Scientific Evidence for the Soul with Neurosurgeon Dr. Michael Egnor

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FRANK:
Ladies and gentlemen, is there any scientific evidence for the soul? Is there scientific evidence for the mind? Or are the mind and the brain the same thing? Do you really have a soul? Or do you just have a body? Well, you might be surprised to learn there's some new research out there from a scientific perspective that I think shows beyond any reasonable doubt, you not only have a mind, you also have a soul. And it comes from Dr. Michael Egnor, who is a professor of neurosurgery and pediatrics at Stony Brook University.

It's the school of medicine there. He got his training at the University of Miami, but he's been at Stony Brook since 1991. Get this. He's done over 7,000 brain surgeries. In fact, as we record this here today, he's going to be in surgery tomorrow. He's still doing these surgeries. And he has compiled with, Denise o' Leary, his co-author, an amazing new book that documents all this. It's called 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.' So, pull up a chair, because this is going to be a fascinating discussion with Dr. Egnor.

As I say, he comes all the way from Stony Brook University, ladies and gentlemen, on Long island, at the site of a debate I had with, Dr. Michael Shermer many years ago. Dr. Michael Egnor, it's great to have you on the program. How are you?

MICHAEL:
I'm great, Frank. Thank you so much for having me.

FRANK:
Oh, my pleasure. I've been watching your interviews and reading your book, and I think it's fascinating what you've written here. And I also think it's fascinating your story because you started as an atheist and a materialist. You were a brain surgeon. What shook you out of materialism?

MICHAEL:
Well, many things. I think the Lord shook me out of materialism, but he used some clever devices. I was brought up kind of in an atheist environment, and I always respected Christianity. I thought it was a lovely story. I thought Christians were really nice people. I just thought it was just a pleasant myth. I fell in love with science, and I majored in biochemistry in college, and I went on, and I fell in love with neuroscience and medical school and decided to become a neurosurgeon.

And I found as I practiced neurosurgery, that things I was seeing in patients and in patients who had brain conditions didn't really fit the textbooks that I had. And I saw that what was wrong was the materialist perspective that the textbooks took. So, it got me to thinking, and many other things in my life moved me to Christ.

FRANK:
It was so fascinating that you had actually a spiritual experience when your younger son was born. Can you tell our audience about that, what happened?

MICHAEL:
Sure. I would get these things that I called hauntings, which were episodes where I would just start to think, well, what am I doing here? Where did I come from? Where am I going? You get so caught up in everyday life that I felt as though I was missing the big question. And I didn't have any answers to that question. So, while this was going through my mind, my, youngest son was born. And my wife and I noticed that he wasn't really making really good eye contact as a young infant.

And I was afraid that he was autistic. And the thought that he wouldn't connect to me, was really terrifying to me. So, we took him to some specialists, got him evaluated. They said they couldn't really be sure. And when he was about six months old, I was outside a Catholic hospital seeing a patient in consultation late at night. And as I was leaving the hospital, I was really having a tough time emotionally. So, I stopped by the hospital chapel, and I got in front of the altar, and I prayed.

And I said, Lord, I don't know if you exist. I rather doubt that you do. But if you do exist, this is something I can't take. I can't have a child who is separate from me in this way. It's something I don't know that I can bear. And I heard a voice. Only time in my life I've ever heard a voice. And the voice said, but that's what you're doing to me. And I collapsed. I said, well, I won't do it to you anymore.

I'm sorry. I know how it feels now. And so, the next day I called up the church, said I need to get baptized like fast as possible. And so, and a couple days later was my son's six month birthday and I came home from work, and he was perfectly normal, making eye contact, smiling, a normal baby. So, I realized that the Lord had shown me what I was doing to him, and he wanted me to be closer to him. So, I've spent many years now trying to get closer to him and to help people see that Christ is the answer. Christ is the way.

FRANK:
And your work, this brand new work again, friends, it's called 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.' In it, you begin talking about how people who, you might think if they had part of their brain missing, wouldn't be able to function. But you found that wasn't the case. Can you unpack that for us here?

MICHAEL:
Sure. The medical textbooks that I had studied, described the brain as if it were a computer. And they were all kind of materialistically oriented. And I had patients who were missing major parts of their brains. And all neurosurgeons have this experience and a lot of them were really in pretty good shape. I had a little girl born missing about two-thirds of her brain. And the rest of her head was mostly water.

