

Hath Man Eternal Life?

Ross Winn

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*What is life?
None answer. The lips of Time are dumb.
Whence this spark divine, which, once aglow,
Transforms this voiceless void of pulseless clay,
And makes all matter life?
The gloom-wrapped portals of the tomb are still,
From them no echo, answering, has come back,
And from the great Beyond that lies behind,
Comes no message and no hope.
Man is born, the pledge of love and lust.
But who has kindled life's glowing fire?
Whence and whither, its speeding course?
From out the silent past there answers back
The silence of the centuries.
Life seems but a narrow ray of light that parts
With aimless art the gloom of two eternities:
A little stretch of golden strand between
Two waveless seas of black oblivion.*

Life and death. These are the two eternal mysteries. If a man die, shall he live again? This query has trembled upon the lips of man thru all the centuries, and as yet remains unanswered. When we discover from whence we come, we shall know whither we go at death. If life is eternal, it is from everlasting to everlasting. If the soul of man survives the grave, it does not begin at birth. Whatever begins, ends. Nature has no miracles. I do not know that death ends conscious personal existence, neither do I know the contrary. I do not believe, because I do not know. I am an Agnostic.

Thru all the centuries man has sought for the evidence of eternal life. And because of this eternal seeking, those who believe in continuous personal existence contend that life is eternal—that man's very impulse to grasp it proves the thing exists. But if man has sought for eternal life, he has also avoided death; and this instinctive avoidance of death—what does it prove? We cannot rely upon the natural impulses and longings of the human mind as trustworthy testimony. Man

most desires that he does not possess. The very fact that the human mind aspires to a continued conscious personal existence tends rather to prove that it has not been attained.

We do not aspire to that we have already.

If we have a continued conscious personal existence beyond the transition of death, we possessed such conscious personal attribute of immortality before the transition of birth.

Continuous conscious personal existence presupposes the survival of memory. If, in the future life, we do not remember the present life, we lose our connection therewith—we simply become a separate consciousness. Thus the immortality of consciousness is destroyed.

We do not remember anything of a life before this. Beyond infancy we cannot go in memory. So, if we existed before, it was another, a separate existence. If we exist after this world-life, it will be another existence. If, then, in that future life I am to recall nothing of this, I shall say, with the materialists, that this life began at birth and that death ends all. The span of human conscious personal existence is bounded by the cradle and the tomb.

So far as I know.

Facts and theories. The hiatus between them is as wide as the Universe. Facts are the known or knowable. Theories are mental speculations, inductive or deductive, rational or irrational.

The chief trouble with mankind is that he, it or they have always lacked sufficient discriminative ability to separate theories from the facts. Man has mixed his facts and theories, with the result that he got mentally mixed himself. He ended by labeling all his theories facts, and got rid of the facts by putting them in his mental index expurgatory. And from his theories he constructed his creeds, both religious and political, and upon them founded his sciences and philosophy. And his creeds and sciences and philosophies are mostly humbug.

A great many people believe in the theory of continuous conscious personal existence. They say this belief gives them a great deal of consolation. Perhaps it does. Man is naturally an idealist. In the loom of Fancy imagination weaves with golden thread many webs of rare and radiant splendor as unsubstantial as the chimerical shadows of a summer night's dream.

And is immortality a dream?

Let us reflect. That which is, is eternal. I am. Therefore I am eternal. But, after all, what is this I, this ego, this individual self-consciousness? It is the sum of physical organism plus life. A physical organization is not self-consciousness. The life-force is not self-consciousness. But the life-force added to physical organization produces self-consciousness. Therefore, self-consciousness is the effect resultant of the union of two forces, viz, life and physical organization. Self-consciousness, instead of being a thing of eternal existence, is but a transitory effect of a creative cause. And tho matter and life and intelligence are eternal, that individual expression of intelligence which is called the ego—the soul of man—is not eternal because it is not self-existent. That which is eternal is self-existent. Intelligence is; it is self-existent; it is eternal. But individual intelligence is a form of expression; forms are transitory. Organization has limitations; that which has limitation cannot have eternal existence: Matter is eternal, without organization, and without limitation: The soul of man is a form of expression; it has no immortal attribute.

If a man die, shall he live again? I do not know. I believe that the Universe is matter. That matter is eternal. That all matter contains intelligence. That intelligence is life. Thus far I am clear. Beyond this I do not know.

The orthodox Christian church claims to have solved the problem of man's future state. According to the church it is all very plain. There is a heaven and a hell. If you believe certain dogmas and perform certain rites, you will go to heaven when you die. But if you honestly disbelieve

the things a belief in which is necessary to your salvation, and neglect to perform the required rites, your certain destination will be the other terminus, with no return ticket. According to this church doctrine, human destiny has two ultimates, and the world is a stage of probation. We, all of us, the wise and the foolish and every sage and seer and philosopher profound, and each little shirtless Southern pickaninny as well,—are here for no other reason than that God just wants to try, by experiment, to find out which is fit for heaven and which deserving of hell. God don't know. And so he places us all here on probation. He didn't know, when he made Ingersoll, that he had created an enemy. God turns us all lose with a free will, and says, "go it." And God sits up there in the clouds with the celestial account-book open before him, and keeps tab on human conduct. When we close our period of probation here, God balances up the account, and we are checked for heaven or billed for hell, according to the way the debit and credit columns are balanced. It is all simple—very simple.

Belief in theological dogmas does not effect a man's character here. There are bad people all churches. Why should belief be the first condition to salvation? When God gave man a free will, was there a string to it? According to the church, God says to man: Do as you please. And then he adds: If you do I'll damn you good for it! This church doctrine of free will is perfectly absurd. It is as tho God said to man: You can do as you please so long as you do as I please. This is free will minus both freedom and will. However, consistency is an insignificant element in Christian theology. Contradictions in fact and logic do not worry theologians. When they discover a fact that does not fit their theology, it is bad for the fact, but it doesn't disturbe the theology.

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