintient en l’air sans aucun appui naturel apparent.*» [55]. It is the phenomena by which a body is raised from the ground and is maintained in the air without any natural support. This implies that there are situations in which the human body can become suspended in air without any natural support thereby clearly violating gravitational pull. In explaining this phenomenon, Pierre Meinrad Hebga stated that in most African societies, there is the belief that some individuals possess the mystical power which permits them to transform into other things including animals and this enables them to move from one place to another swiftly and without any physical obstruction. One can understand the phenomenon of levitation across human shadow, which represents energy and it is the instance of mobility. Indeed, the shadow is the entire human person generally considered in the spiritual dimension. It should be noted that in the traditional African society, the human shadow can be considered as the human spirit which represents the vital force or life force that every human being shares in common with the cosmic spirit. Hebga reports the experience of a European missionary in the early 1940s who on a pastoral visit in the deep forest region of Cameroon commissioned a young villager with a letter destined for a reverend sister whose convent was about sixty kilometres away. The bearer of this letter was equally requested to obtain a bottle of altar wine for the celebration of holy mass. To the greatest surprise of this European priest, in less than two hours the African young villager returned with a response from the reverend sister including the bottle of the altar wine. The departure and return of this young man was accompanied by a very powerful noise. This young man had certainly used some paranormal means to travel.

In another case, Pierre Meinrad Hebga, himself an outstanding exorcist priest recounted the story of a woman who decided to abandon her mystical powers and activities in order to become a Christian. Pierre Meinrad Hebga informs us this woman handed over to him symbolically her “natural aircraft”, which she previously employed for her astral movements. It is in this light that Hebga writes:

Plus récemment, au début des années 80, des convertis, ayant décidé de renoncer aux œuvres des ténèbres, me remit son avion de nuit, qui consistait en une camisole rouge et quelque écorces d’arbre. Avec ça, assura-t-elle, je peux prendre mon élan d’ici et atterrir au village de Lindoi [56].

From the above illustration, one learns that certain individuals have the power to transform into spiritual beings and use metaphysical objects to travel from one place to another mystically in clear violation of the physical laws of nature.

Pierre Meinrad Hebga after exposing the above manifestation also remarks that there are registered cases of levitation in the history of Western philosophy or theology. He cites the incidents related to persons, which the Catholic Church upholds as the “great mystics” who lived mostly during XVII centuries in Italy and Spain. They were all religious men (nuns, monks or priests). The leading ones are Saints Jean de la Croix and Therese d’Avila. This is what he writes about them: *Les biographies de saint Jean de la Croix et de Sainte Thérèse d’Avila sont pleines de récits étonnants. Parfois les deux mystiques en conversation pieuse au parloir, se seraient élèves de la terre et seraient demeures suspendus dans les airs [57].*

This implies that these formally recognized Saints of Christian faith from time to time while at prayer found themselves suspended in the air with their bodies not being supported by any physical structure.

There is equally the case of another Italian monk Joseph de Cupertino whose case of levitation was very popular in Europe. Pierre Meinrad Hebga affirms that the famous rationalist philosopher and mathematician and protestant believer, Leibnitz travelled to live briefly in the same Monastery where Joseph de Cupertino lived. It is recorded by Colin Wilson that Leibnitz “constata les faits et avoua honnêtement ne pouvoir les expliquer.” [58]. It follows from the above that even philosophers and scientists have personally witnessed this phenomenon of levitation that are beyond rational explanation.

While commenting on the above registered case of levitation both in and out of the Africa, Pierre Meinrad Hebga points to the fact that this extra-phenomenal happening defy the laws of gravity and related scientific laws. Consequently, he re-affirms the fact that mindful of the fact these occurrences do exist as testified by the mathematician and rationalist thinker, Leibniz, one could infer from them that there is an apparent weakness in the methodological insistence by the science

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.191

⁵⁶ Ibid.,p.192.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Colin Wilson, *L’occulte*, as quoted in P M Hebga, Ibid.

on rational explanation and objectivity as the exclusive criteria for truth. Pierre Meinrad Hebga equally makes us to understand that the phenomenon of levitation is biblical. We are presented the case of Philip, the Deacon who was transported by the Holy Spirit to the eunuch in the Acts of the Apostle (Acts 8; 39). He pointed out the fact that this phenomenon is reserved to persons with a special grace in their life as believers or ministers of the Most High God. Alternatively, he also indicates that the power of levitation could equally be employed by a person's initiation into diabolical cults.