And I told her family that I didn't think she was going to do very well. And I followed her as she grew up. She's currently in her mid-20s and she's a perfectly normal person. She's actually rather bright. And I have a number of patients like that. That doesn't mean that everybody who's got problems with their brain is going to be okay, but there are many people who are okay. And it really struck me. At one point I was doing an operation on a woman who had a brain tumor in her left frontal lobe. And we had to do it with her awake, which we do occasionally.

And we use local anesthesia, so, there's no pain. And I had to map the surface of her brain to find out where her speech area was located because the tumor was very close to it. And I had to remove part of her brain that had the tumor embedded in it. And I was talking with her as I did this, and it was a surreal experience. I mean, I'm taking out a major part of the left frontal lobe of her brain as I'm having a conversation with her about the weather, and about her family, and about the hospital cafeteria food, and so on. And it struck me that none of the textbook said anything about this.

The textbook made it sound as though the brain is just a computer. And obviously, if you remove a major part of your computer, it's not going to work very well. But she was doing just fine. And so, I came to realize from that, and from doing a lot of research looking in the medical literature, that there's a part of our mind that is not in the brain, that we have souls. And there's an immaterial aspect to us.

FRANK:
It's so fascinating. And in your book, you go through several of these instances, but you also point out that there are certain parts of the brain that if you were to in any way interfere with it, would create some sort of disabilities. Why is that?

MICHAEL:
Well, yeah. I mean, and there certainly are. Roughly half the brain is what we would call eloquent brain. And eloquent brain means parts of the brain that you really need. And if there's any damage to them, you get serious trouble. You can have a stroke, brain injury, things like that. But there are other part, parts of the brain, about half the brain, that are not eloquent at all. And that one can damage or remove without any significant effect on a person's life. You can even cut a person's brain in half, which occasionally is done surgically to treat seizures.

And people, are pretty normal after that. And there's been a lot of research done on this. So, the brain in many ways is not like a computer. And the mind is not like computation. And there's a part of the mind that really fits the model of a soul better than it fits the model of a computer.

FRANK:
And when we come back from the break with Dr. Michael Egnor, we're going to see that there's not only evidence that you have a mind, but there's also evidence you have a soul. And some of this was discovered through surgeries that other neurosurgeons had done. And Dr. Egnor has then taken their findings and put them in this brand new book that you're going to want to get. It's called 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.'

There's much research in here I had never heard of, and this is one place you can go to get it, especially if you know somebody who is scientifically minded. This is the kind of book you want to get them. Again, 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.' It just came out June 3rd. You don't want to miss it. We're going to be back in just a few minutes. Don't go anywhere. We'll be back right after the break. You're listening to I Don't have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network and other radio stations around the country. My guest today, Dr. Michael Egnor. He is actually literally a brain surgeon. Tomorrow he'll be doing another brain surgery. He's done about 7,000 in his career already.

And he recently got together with a writer by the name of Denise o' Leary. And they put together in a fascinating new book called 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.' And Mike, there's a lot of research that a pioneer in neuroscience did that is a part of your book. Can you unpack what this gentleman did?

MICHAEL:
Sure. That's the work of Wilder Penfield. Dr. Penfield is probably the greatest neuroscientist of the neurosurgical profession. He worked in the mid 20th century, and he was fascinated by epilepsy. And he pioneered the surgical treatment of epilepsy. And what he did was, he developed operations where he would do awake brain surgery where the patients were awake because he had to test their brain and find out exactly where the various functions of the brain were located.

And then he would find the part of the brain that was causing the seizure, and he would remove that part so the patient wouldn't have any more seizures. And he really is responsible for most of what we know about brain maps. If you've looked in textbooks about the anatomy of the brain, you see there are parts of the brain that control movement, and speech, and sensation, and so on. And a lot of that work was Penfield's work. And he began his career as a materialist. And he believed that everything that we do in the mind comes from the brain.

And as he went on in his career and he worked for about 40 years, he really changed his perspective. And he became a dualist. And he believed that there was a part of the mind that didn't come from the brain. And he wrote a book called 'Mystery of the Mind' at the end of his career where he explained all of that. And, for example, he found that when he was mapping the surface of the brain, he would stimulate it with a small electrical current. And he found that he could elicit four different kinds of things when he would stimulate the brain.

