HAS MAN A SOUL?

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[THIS lecture was originally delivered to the Sheffield Secular Society, and was printed from the reporter's notes without efficient correction from myself, I, at that time, suffering under a severe attack of acute rheumatism. The lecture has since been often re-delivered; and three editions having been exhausted, I have again corrected and revised the present edition. It is not intended as an answer to the question which forms the title, but it is intended to provoke thought upon this important subject.]

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What do you mean by soul? What is the soul? Is it I? Is it the body? Is it apart from the body? Is it an attribute of the body? Has it a separate and distinct existence from the body? What is the soul? If I ask one of those who claim to be considered orthodox men, they will tell me that the soul is a spirit—that the soul lives after the body is dead. They will tell me that the soul is immortal, and that the body is mortal; that the soul has nothing whatever in common with the body; that it has an existence entirely independent of the body. They will tell me that after the body has decayed—after the body has become re-absorbed in the universe, of which it is but a part, that the soul still exists. Is there any proof of the existence of the same individual soul apart from all material conditions? I have endeavoured to examine this subject, and, up to the present time, I have not found one iota of proof in support of the positions thus put forward. I have no idea of any existence except that of which I am part. I AM. Of my own existence I am certain. I think. I am. But what is it that thinks? Is it my soul? Is it "me," and yet distinct

from me? I am but a mode of existence. I am only part of the great universe. The elements of which I am composed are indissolubly connected with that great existence which is around me and within me, and which I help to make up. If men tell me I am a compound, and not a compound—a mixture, and not a mixture—a joining together, and not a joining together—of two entirely different existences, which they call "matter" and "spirit," I am compelled to doubt those men. The ability to think is but an attribute of a certain modification of existence. Intelligence is a word by which we express the sum of certain abilities, always attending a certain mode of existence. I find intelligence manifested so far as organisation is developed. I never find intelligence without animal organisation. I find intelligence manifested in degree, only so far as I find a higher or lower type of organisation—that is, I find man's intellectual faculties limited by his organisation But the orthodox tell me that my soul has an immaterial existence, independent of all organisation—independent of all climatic conditions—independent of all education. Is that so? When does the soul come into man? When does it go out of man? If the soul is immortal, why is it that standing here, in the prime of health and strength, if part of that roof should fall fracturing my skull, and pressing upon my brain—how is it, if my soul is not subject to material conditions, that it then ceases to act? Is the plaster roof more powerful than my immortal soul? Or is it that intelligence is the necessary result of a certain condition of existence, and that the moment you destroy that condition—the moment you destroy the organisation—the result ceases to be realisable? By the course of reasoning you adopt (says the orthodox objector) you reduce man to the same level as the beasts. And why not? I stand on the river's bank, I see there a man full grown, possessed of the physical figure of man, but an idiot—an idiot from his birth upward—one who could not, even if he would, think and act as other men. A little child is there playing on the bank, and the idiot, having large destructive propensities, has thrust the child into the water, and he stands there jabbering and gesticulating while the little child is drowning in the river. And see how half-vacantly, half-triumphantly, he points to the helpless child. A Newfoundland dog has come to the bank; it jumps in and brings the little child out and saves its life. Yet theologians tell me that the idiot has a soul, and that the Newfoundland

dog has not one. I cannot understand these nice distinctions, which make the man so superior to the beast in matters in which he is positively inferior. Man has doubtless an organisation on the whole far superior intellectually to that of any other animal, but he is only superior by virtue of his superior organisation and its consequent susceptibility for development or education. Many brutes can see more clearly than man; but they possess not the capability for the manufacture of telescopes to aid their vision. Many brutes can run more swiftly, but they manifest no capacity for the subjugation of a steam power which far outstrips their speed. But man himself, a well-organised, thoughtful, intelligent, well-educated man, by a fall from a horse, by a tile from a roof, may receive an injury to his nervous encephalic apparatus, and may be, even while a man in shape, as low as the brute in the imbecility of his reason, and inferior to the brute in physical strength. There is as much difference between different races of men, there is, in fact, more difference between a pure Caucasian and a Sahara negro, than between the Sahara negro and the infant chimpanzee.