Pierre Meinrad Hebga reminds us of the fact that the main mission of science is to explain reality in its complex whole. He also raises the issue that the exercise of interpreting reality ought to be critical and objective. However, he noted that whenever it concerns reality that is extra-phenomenal such as levitation, a majority of scientific thinkers dismiss it out rightly as being supernatural or irrational and therefore not fit for rational debate. This explains why Pierre Meinrad Hebga opines that:

Malgre notre volonte de rigueur, il ne nous est pas toujours possible de prouver, de maniere irrefutable, la verite de faits rapporte par autrui. Force nous est de nous contenter parfois de l'argument d'autorite, de temoignages de gens au sujet desquels l'information, la penetration et la probite intellectuelles sont etablies [59].

It is not usually easy to rationally explain all the whys behind such extra-phenomenal activities. He affirms that in the search for truth in this area of inquiry, sometimes one has to accept arguments based authorities (revealed truth), personal witnesses and results arrived at after careful intellectual inquiry.

According to Pierre Meinrad Hebga, the phenomena of multilocation and bilocation are terms created apparently by mystical language experts and used in describing the ability to be simultaneously present in more than one place by an individual. Hebga explains also that pantheists interpret it as corresponding to a type of impersonal universal existence. He says that this view is re-curent in some Hindu and Buddhist conceptions.

In offering objective cases of bilocation, Pierre Meinrad Hebga presents us the case of St Philip of Neri who was recorded and believed that he could be found to be present simultaneously in Rome and Florence (two different Italian towns) while on an apostolic work. Pierre Meinrad Hebga also explains that the phenomenon of bilocation also referred to as the redoubling of mediums and it is the situation whereby a single individual could be found at two different places simultaneously.

These revelations sound shocking in certain types of environment, but in the society, we have often heard about certain personalities who had to disappear physically from an imminent threat just to be seen instantly elsewhere. However, the case stated above in which the same person could appear at different locations simultaneously is much more thought provoking. Whatever may be the "unknown" power that permits this to take place, the interest of this study is to ascertain the brand of human nature from an African perspective. So far, if we grant the explanations justifying multilocation and bilocation, then we can logically infer that the human body is not exclusively material. In other words, though the human being thrives in physical existence s/he equally transcends it. This leads us to yet another extra-phenomenal aptitude of human beings.

In recent years, Catholic Christians have had to believe in the apparitions of Blessed Virgin Mary. The history of the Catholic Church or better still Christian religion records many cases of apparitions. In the Gospels, we can find amongst others, the post-resurrection appearances of the risen Jesus Christ to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke) and the apparition to his apostles.

Similarly, the Catholic Church has upheld certain apparitions of the Virgin Mary as being true. Such incidence include the apparition in Lourdes, France, others in Portugal, etc. Even here in Yaounde, Cameroon, the Blessed Virgin Mary is said to have appeared very close to the Nsimalen International Airport. When these apparitions are acknowledged as authentic by the church the area of apparition suddenly becomes a sacred ground and a centre for pilgrims. What then is an apparition and a vision? What aspect of human nature is exposed through apparition and vision?

Pierre Meinrad Hebga opens the discussion on apparition and visions with an attempt to distinguish between the two. He begins with a denial of the claim by persons who consider the two to be synonymous. According to Hebga, « *l'apparition es l'acte du sujet qui s'offre à la vue, tandis que la vision est l'acte de celui qui perçoit. Parfois aussi l'on appelle apparition la personne ou l'objet qui se montre à nous.* » [60]. Hebga states that an apparition is the act by which a subject presents itself to the sight of others, while vision is the act of seeing something (including an apparition). Pierre Meinrad Hebga next argues that the belief in apparitions and visions has been more prevalent throughout the history of Western thought than in traditional Africa, though the former derogatively terms them as primitive and superstitious.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.197.

⁶⁰Ibid., p.214

Hebga also presents the passage recoded in the Book of Isaiah where the prophet narrates how he had a vision in which he saw heaven open and God seated on His throne, His majesty filled his sanctuary, seraphim bowing down in worship with each having wings. (Isaiah 6:1). Also, he makes allusion to the cases of Christ recorded in the Bible and His unofficial apparitions to some Saints down the ages such as St Therese of Avila, St Francis of Assisi, etc. He concluded that while in the past these apparitions were almost considered normal, later science completely put them aside or tried to use science in order to rationalize them.

According to Pierre Meinrad Hebga, psychology does not really take apparitional appearances and visions seriously. This explains why he says:

Elles nous sont familières: autosuggestion collective, perception hallucinatoire etc. selon la psychologie pathologique, la conscience dite crépusculaire ...vit des évènements délirants, fantastiques, des déformations perceptives (illusion), des phénomènes hallucinatoires a prédominance visuelle.... En clair selon elle, apparitions et visions sont des produits d'une conscience qualitativement altérée [61].