He could elicit movement. Patient's arm or leg would move. He could elicit sensations like flashes of light, or tingling on the skin, and so on. He could elicit memories. If he touched the temporal lobe in certain places, people would have these memories of when they were a child with their mom or something. And he could elicit emotions, in certain parts of the brain. But he noticed something very odd, and this just amazed him, is that nowhere in the brain could he elicit any kind of abstract thought. He couldn't elicit any kind of reasoning.

People didn't, have, any-- He couldn't elicit mathematics or logic, anything like that. The higher kinds of thoughts didn't seem to come from the brain. He couldn't find them. And, eventually he said, well, the most reasonable scientific explanation for that is that that kind of thinking doesn't come from the brain. That there's an aspect of the mind that isn't located in the brain. And he also found that he couldn't elicit free will from the brain.

What he would do is he would ask people during the surgery-- They were under surgical drapes, and they couldn't feel what he was doing. And he would touch their arm area, and make their arm move. But he also asked them occasionally to voluntarily move their arm. And when their arm would move, he would ask them, did you do that, or did I do that? And they always got it right. They never got it wrong. And he said, he couldn't find any part of his brain that would make them think that they had freely willed to move their arm.

He said, I couldn't find any will center anywhere. So, he ended up, believing that the capacity for abstract thought and the capacity for free will were not from the brain. They were part of the soul, not part of the brain. So, the same thing that I had seen in my own practice, that there was a disconnect between what goes on in the mind and the soul and what goes on in the brain, he also saw. So, his work is fascinating and pioneering.

FRANK:
Now, is he the one also, Mike, that did the halving of the brain as well?

MICHAEL:
No, no. That was done by a number of different neurosurgeons beginning in the 1940's. And the research that was done on that was by a guy named Roger Sperry, who was a neuroscientist, who worked in the mid 20th century, who actually won the Nobel Prize for his work on that. There are certain kinds of seizures, relatively rare, that begin as a tiny focus in one side of the brain, and then they jump across to the other hemisphere of the brain through a big bundle of fibers called the corpus callosum, which is about the size of the palm of your hand.

And that would cause a major seizure. And it was discovered in the 1940's, that if you cut the corpus callosum, it would stop that kind of seizure from happening and give these people a lot better lives. And the surgery was done, and what was found, and I've done the surgery. That postoperatively, these people are really normal people. Their brain hemispheres are almost completely separated, but they feel like one person.

They don't become two people. They're not two centers of consciousness. They're amazingly normal. So, Roger Sperry, this neuroscientist, studied them in great detail, and he found ways that he could present images to each one of the hemispheres independently. And he did find some slight perceptual abnormalities in these people. They're very subtle. And the research was so beautiful that he won the Nobel Prize for it. But the amazing thing I think, and even Sperry commented on this, is how little a difference cutting the brain in half makes.

And particularly-- And there's been recent research that's looked into this in much more detail. What people find is that splitting the brain in half splits some aspects of our perception, like our

visual perception, but it doesn't split consciousness. It doesn't split our sense of self. It doesn't split our ability to think abstractly. That all remains unified, which implies that there is an aspect of the mind, which is the soul, that can't be split with a knife. You can split certain things because the brain is certainly an organ that's involved in some aspects of the mind, but not other things.

A wonderful example of this that actually gives me chills. This is a fascinating work. It's done by Alice Cronin at MIT. And what she's done is using certain techniques can take split brain patients and into one hemisphere, she shows a picture. To the other hemisphere, she shows three pictures, and she asks the person to match which of the three pictures conceptually matches the one picture in the opposite hemisphere.

And for example, one of the things she uses is a picture of an artist's palette in one hemisphere, and then a picture of a violin, a toilet plunger, and an electric light bulb in the other hemisphere. And she says, which one of those three pictures matches the other picture? And most people will pick the violin because an artist palette and a violin are both artistic things. But there's no part of the patient's brain that has seen both of those sets of pictures. One hemisphere sees the artist's palette. One hemisphere sees the violin.

But no part of the brain sees both. But the people can connect them. The people say, oh, those two match. So, the question is, what part of the person's mind is able to compare the two things? Because it's not the brain. The brain can't see both. One part of the brain sees one, the other part of the brain sees the other. They're not connected anymore. Go ahead.