When did the soul come into the body? Has it been waiting from all eternity to occupy each body the moment of birth? Is this the theory that is put forward to man—that there are many millions of souls still waiting, perhaps, in mid air, 'twixt heaven and earth, to occupy the still unborn babes? Is that the theory? Or do you allege that God specially creates souls for each little child at the moment it is born or conceived? Which is the theory put forward? Is it that the soul being immortal—being destined to exist for ever, has existed from all eternity? If not, how do you know that the soul is to exist for ever, when it only comes into existence with the child? May not that which has recently begun to be, soon cease to be? In what manner does the soul come into the child? Is it a baby's soul, and does it grow with the child? or, does it possess its full power the moment the child is born? When does it come into the child? Does it come in the moment the child begins to form, or is it the moment the child is born into the world? Whence is it this soul comes? Dr. Cooper, quoting Lawrence on the "Functions of the Brain," says:—"Sir Everard Home, with the assistance of Mr. Bauer and his microscope, has shown us a man eight days old from the time of conception, about as broad and a little longer than a pin's head. He satisfied himself that the brain of this

homunculus was discernible. Could the immaterial mind have been connected with it at this time? Or was the tenement too small even for so etherial a lodger? Even at the full period of uterogestation, it is still difficult to trace any vestiges of mind; and the believers in its separate existence have left us quite in the dark on the precise time when they suppose this union of soul and body to take place." Many of those who tell me that man has a soul, and that it is immortal—that man has a soul, and that the beast has not one—forget or ignore that at a very early stage in the first month of the formation of the brain, of the state of the brain, corresponds to that of the avertebrated animal, or animal that is without vertebra. If the brain had stopped in its first month's course of formation, would the child have had a soul? If it would have had a soul, then have avertebrated animals souls also? if you tell me it would not have had a soul, then I ask—How do you know it? and I ask you what ground you have for assuming that the soul did not begin to form with the formation of the brain? I ask you whether it was pre-existing, or at what stage it came? In the second month this brain corresponds then to the brain of an osseous fish. Supposing the development of the child had been then stopped, had it a soul at that time? If so, have fishes souls? Again, if you tell me that the child has not a soul, then, I ask, why not? How do you know it had not? What ground have you for alleging that the soul did not exist in the child? We go on still further, and in the third month we find that brain corresponds then to that of a turtle, and in the fourth to that of a bird; and in the fifth month, to an order termed *rodentia;* sixth, to that of the *ruminantia;* seventh, to that of the *digitigrada;* eighth, to that of the *quadrumana;* and not till the ninth month does the brain of the child attain a full human character. I, of course, here mean to allege no more than Dr. Fletcher, who says, in his "Rudiments of Physiology," quoted by the author of the "Vestiges of Creation"—"This is only an approximation to the truth; since neither is the brain of all osseous fishes, of all turtles, of all birds, nor of all the species of any of the above order of mammals, by any means precisely the same; nor does the brain of the human fœtus at any time precisely resemble, perhaps, that of any individual whatever among the lower animals. Nevertheless it may be said to represent, at each of the above-named periods, the aggregate, as it were, of the

brains of each of the tribes stated." Now, should a birth have taken place at any of the eight stages, would the child thus prematurely born have had a soul? That is the question I propose to you. You who affirm that man has a soul, it lies upon you, here, without charging me with blasphemy—without charging me with ignorance—without charging me with presumption—it lies upon you who affirm, to state the grounds for your belief. At which stage, if at any, did the soul come into the child? At the moment of the birth? Why when a child is born into the world it can scarcely see—it cannot speak—it cannot think—but after a short time I jingle my keys, and it begins to give faint smiles; and after a few weeks, it is pleased with the jingling of my keys. Is it the soul which is learning to appreciate the sound of the jingling keys, and pleased with them? Is it the immaterial and immortal soul amused and pleased with my bundle of keys? Where is the soul? How is it that the soul cannot speak the moment the child is born—cannot even think? How is it, that if I keep that child without telling it any thing of its soul until it become fourteen or fifteen years of age, it would then speak and think as I had taught it to speak and think; and if I kept it without the knowledge of a soul, it would have no knowledge of a soul at that age? How is that? Rajah Brooke, at a missionary meeting at Liverpool, told his hearers there, that the Dyaks, a people with whom he was connected, had no knowledge of a God, of a soul, or of any future state. How is it that the Dyaks have got this soul and yet live knowing nothing whatever about it? And the Dyaks are by no means the only people who live and die knowing nothing of any immortal and immaterial soul. Again you tell me that this soul is immortal. Do you mean that it has eternally existed—has never been created? If so, you deny a God who is the creator of all things. If the soul began at some time to exist, where is the evidence that it will not also at some time cease to exist? If it came into existence with the body's birth, why not cease with the body's death? You say the soul is immaterial, do you mean that it is susceptible to material conditions, or do you not? If susceptible to material conditions, what do you mean by its being immortal and immaterial? If not susceptible to material conditions, then explain to me how it is that under good conditions it prospers and advances, and under bad conditions deteriorates and recedes. If a child is born in some

