



The Metaphysical Problem of the Ontological Destiny of Man

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Abstract

Change according to Heraclitus is the only abiding substance observable in the universe. The implication of this view is that apart from change which remains the only constant thing, there is nothing that is held to be permanent. That is why life though relatively blissful, sooner or later is overtaken by death. Of course, death is always a dread to human consciousness. It is a phenomenon which man has always wished that it not be a reality. It is this facticity and the finitude of life that the writer intends to critically examine in this paper. With the methodological approach of critical reflection, he aimed at achieving the goal of the study which concludes that death is an inescapable phenomenon awaiting every single existent being, though not the end of existence.

Keywords: Immortality; Soul; Rationality; Intellection; Death

General Introduction

Though death like life (or existence), is an indisputable fact, unlike life (in which people look forward to with enthusiasm in terms of marriage, birthday and all the good things of life), death is the very least anticipated. To many people, death is the worst evil that has ever come the way of man. Yet for Heidegger it is a gift and our faith in Christ has also given it a new meaning. What then can we say is the philosophy of immortality? One can say that it is a response to the old metaphysical problem on the ontological destiny of man and of the existence of a place of rest for the soul after the disintegration of this body at death. Also it would seem to be a response to the materialists who do not accept the view of the survival of the soul after death. Thus, the main issue of conceiving a philosophical inquiry into the concept of immortality is basically to investigate into the possibility or the illusionary view of idea or belief of survival after death in a bid to address those who ignorantly think that the body and soul at death, becomes food to worms; and at such are eternally destroyed. A knowledge of this philosophical

inquiry will convict them of their errors, make them unlearn what is evil and learn what is good

Empirical Review

Also, this issue is fundamental to human life for our attitude to it will determine our entire attitude to life itself. However, experience of what happens after death is not known to anybody alive, so there is no logical, practical or empirical proof of what actually happens. We say this because the issue of immortality of the soul involves an important fact. But if it is not logically possible that there is life beyond the grave, it is, also impossible to assert the contrary namely that, the human existence is destroyed at death [1].

To this extent, one might be pushed to ask quite frankly thus--can philosophy claim to possess the faculty and the instrument to investigate into such a concept like God and soul? Thus humility and carefulness of this meta-philosophy (reason) does not and must not mean the exclusion of the possibility of philosophy to investigate on the destiny of the

soul, to know and to say something about it. On the other hand, philosophy which depends solely on the power of the human reason, sensible experience and intuition or imagination, must always or also be humble to admit its own limits regarding the subject-matter and the like. Everything searchable by man is not exhausted and exhaustible by the unaided human power of his reasoning. Nevertheless, as human beings and in line with our attitude to all similar difficult issues, we can achieve some level of reasoning regarding this, for our practical need. In this analysis we wouldn't stick strictly on proofs, for there are certain things beyond the rule of logic. For example there is no way you can prove to someone that you really love him or her. It is often taken for granted, especially among partners and insistence of such proof among partners often destroys rather than enhance such relationship. And so philosophical questions like the immortality of the soul, the existence of God and the freewill belong to such level of consideration. Therefore, we should keep our minds free from all kinds of prejudice regarding them. Generally speaking, philosophical enquiry is a conceptual analysis, and this, does not involve proofs. Proofs strictly speaking, are available when it is possible to show that an assertion is true and acceptable to others, also as true. Truth in philosophy usually presented as in the case of logic in forms of syllogism with a premise and conclusion. Even in this case, what matters is the form not the context of the presentation.

Immortality, a Fact or a Fade

It is the intention of the study to focus on just two aspects: the Soul and Death; not that there are not other areas whose implications would help address this issue of immortality, rather it is the intention of this article to limit its idea to those two concepts only.

The Soul

It was St. Thomas Aquinas who summarily defined soul as the primary (first) principle of life in those things in our world which exists [2]. The soul as the first principle of life is that which makes a body a living body [3], and without which the body will surely cease to be a living body. However, for Socrates and Plato, the soul was clearly a definite entity that could exist apart from the body. It is far more than merely a personification of the life of the body, for Plato said; it was a "self-moving power", which could also set the body into motion. As such, it existed before the body and could survive the death of the body. It was also the carrier, of individual personality and could be reincarnated into another existence. Plato puts it thus: "Every soul is immortal for that which is ever moving is immortal; but that which moves something else or is moved by something else, when it ceases to move,

ceases to live...but since that which is moved by itself has been seen to be immortal, one who say that this self-motion is essence and the idea of the soul, will not be disgraced... for everybody which has its motion within itself has a soul, since that is the nature of the soul; but if this is true, then that which moves itself is nothing else than the soul - then the soul would necessarily be ungenerated and immortal [4]."