FRANK:
No, no. Complete the thought. I have another question.

MICHAEL:
So, what that implies is that there's an aspect of the mind that is not material, that is part of the soul, that can integrate these things, that come from different brain regions that are no longer connected.

FRANK:
So, with our materialist, mindset, I'm going to ask you a category mistake question right now, Dr. Egnor, and that is, where is the mind?

MICHAEL:
Well, first of all, the concept of the mind is a pretty modern concept. Classical philosophers and so on didn't really think in terms of the mind. They thought in terms of the soul. And what I think is the most reasonable, most accurate way of understanding what a soul is, is Thomas Aquinas' way of understanding it, which is basically Aristotle's, which is that the soul is not some spooky, translucent thing that looks like you, but you can see through it, stuff like that.

The soul is just everything that we do that makes us alive. So, our soul is a set of activities that make us living human beings. So, my ability to speak is part of my soul. My heartbeat is part of my soul. My breathing is part of my soul. My vision is part of my soul. And the mind as we understand it now really is just several of those powers. That is, the mind is the ability to perceive, to move, to remember, to think abstractly.

And some of those powers are linked to the brain in very tight ways. But other powers like the intellect and the free will are not linked to the brain in a tight way. And I think that's the way the soul works, and that's the way that Thomas Aquinas felt the soul worked. And one of the things that utterly amazes me about modern neuroscience is that if you wanted a roadmap as to the way the mind works, you read Thomas Aquinas. I mean, he lays it out and the neuroscience strongly supports what he saw in the 13th century.

FRANK:
Yeah, here's a guy that lived from 1224 to about 1274, maybe. He lived 49 or 50 years, wrote as many books as probably are behind me on my shelf right now, and was a towering intellect who took much of what Aristotle said and baptized it. And you, actually in the book, go through Aquinas' five ways toward the end of the book. Again, friends, the book is called 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.' How do you think somebody like that had the foresight almost a thousand years ago to know this kind of material, Mike? Did he have some sort of inspiration or--?

MICHAEL:
Well, some of his inspiration was Aristotle. A great deal of his inspiration was the Bible. He was a Dominican friar, and he was a devout man, and he obviously spent many, many hours in prayer. And I believe that he was inspired by the Lord. And I'm just astonished by the accuracy of what he said. And I've been encouraging my friends and colleagues in neuroscience to abandon the materialist perspective, and go back to Aquinas, and go back to Aristotle, because they got a lot of things right.

FRANK:
Don't your colleagues notice the self-defeating problem in materialism? That they shouldn't even trust what they think if materialism is true?

MICHAEL:
They don't think that deeply. These kinds of deep philosophical questions I found-- And not to belittle many of my colleagues, but neuroscience is a technical business where they're studying their neurons, and they're studying their functional MRI imaging, and stuff like that. And there's not a lot of deep philosophy that goes on. But you can't understand this stuff unless you have a philosophical grounding.

FRANK:
Yeah. And you need that philosophical grounding because science doesn't say anything. Scientists do. And how you interpret the data depends upon the assumptions you bring to the data. And we'll talk more about that with my guest, Dr. Michael Egnor of Stony Brook University. He's done over 7,000 brain surgeries, and the new book is called 'The Immortal Mind.' Pick it up. Back in just a couple of minutes.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'll be down in Orlando on the 29th of June doing the morning services and then also the evening services. We're going to do I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. And it'll be at Faith Assembly in Orlando. So, in the morning we'll start I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. We'll conclude it in the evening and take your questions. Hope to see you there. Also, I want to mention we're about at the last week to register for CIA, or to apply to CIA the CrossExamined Instructor Academy.

It's going to be held in Charlotte end of August-- Or sorry, end of July into August for three days. Check that out. Go to CrossExamined.org. Click on events, you'll see 'What is CIA?' there. You need to apply. It's not free. You need to be accepted. But we have people that have come back five, six, seven times. This is the 18th year we're doing it. Also want to mention Brave Books has a lot of great books for your young, your young Christian. In fact, the one we're talking about today with Dr. Egnor, that topic is covered at least partially by a little book they have on the sanctity of life called 'Little Lives Matter.' So, go to Brave Books.