of the back streets of our city, and lives on bad food in a wretched cellar, it grows up a weak and puny pale-faced child. If allowed to crawl into existence on the edge of a gutter, imperfectly educated, in fact mis-educated, it steals—steals, perhaps, to live—and it becomes an outcast from society. Is this immortal soul affected by the bodily conditions? or is the soul originally naturally depraved? And if the soul is primarily naturally depraved, why is God so unjust as to give a naturally depraved soul to anybody? If not, how is it that this immortal soul, when the body is kept without food, permits the man without money to buy food, to steal to satisfy his hunger? You allege that the soul moves my body. You assert that matter is inert, unintelligent; that it is my active, intelligent soul that moves and impels my inert and non-intelligent body. Is my immortal soul hindered and controlled by the state of my body's general health? Does my soul feel hungry and compel my body to steal? Some theologians declare that my soul is immaterial—that there is no means by which I can take any cognisance whatever of it. What does that mean, except that they know nothing whatever about it? Sir W. Hamilton admits that we are entirely ignorant as to the connection between soul and body. Yet many who in so many words admit that they have no knowledge, but only faith in the soul's existence, are most presumptuous in affirming it, and in denouncing those who dispute their affirmation. It is an easy method to hide ignorance, by denouncing your opponent as an ignorant blasphemer.

Joseph Priestley in his book upon matter and spirit, quotes from Hallet's discourses, as follows:—"I see a man move and hear him speak for some years. From his speech I certainly infer that he thinks as I do. I then see that man is a being, who thinks and acts. After some time the man falls down in my sight, grows cold and stiff, and speaks and acts no more. Is it not then natural to conclude that he thinks no more; as the only reason I had to believe that he did think was his motion and his speech? And now that his motion and speech have ceased, I have lost the only way of proving that he had the power of thought. Upon this sudden death, one visible thing, the one man, has greatly changed. Whence could I infer also, the same being consisted of two parts, and that the inward part continues to live and think, and flies away from the body? When the outward part ceases to live and move, it looks as if the whole

man was gone, and that he, with all his powers, ceases at the same time. His motion and thought both die together, as far as I can discern. The powers of thought, of speech and motion, equally depend upon the body, and run the same fate in case of declining old age. When a man dies through old age, I perceive his powers of speech, motion, and thought decay and die together, and by the same degrees. That moment he ceases to move and breathe, he appears to cease to think, too. When I am left to my reason, it seems to me that my power of thought depends as much upon the body as my sight and hearing. I could not think in infancy; my power of thought, of sight, and of feeling are equally liable to be obstructed by the body. A blow on the head has deprived a man of thought, who could yet see, and feel, and move; so naturally the power of thinking seems as much to belong to the body as any power of man whatsoever. Naturally there appears no more reason to suppose that a man can think out of the body than he can hear sounds and feel cold out of the body."

What do those mean who say that man is made up of two parts—matter and mind? I know of only one existence. I find that existence manifested variously, each mode having certain variations of attributes by which it is cognised. One of these attributes, or a collection of certain attributes, I find in, or with, certain modifications of that existence, that is, in or with animal life—this attribute, or these attributes, we call intelligence. In the same way that I find upon the blade of a knife brightness, consequent upon a certain state of the metal, so do I find in man, in the beast, different degrees, not of brightness, but of intelligence, according to their different states of organisation. I am told that the mind and the body are separate from one another. Are the brightness and steel of the knife separate? Is not brightness the quality attaching to a certain modification of existence—steel? Is not intelligence a quality attaching to a certain modification of existence—man? The word brightness has no meaning, except relating to some bright thing. The word intelligence, no meaning, except as relating to some intelligent thing. I take some water and drop it upon the steel, in due course the process of oxidation takes place and the brightness is gone. I drop into man's brain a bullet, the process of destruction of life takes place, and his intelligence is gone. By changing the state of the steel we destroy its brightness, and by disorganising the man destroy