Hebga stresses that the discipline of psychology that is supposed to know more is paradoxically very ignorant about human nature since it considers most of these extra-phenomenal manifestations as pathological disorders. He nevertheless cites another psychologist who had carefully studied the apparitions of Jesus Christ. In this light, Francoise Dolto, the psychologist argues that:

Les apparitions des Jésus réussite ou éveillé ne sont de irrptions psychiques, des hallucinations car « de tel accident psychiques ne produisent pas des fruits » ; or « quand Jésus ressurgit visible avec ce corps, il délivre ses disciplines, il débloque leur détresse, leur peur. » Ainsi la réalité objective du retour du corps refoule est prouvée par son action efficace sur les disciples [62].

Dolto's argument is that apparitions such as those of Christ cannot be chimerical. They are not the result of mental disorders, indeed they are substantial. To justify these claims, Dolto affirms that pseudo apparitions that result from mental disorder do not bear fruit as Christ's apparitions, for He commissioned them. Even Thomas who like many scientist today doubted the reality of the apparitions had to physically touch his wounds before consenting to the truth of it.

From a strictly metaphysical point of view, Pierre Meinrad Hebga distances himself from psychological experiments conducted by E. Bozzano,

which consider apparitions of the living and the dead as a manifestation of their astral bodies [63]. This astral body, according to E-Bozzano, is also called the subtle body which is lighter and luminous. He also rejects the claims of D. Scott Rogo and Robert Kall who studied about 700 cases of what is known as "out-of-the- body" experiences or (OOBE) [64]. In such experiences, the individual when subjected to certain exercise are said to "leave" the physical body. For Scott Rogo, what appears as this second "body" of the individual is lighter than the gross material body, which decomposes at death. While asserting that their claims give an insight into the debate on human nature, Hebga nevertheless stresses that their accounts do not really provide a rational explanation of the human body especially in relation to what is viewed as an apparition.

Finally, Hebga says that which appears is that which the object of vision is, that is, the apparition of the person in the form of a body. His position is that we need not attempt to separate the physical and the "psychological" body because, all bodies as earlier affirmed are by nature "epiphanic", that is, capable of being shown or appearing to sight. Hence, to appear is to be perceived as either a person or as this or that being. It follows from the above that through apparitional appearances and visions, one can infer that the human body from an African perspective is capable of performing activities, which the natural sciences cannot explain. This would imply that the human body transcends matter. In all, it should be noted that the phenomena of bilocation, apparitional experiences as well as zombies suggest the existence of an apparitional body.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the objectives had been to discuss a coherent Hebga's account of the nature of human being with special focus on its status of the material body as well as its historical intellectual antecedents. In this conclusion, I wish to recall the key elements of Hebga's account of human nature I have described. Hebga's metaphysical thought was influenced by Platonism, Aristotelianism, Thomism, Cartesian dualism as well as Sartre's phenomenology. Contrarily to the dualistic tradition, Hebga employs pluralism and conceives of the human being to be composed of three instances: material body, immaterial breath, immaterial shadow and they both co-exist. Indeed, his conception of the breath has a biological orientation. He uses the term 'instance' to express the various levels of being or operations of the human being so as to avoid the classical dualistic dichotomy of man conceived as made up of corporeal and spiritual substances. Hence, an instance is not

⁶¹Ibid., p.215.

⁶² Françoise Dolto, *L'Évangile au risque de la psychoanalyse*, as quoted in P M Hebga, *La rationalité d'un discours...*, Ibid., p. 176.

⁶³ Ibid.,p.217

⁶⁴ Ibid.

synonymous to a component of a person, but represents the entire person viewed from a particular perspective [65]. An instance, following Hebga is not a substance, thus, even at the level when separated an instance possesses only a virtual subsistence. Unlike Plato, Hebga's notion of the human being recognizes and upholds the pre-eminence of the material body. The body is said to represent the whole person to the exterior environment. Hebga holds that at death the mortal remains of a human being does symbolise the real body, implicitly implying that the body subsists at death. Though he fails to explain this thesis, however, Hebga's transcendental concept of human nature is symmetrical, to an extent, with Aristotelian dualism and medieval Thomistic account of the human body in which the human being is the substantial union of matter and form. Even though human being's existence transcends the material body and can persist without it, such does not entail that a human being ever ceases to bear some relationship to the body. This, according to Meinrad Hebga, partially explains why the human being is capable of assuming different physical forms and performing certain non-physical actions that violate established rational principles. Indeed, parapsychology is the ability of the human being to spiritually or psychically affect human states (physical or spiritual) positively or negatively without any physical contact. These paranormal phenomena include telepathy, clairvoyance, divination, incantation, miracle, apparitional experiences, psychokinesis, levitation, near death experiences, reincarnation, witchcraft, and so forth.

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