Go to Brave Books US and get a book a month from them. It's going to help your young person. It helps my grandkids who are now anywhere from-- Well, the one who's really into it is about four and a half right now. He loves these little books, so check all that out. Let me go back to my guest, Dr. Michael Egnor. The new book, 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.' At the end of the last segment, Mike, we were talking a little bit about science and how science doesn't say anything, scientists do, and all data needs to be interpreted. And you wanted to make a comment about that. Go ahead, sir.

MICHAEL:
Yes, Roger Scruton, who's a philosopher. I think he passed away recently, but was a wonderful philosopher, made a comment about neuroscience and a paraphrase that I think gets to the heart of a lot of the interpretive problems we face in neuroscience. And Scruton said that neuroscience is a vast trove of answers with no memory of the questions. That is, that we have to be very careful about what we're looking for and the way we view our science from a philosophical perspective, or we just consistently get the wrong interpretations of what we find.

And Werner Heisenberg, who's a famous physicist who was instrumental in the development of quantum mechanics back about 100 years ago, had a deep insight when he said that what we observe is not nature herself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning. So, that when neuroscience is studied as if the brain is-- As if the mind is just a material product of the brain, well then it kind of looks like the mind is a material product of the brain.

But that's an artifact of the way scientists study it. If scientists open their minds to the existence of the soul, the science is much better science, and the answers become much more clear.

FRANK:
I just find it fascinating that some neuroscientists assume materialism. But when they do that, in order to discover that materialism is true, they'd have to assume it's false. Because any data they get from their experiments, they assume they would have to have the freedom to follow the evidence where it led.

But they don't have that freedom if materialism's true. That's why I asked you earlier, don't they see that you can't prove materialism if you're a moist robot, if you're just a molecular machine.

MICHAEL:
Precisely. Materialism is a self-refuting claim. And if what materialists are telling people basically is that they believe that they're meat robots, and I couldn't care less what a meat robot thought about anything. So, yeah. It's just, it's a crazy thing. It's a crazy thing.

FRANK:
Now, in the book, 'The Immortal Mind', in addition to the experiments we've talked about earlier that Wilder Penfield did and also the splitting of the brain, you also talk about co-joined twins in this book. How does that show that materialism is not true and that we have a soul or a mind?

MICHAEL:
It's fascinating. And again, it shows how beautifully the Thomistic understanding of the soul applies to modern neuroscience. Conjoined twins are quite rare. And even more rare are twins that are joined at the head. And there are several in the world, and they share parts of their brains.

And probably the most famous of which are Krista and Tatiana Hogan, who are young ladies who were born with basically attached at the head. And they share a connection between their brains. And they've been studied in some depth. And for example, they can see through each other's eyes.

They can feel each other's skin. If her mother touches one child's leg, the other child also knows that the leg is being touched. And they share some memories. But interestingly enough they're completely different people. That is, they have different personalities, they have different opinions about things.

Clearly, I think what we're seeing there is that there are two different souls, two different distinct human beings who do share some mental abilities, but they don't share all mental abilities. And they're still completely distinct, and it's a fascinating thing. So, conjoined twins I think, tell us quite a bit about how the mind works.

FRANK:
Now, you did a very succinct presentation at the Discovery Institute's Science conference in February down in Dallas. I spoke there a couple years ago. You were just there in 2025. It's the Dallas Conference on Science and Faith. And you put a slide up. I have it on my screen right now.

We're going to put this presentation in the show notes friends, because this was just, it was action packed and to the point. And I want you to comment on this slide if you can, Dr. Egnor. You said this. The brain is the organ of movement, perception, memory, and emotion. There is no organ of intellect and will. Please comment on that.

MICHAEL:
Yes, and as you mentioned, it's a really nice synopsis. First of all, it's a nice synopsis of Thomistic psychology, of St. Thomas' understanding of the soul. And neuroscience really demonstrates it. The brain is an organ just like any other organ. That is, the heart has a job. It pumps blood. The kidneys have a job, they make urine.

Every organ does its thing. The brain's an organ. It's a piece of meat. And it really has five things. One thing it does is it regulates homeostasis, meaning it keeps our blood pressure normal, keeps our heartbeat normal, stuff like that. It allows us to move. It allows us to have sensations.