his intelligence. Is mind an entity or a result? an existence or a condition? Surely it is but the result of organic activity a phenomenon of animal life. Dr. Engledue says:—"In the same way as organism generally has the power of manifesting, when the necessary stimuli are applied, the phenomena which are designated life; so one individual portion—brain, having peculiar and distinct properties, manifests on the application of its appropriate stimuli a peculiar and distinct species of action. If the sum of all bodily function—life, be not an entity, how can the product of the action of one portion of the body—brain, be an entity? Feeling and intelligence are but fractional portions of life." I ask those who are here to prove that man has a soul, to do so apart from revelation. If the soul is a part of ourselves, we require no supernatural revelation to demonstrate its existence to us. D'Holbach says:—"The doctrine of spirituality, such as it now exists, affords nothing but vague ideas; it is rather a poisoner of all ideas. Let me draw your attention to this:—The advocates of spirituality do not tell you anything, but in fact prevent you from knowing anything. They say that spirit and matter have nothing in common, and that mortal man cannot take cognisance of immortality. An ignorant man may set himself up as an orator upon such a matter. He says you have a soul—an immortal soul. Take care you don't lose your soul. When you ask him what is my soul, he says he does not know—nobody knows—nobody can tell you This is really that which they do. What is this doctrine of spirituality? What does it present to the mind? A substance unsubstantial that possesses nothing of which our senses enable us to take cognisance." Theologians urge that each of us has a soul superior to all material conditions, and yet a man who speaks cannot communicate by his speaking soul so freely with that man who is deaf and dumb; the conditions cramp that which is said to be uncontrolled by any conditions. If you cut out a man's tongue, the soul no longer speaks. If you put a gag in his mouth, and tie it with a handkerchief, so that he cannot get it out, his soul ceases to speak. The immaterial soul is conquered by a gag, it cannot utter itself, the gag is in the way. The orthodox say that the soul is made by God; and what do you know about God? Why just as much as we know about the soul. And what do you know about the soul? Nothing whatever. How is it that if the soul is immaterial, having nothing in

common with matter, that it only is manifest by material means? and how is it that it is encased and enclosed in my material frame? They affirm that my soul is a spirit—that I received the same spirit from God. How is it that my spirit is now by myself, and by my mortal body, denying its own existence? Is my mortal soul acting the hypocrite, or is it ignorant of its own existence, and cannot help itself to better knowledge? And if it cannot help itself, why not, if it is superior to the body? and if you think it a hypocrite, tell me why. What is meant by the declaration that man is a compound of matter and spirit?—things which the orthodox assert have nothing in common with one another. Of the existence of what you call matter you are certain, because you and I, material beings, are here. Are you equally certain of the existence of mind, as an existence independent and separate from matter? and if you are, tell me why. Have you ever found it apart from matter? If so, when and where? Have you found that the mind has a separate and distinct existence? if so, under what circumstances? and tell me—you who define matter as unintelligent, passive, inert, and motionless—who talk of the *vis inertiæ* of matter—tell me what you mean when you give these definitions to it? You find the universe, and this small portion of it on which we are, ceaselessly active. Why do you call it passive, except it be that you want courage to search for true knowledge, as to the vast capabilities of existence, and, therefore, invent such names as God and Soul to account for all difficulties, and to hide your ignorance? What do you mean by passive and inert matter? You tell me of this world—part of a system—that system part of another—that of another—and point out to me the innumerable planets, the countless millions of worlds, in the universe. You, who tell me of the vast forces of the universe; what do you mean by telling me that that is motionless? What do you mean by yet pointing to the unmeasurable universe and its incalculably mighty forces, and affirming that they are incapable of every perceptible effect? You, without one fact on which to base your theory, strive to call into existence another existence which must be more vast, and which you allege produces this existence and gives its powers to it. Sir Isaac Newton says:—"We are to admit no more causes of things than are sufficient to explain appearances." What effect is there which the forces of existence are incapable of producing?

Why do you come to the conclusion that the forces of the

universe are incapable of producing every effect of which I take cognisance? Why do you come to the conclusion that intelligence is not an attribute—why? What is there which enables you to convert it into a separate and distinct existence? Is there anything? Is it spirit? What is spirit? That of which the mortal man can know nothing, you tell me—that it is nothing which his senses can grasp—that is, no man, but one who disregards his senses, can believe in it, and that it is that which no man's senses can take cognisance of. If a man who uses his senses can never by their aid take cognisance of spirit, then as it is through the senses alone man knows that which is around him, you can know nothing about spirit until you go out of your senses. When I speak of the senses, I do not limit myself to what are ordinarily termed man's five senses—I include all man's sensitive faculties, and admit that I do not know the extent of, and am not prepared to set a limit to, the sensitive capabilities of man. I have had personal experience in connection with psycho-magnetic phenomena of faculties in man and woman not ordinarily recognised, and am inclined to the opinion that many men have been made converts to the theories of spiritualism, because their previous education had induced them to set certain arbitrary limits to the domains of the natural. When they have been startled by phenomena outside these conventional limitations, they at once ascribed them to supernatural influences, rather than reverse their previous rules of thinking.