In Aristotle's psychology which was a study on the soul, he insisted that, a living body substance (the essence or unchanging characteristic element in an object) and matter (the common undifferentiated substum of things) always exist together. Aristotle defined a soul as a kind of functioning in a body organized so that it can support vital functions in considering the soul as essentially associated with the body, he challenged the Pythagorean doctrine that the soul is a spiritual entity imprisoned in the body. Aristotle's doctrine is a synthesis of the earlier notion that the soul does not exist apart from body and of the Platonic notion of a soul as a separate and non-physical entity. On this, Aquinas, therefore warned against the possibility misconstrued understanding of the meaning of soul as as the first source of life. He distinctively describes:

It is manifested that not every source of vital action is a soul, for then the eye would be a soul, since it is a source of vision; and the same could be said of the other instrument of the soul [5].

The Soul as the Subject of Immortality

It is an obvious datum of experience that man is subject to death; death meaning the corruption of a living being that is, by decomposition of its component parts. These component parts of a living body is its body and soul, hence man's death means the separation of his body and soul. When death occurs, the "body" continues to exist in the sense that the matter which formally had a human soul is now informed by other substantial form corresponding to the distinct material substance existing in the corpse. We may continue to speak about the corpse as a "human body but it should be clear that the corpse is not a human body in the proper sense of the term because it is not, but merely was the body of a man [6].

Kinds of Soul

The concept of the soul is not restricted only to the human species. But it cuts across every living being for we have it as the vital principle by which things live and when lost, death takes over the kingdom that once belongs to life. Each living being has that vital principle, called soul by which it is alive; a thing not to be weighed or measured, yet not to be doubled in the face of the graphic facts of life. These souls are not Composite things to be taken apart; they are not bodies

but the principles by which bodies come alive. The soul is not necessarily what differentiates man from other animals and created things. What actually distinguishes man from other created things, from the Igbo-African conceptual perspective is the self which is the union of body, soul and spirit. Hence:

Man is not subject to departmentalization and disjointedness that characterized Western thought. Thus, it is not the soul that survives death as is the case with Western ontology. Rather, it is the „Onye“ the „mmadu“ (the self) as a unity of „Obi“ (soul), „ahu“ (body) and „Mmuo“ (Spirit) that survives death. It is not the body from the strict sense that distinguishes man from spirits as such, as some would think. After all, there are spiritual bodies as well as material bodies [7].

Therefore this soul is not particular to human species but common characteristics of all living beings. We, therefore distinguished three kinds of besouled organisms among the creatures of the earth: plants, animals and man. From these emerged three kinds of souls: vegetative soul, sensitive soul and rational soul respectively. Each of these souls is distinct by the virtue of its special power that is manifested in its operation [8].

Vegetative Soul

Vegetative soul is proper to plant. It is, therefore the lowest kind of souls when compared with the sensitive and rational souls. The nature of this vegetative or otherwise called plant soul, is not directly clear for investigation by the light of pure reason, but can however be determined from its operations in accordance with the metaphysical datum that action follows being. This vegetative soul is purely material but we do not intend to say that it is composed of matter rather that it is intrinsically dependent upon matter for its very existence. In other words, it is a non-substant being, that is, that which can not exist by its self or boast of autonomy. But can only exist only in dependence or attachment upon the body of the plant. The vegetative soul in plants does three basic functions: it facilitates nutrition, growth and reproduction. Nutrition is what sustains a living thing in existence, and the absence of nutrition results into a radical cessation or termination of life. The process of nutrition mainly involves three differentiated factors:

First, that which is fed, and this is the body, second, that whereby the body is fed, and this is food, third, that whereby the food is transformed into the body and this is the soul [9].

The above differentiated factors are what facilitate the process of nutrition. Despite the obvious reality that plants are stationed in a particular place through their roots, they are equally still living things. As such, they are capable of reproducing their kinds just as other living mortal beings.

Sensitive Soul

After the vegetative soul which belongs to plants, there is a sensitive soul. This sensitive soul is peculiar to animals alone. There should be no doubt regarding the existence of a sensitive soul in animal, that is, the soul as really the principle of life in a being. Nature, accordingly, has arranged, first that all animals should have a sense of touch; second that it should be distributed throughout the whole body [9].

Animals have vital operations and potencies, which can exist only in the body endowed with a vital principle. The soul of an animal is essentially different from the soul of plants, because its vital operations of sensing and appetency are essentially different from the operations of vegetative life.

Animals are not only capable of nourishing themselves and of reproduction as plants are, but also have the power of sensations. It has the faculties of sensitive cognition, sense appetite and locomotion which abide within it. Animals possess five external senses, tactual sense, gustatory sense, olfactory sense, auditory sense and visual sense [8].

The type of soul required by the specific activities of animal life is called sensitive soul. By way of definition, we mean here, the soul whose highest activity consists in the operation of the sense life. From intrinsic dependence of the sensitive soul upon the body, it follows that this soul cannot continue to exist after the death of the animal. The fact about the vegetative and sensitive soul of plants and animals is that they are not made up of parts, not to be located in the leaves or the roots, head or tail, for by the soul the whole being lives head as well as tail.