It allows us to have memories, and it allows us to have emotions. But the neuroscience makes it very clear I think that intellect, the capacity for reasoning, for abstract thought, and free will, don't come from the brain. They don't come from any meat. They're not from an organ. They're powers of our soul. But those powers of our soul are immaterial. And because they're immaterial, they're spiritual.

We have spiritual souls. And because they're immaterial, also, they can't die. That is, that things that are not matter can't disintegrate at the time of death. So, that points to the immortality of our souls, which I think is also demonstrated by neuroscience.

FRANK:
So, how then, if the brain is not the organ of the intellect, how is it then that people that have brain injuries have problems maybe expressing themselves or thinking, if in fact they do? How does that work?

MICHAEL:
It has to do with the difference between necessity and sufficiency. When you see a correlation between things, for example, the brain and the exercise of say, the brain and the exercise of vision. You can ask, first of all, is the brain necessary for the normal exercise of vision?

The answer is yes. If your brain isn't working right, you can have visual problems. Is it sufficient for vision? And the answer is also yes, meaning that if you've got a good brain, you can see. With the intellect and will, is the brain necessary for the normal exercise of intellect and will?

Yes. Right. I mean, if you drink too much alcohol, your will isn't going to be the same as when you're sober. And if you get hit on the head with a bat, your intellect isn't going to be the same as when you're sober. But is the brain sufficient for the intellect and will? And there's a ton of neuroscientific evidence that is not sufficient for it. That is, in a sense, the brain enables us to exercise our intellect and will normally. But the intellect and will don't come from the brain.

FRANK:
I think you may have found that in the part of the book where you talked about people who are in a deep coma, a vegetative state. Can you describe that, Dr. Engor?

MICHAEL:
Yeah, it's fascinating work. Just this landmark work. It was originally done by Adrian Owen, who's a neuroscientist at Cambridge, England, back about 20 years ago. There's a particular kind of severe brain damage called persistent vegetative state, that is actually deeper than coma, meaning it was believed by the medical profession that it was a state where a person had had such enormous brain damage, that there was no mind at all.

This person was just a body, just a shell. And it's just one step above brain death. And what Owen did, is he took a patient. It's been done on many patients since then. He put her in an MRI machine and did something called functional MRI imaging, which can let you know what's happening inside the brain as a person thinks and does things. And he asked her questions like, imagine you're playing tennis. Imagine you're walking across the room. And he found that, areas of her very badly damaged brain lit up in certain patterns.

So, he put normal people in the machine, and did the same thing, and the same areas lit up. It was as if she was understanding what he was saying. And then what he did is, he scrambled the words so that the same noises were coming into her ears, but they didn't make any sense and nothing lit up. So, what he showed was that she was understanding what he was saying even in the deepest level of coma. And other people have studied this. And they found that you can, for some people in persistent vegetative state, you can converse with them.

You can talk about their family. They can tell you things about what's happened in their life. There are people who can do a little bit of mathematics in persistent vegetative state using this imaging technique. So, what it shows us is that there's a disconnect between the brain. In these patients, the brain is massively damaged, nearly destroyed. And the capacity to have abstract thought, the capacity to use reason, to form concepts.

And that disconnection shows up again and again in neuroscience, and it shows up in the work with persistent vegetative state as well.

FRANK:
So, while their lack of a brain may affect their movement, perception, memory and emotion—

MICHAEL:
Precisely.

FRANK:
Their intellect and will is not as affected as much.

MICHAEL:
It seems that way. Yes, yes. Which has always been a question that I've had about persistent vegetative state. When your brain is massively damaged, you can't communicate. You can't talk. You can't move.

So, how do we know what's going on inside the mind? Because the only way that a person knows what's going on inside another person's mind anyway is just behavior. And brain damage, damages behavior. And what Owen showed is that the mind, in many cases, kind of keeps going even when behavior is damaged.

FRANK:
And right after this break, Dr. Egnor is going to tell us how they know what a person in a persistent vegetative state is thinking. There's a technique to it we'll talk about. Then we'll talk about near death experiences. What do they have to do with the existence of the mind and the soul? We're back right after the break. Don't go anywhere.

How does science show that you not only have a brain, but a mind? That you actually have a soul, that your brain isn't a computer? Well, my guest today has shown that, I think quite definitively. The new book is called 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.'