Some urge that the soul is life. What is life? Is it not the word by which we express the aggregate normal functional activity of vegetable and animal organisms, necessarily differing in degree, if not in kind, with each different organisation? To talk of immortal life and yet to admit the decay and destruction of the organisation, is much the same as to talk of a square circle. You link together two words which contradict each other. The solution of the soul problem is not so difficult as many imagine. The greatest difficulty is, that we have been trained to use certain words as "God," "matter," "mind," "spirit," "soul," "intelligence," and we have been further trained to take these words as representatives of realities, which, in fact, they do not represent. We have to unlearn much of our school lore. We have specially to carefully examine the meaning of each word we use. The question lies in a small compass. Is there one existence or more? Of one existence I am conscious,

because I am a mode of it. I know of no other existence. I know of no existence but that existence of which I am a mode. I hold it to be capable of producing every effect. It is for the man who alleges that there is another, to prove it. I know of one existence. I do not endeavour to demonstrate to you my existence, it needs no demonstration—I am. My existence is undeniable. I am speaking to you. You are conscious of my existence. You and I are not separate entities, but modes of the same existence. We take cognisance of the existence which is around us and in us, and which is the existence of which we are modes. Of the one existence we are certain. It is for those who affirm that the universe is "matter," and who affirm that there also exists "spirit," to remember that they admit the one existence I seek to prove, and that the onus lies on them to demonstrate a second existence—in fact, to prove there is the other existence which they term spiritual. There cannot exist two different substances or existences having the same attributes or qualities. There cannot be two existences of the same essence, having different attributes, because it is by the attributes alone that we can distinguish the existences. We can only judge of the substance by its modes. We may find a variety of modes of the same substance, and we shall find points of union which help to identify them, the one with the other—the link which connects them with the great whole. We can only judge of the existence of which we are a part (in consequence of our peculiar organisation), under the form of a continuous chain of causes and effects—each effect a cause to the effect it precedes, each cause an effect of the causative influence which heralded its advent. The remote links of that line are concealed by the darkness of the far-off past. Nay, more than this, the mightiest effort of mind can never say—*This is the first cause.* Weakness and ignorance have said it - but why? To cloak their weakness, to hide their ignorance. Knaves have said it—but why? To give scope to their cunning, and to enable them to say to the credulous, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther." The termination is in the as yet unknowable future; and I ask you, presumptuous men, who dare to tell me of God and soul, of matter and creation—when possessed you the power to sunder links of that great chain and write, "In the beginning?" I deny that by the mightiest effort of the strongest intellect man can ever say of any period, at this point substance began to be—before this existence was not.

Has man a soul? You who tell me he has a soul, a soul independent of material conditions, I ask you how it is that these immortal souls strive with one another to get mortal benefits? Has man a soul? If man's soul is not subject to material conditions, why do I find knavish souls?—Why slavish souls?—tyrannous souls? Your doctrine that man has a soul prevents him from rising. When you tell him that his soul is not improvable by material conditions, you prevent him from making himself better than he is. Man's intelligence is a consequence of his organisation. Organisation is improvable, the intelligence becomes more powerful as the organisation is fully developed, and the conditions which surround man are made more pure. And the man will become higher, truer, and better when he knows that his intelligence is an attribute, like other attributes, capable of development, susceptible of deterioration, he will strive to effect the first and to guard against the latter.

Look at a number of people putting power into the hands of one man, because he is a lord—surely they have no souls. See the mass cringing to a wretched idol—surely these have no souls. See men forming a pyramid of which the base is a crushed and worn-out people, and the apex a church, a throne, a priest, a king, and the frippery of a creed;—have those men souls? Society should not be such a pyramid, it should be one brotherly circle, in which men should be linked together by a consciousness that they are only happy so linked, conscious that when the chain is broken, then the society and her peace is destroyed. What we teach is not that man has a soul apart and independent of the body, but that he has an ability, an intelligence, an attribute of his body, capable of development, improvable, more useful, according as he elevates himself and his fellows. Give up blind adhesion to creeds and priests, strive to think and follow out in action the result of your thoughts. Each mental struggle is an enlargement of your mind, an addition to your brain power, an increase of your soul—the only soul you have.

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