Dr. Michael Egnor is my guest. Mike, just before the break, we were talking about people in a vegetative state, and you pointed out that you can only know what somebody's thinking by them telling you. How does somebody in a vegetative state tell you what they're thinking?

MICHAEL:
It's a great question. There's a technique called functional MRI imaging and that's where you go into an MRI machine. And as you're thinking and doing things, the blood flow in your brain in various regions shifts and changes. And that change in blood flow seems to correspond to what you're thinking. And so, it can be used as a research tool. It's actually also used occasionally in clinical neurosurgery to help map the brain if a person needs brain surgery.

And we need to have a better understanding of the brain anatomy. So, people in the deepest levels of coma, persistent vegetative state can be studied using functional MRI imaging. And what can be shown is that despite the fact that their brains are massively damaged, the patterns that light up on the imaging, can show that people are capable of very sophisticated levels of thought even in the presence of massive brain damage. Very often, not always, but very often.

FRANK:
Yeah. So, you, I remember you saying in the presentation, you might say, what's six times nine? Or six plus nine? And once you get, if someone is counting up to 15, when you hit 15, their brain lights up.

MICHAEL:
Right.

FRANK:
So, they are communicating they know what you said. So, ladies and gentlemen, it seemed to me. Mike, did you agree that if you're visiting someone who's in a coma or in a vegetative state, you ought to talk to them?

MICHAEL:
Oh yeah. I tell families all the time that that's very important. And nurses who work in intensive care units all know this, that when you're in a room with somebody who's in a coma, you have to be careful of what you say. You shouldn't say things that are distressing or make the person frightened because it can change their vital signs. Their heart rate goes up. People respond.

FRANK:
So, Mike, is it fair to say, given the research you've done, that somebody who say, has dementia, has a problem maybe with memory? Which as you've discovered, is part of the brain. Yet, their mind may still be functioning properly. Is that a fair statement or not?

MICHAEL:
Yeah, I think there's certainly evidence that would point to that, particularly with a phenomenon called paradoxical lucidity, which is actually fairly common. In which people in the late stages of Alzheimer's, will have periods of time, 30 or 40 minutes, where they will just wake up and they can be actually very much like their old self.

They're quite lucid, quite with it, and then slip back down again. And this is very, very well-documented. A colleague of mine at Stony Brook named Steven Post actually has written a book about it. And so, the lights are on, I think, more than we're aware of in patients who have severe dementia. Which is a good reason of course, to always deal, with people who have severe dementia in compassionate, humane ways, because they understand a lot very often.

FRANK:
But sometimes the erratic behavior is more a result than of physical damage to their brain rather than their mind. Is that a fair statement?

MICHAEL:
Yes, yes. And this unlinking of certain aspects of the mind from aspects of the brain shows up again and again in neuroscience. Obviously, having a severe brain problem can affect the way you express yourself. But there's a lot of evidence that in many cases there's a much better functioning mind behind the way the brain works.

FRANK:
Tell us a little bit about near death experiences, because you have a section in the book about that. Again, the book is 'The Immortal Mind.' How does this show that the brain and the mind are not the same?

MICHAEL:
Well, near death experiences, first of all, are fairly common. About at least 9 million Americans have had some kind of near death or out of body experience. That's pretty well established. And about 20% of those experiences involve accuracy perceptions that take place during a time when the brain is not functioning. Probably the most famous near death experience was a woman named Pam Reynolds, who was a lady who had an aneurysm at the base of her brain and required a very radical kind of brain operation to fix the aneurysm, called a standstill procedure.

It was done in Phoenix by Robert Spetzler, who was a neurosurgeon there who specialized in this back in 1991. And what Speltzer had to do was, he had to cool her body down in the operating room under general anesthesia to about 60 degrees Fahrenheit to protect her brain.

Then to put her on a heart lung machine, then to stop her heart, and stop the blood flowing to her brain. Then to tilt the operating table up so the blood drained out of her brain and then fix the aneurysm. The aneurysm was in a blood vessel, and he had to repair the blood vessel, open it, and fix it, without blood flowing through it.

And he had about 30 minutes before she would have permanent brain damage. And he did the surgery. It worked very well. She was tested meticulously. They tested her brain waves. And she was clearly completely brain dead. I mean, there wasn't even any blood inside her brain. Her heart wasn't beating. And after the surgery, she told Dr. Spetzler that she watched the whole operation. She said that as soon as her heart stopped beating, that she felt a pop and she felt herself coming out of her body.

She rose up to the ceiling of the operating room, over Spetzler's shoulder, watched him operate. She described to him in detail about his surgical instruments. She described his conversations word for word that he had. She described what the other doctors said and did during the operation. She knew intimate details of the surgery. Then she said she went down a tunnel. At the other end of the tunnel, she saw deceased relatives. They told her she had to go back and raise her kids. She had three kids. She couldn't stay on the other side.

She went back down the tunnel. And she said that going back into her body was like diving into a pool of ice water, which is true because her body temperature was 60 degrees. So, she's a very well documented case of near death experiences. And people who have near death experiences have these remarkable things happen to them. And when I've discussed this with skeptics-- And there are many materialists out there who are skeptical of the reality of these experiences. I point out that there are four aspects of the near death experiences that a skeptic has to explain.

One is that people who have these experiences have crystal clear thoughts. Very detailed, high level thoughts that are not characteristic of somebody who has a dying brain. Second of all, that they have out of body experiences very often that occur when their brain is not working. That is when their heart is stopped, their brain is not functioning, but they can see what's going on. They see details around them. They actually say that their perceptions are more accurate, are more comprehensive than when they were in their body.

Also, something that really fascinates me is that when people go down the tunnel and they meet people at the other end of the tunnel-- As far as I know, in every recorded instance, the people they meet are dead. That is, you don't meet living people at the other end of the tunnel. It's not like wishful thinking.

Like you would like to see your wife and you see her at the other end to comfort you, but she's still alive. And there have been a number of reports of people who see people at the other end of the tunnel who are dead that they didn't know were dead. People, who had, someone who passed away that they didn't know they passed away, but they met them at the tunnel.

And near death experiences are transformative. People really-- It transforms people's lives. So, for skeptics, I challenge them with these four characteristics of near death experiences because I think, at least in a certain subset of people, these experiences are very real, and they indicate that the soul is not the same thing as the body.

FRANK:
This is fascinating material, and your book goes into it in a lot of detail. Again, friends, the book by Dr. Michael Egnor and Denise O'Leary, is 'The Immortal Mind.' It just came out earlier this month and it is such a great read. There are so many insights in here that will help you. Mike, can you kind of summarize it for us and give us the personal impact of this on our viewers and listeners?

MICHAEL:
Yeah, I think it's very important to understand that we have immortal souls, that there's an aspect to us that is spiritual. And the human soul is a spirit, and the human spirit is a soul. We're really spiritual creatures who are embodied. And that means, it means a lot. It's not just a scientific or philosophical observation.

It's a very practical thing. It means, for example, that everything we do has reverberations in eternity. That we are eternal creatures, and people we deal with are eternal creatures. And everything we do matters. Things don't go away when we die, that we continue living.

And it's important to live this life the way we are intended to live this life. And I think the way we're intended is the way God intends us to live this life. And it also tells us a lot about the sanctuary sanctity of human life. That life begins at fertilization of the sperm and the egg, and that, even a tiny embryo has a soul. And it's the same soul that we have when we grow up. It just has different possibilities and different actualities, but it's every bit as much of a soul as a soul we have.

And it means that we have to respect the lives of children in the womb, respect the children lives of handicapped people, respect the lives of people at the end of life. And that life is sacred, because we're dealing with spiritual souls. It tells us that we have to respect people of different races and different ethnicities because there's no such thing as a white soul, or a black soul, or a Hispanic soul.

We're all human beings. And it tells us that, I think, that we should get right with God. We should come to know our Lord and know our Creator, because we're going to spend eternity with him.

FRANK:
Fascinating, Mike. Thank you so much for being on the program and for this book, 'The Immortal Mind.'

MICHAEL:
Thank you, Frank.

FRANK:
That's Dr. Michael Egnor. You can also see his writings at the Discovery Institute. There's a section there called Mind Matters News. Check it out. He's got a couple of podcasts and blogs right there. Get the book as well, 'The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.' Give it to somebody who's scientifically oriented. They're going to be very intrigued. Thank you, Dr. Egnor. All right, see you guys here next time. God bless.