Rational or Intellectual Soul

Unlike plants and animals, human beings are endowed with the power of activities such as thinking and choosing freely. Human beings are, therefore attributed with the higher kind of soul which is called a rational soul. Rational soul is known for its performance of the highest function. Of all the kinds of souls, only the rational soul belongs to man, and it is the rational soul that distinguishes man from both the plants and other animals.

The rational soul designates man as a human creature, an intellectual being, one whose proper action is to be understood. That is the primary function of the intellect. The primary object of intellect according to St. Thomas, is a universal being and its function is to apprehend the being [8].

Even the most confirmed and known materialist will agree in the existence of rational soul and that achievement of a man marks him out from other animals. While other animals continue to live, generation after generation without

any distinguishable change in their total way of life, man largely determines his own way and constantly endeavours to improve his condition and pattern by purposefully seeking for new and best known way and tools for doing things, by deliberate use of tools and the invention of language by which he communicates his ideas sets him apart from the visible world. And these activities show that man has an intellect. By a tool we mean here, anything used by an agent to reach a desired purpose. Such a purposeful use of tool implies that the user (man) knows the tool as a tool, the purpose as a purpose, and the relationship of one to the other. It implies also that the user (man) is able to judge whether or not a thing is suitable as a tool for the desired purpose. But the knowledge of tool as tool, purpose as purpose, cannot be had by sense power (earthly means). But accordingly, man's ability to make a deliberate use of tools shows that he has a supersensible power of cognition.

Death

Death has been conceived as an event which every human being must conform on their own account. Many people, therefore see death as an inescapable reality, an all-inclusive event and a formal course of the "teleological world." A. L. Vischer, rightly observes:

Death, in terms of life, is not a potential event which at some time or other becomes a reality, but rather our life is shaped into what we know it to be only by the virtue of the fact that, growing or declining, on the sunlit heights of life or in the shadow of its lowlands, we are at all times creatures who will die [10].

Ludwig & Strock, having understood the inevitability and the universality of death, succinctly summarise:

To ignore death is unrealistic. Not bothering with the problem of death is equivalent to divorcing philosophy from the profoundest theme which has troubled, mystified and hunted mankind from the beginning of time [11].

Thus the Igbo say that "death is written on the palms of every man (*Onwu di na akara aka*)", so as he daily looks at his palms, he becomes aware that he will come to an end one day. The characteristics of death is that: it is universal and, therefore, does not look anyone in the face before striking its murderous blow, and it does not take into account position or race or wealth or age or gender or religion. It is inescapable: there is nothing anyone can do to escape the inevitability of death. Any battle against death is doomed to fail. Onwuatuegwu, succinctly summarises:

In Igbo-African milieu, the consciousness of the reality of death is taken for granted. Hence, the Igbo saying that a pilgrim is always aware of the fact that

he must one day depart or set out to go back from where he comes from (*Obiara ije nwe una*) [12].

Another characteristic is that death is imminent. Despite the fact that the precise moment of death is not known, and despite the fact that death is somewhere in the future, yet death is already present as unavoidable possibility [13]. It is not something entirely and instantly fixed in an undetermined future that does not touch us at the present moments; it is always present, potentially interweaving itself with life and threatening it. Flowing from the above characteristics, therefore, is the universal consciousness of death, which gives rise to aversion and anguish in man. Men generally, no matter where they are found, detest death and do not wish to hear it being spoken of. In fact, the fear of death is universal. There is no problem in the human situation that has been subjected to the creative imagination of man that is more than the prospect of the fact that he is going to cease to exist one day [14]. From the characteristics, it implies also that death of man is a biological necessity, and, in death, the essence of man is revealed as a creature. It is the sign of the "Creatureness" of man and therefore is inescapable, necessary and the direct consequence of his composite nature.

Heidegger tells us that death belongs in a special way to the very being of existence. Death is an unqualified impossibility of continuing to exist, and man can in no way escape this impossibility. Death is the end of terrestrial existence, as we have noted in the characteristics above. Heidegger says that it is the most distinctive, unconditional, the most certain and, therefore the most undetermined and insurmountable possibility of existence. Death exists as the end of existence in the very being of this existing thing right down to its very end [15]. Death is the completion of existence, but not in the sense of an ultimate perfection, as, for example, a tree finds its perfection, its completion and the very purpose of all its vital activity in the fruit that is fully ripened. Such a maturity, such a termination must not be attributed to existence; and yet death is not merely a ceasing to exist, it is also the very way in which a thing exists. As soon as man comes into life, he is old enough to die. Thus man must anticipate death as the possibility which unfolds all other possibilities. The acceptance of the unavoidable nature of death at the highest level of passion is an empowering thing [16]. and not as a dreadful absurdity. Hence Africans in general and Igbo-Africans in particular conceive death as a door to immortality. I. N. Onwuatuegwu, thus emphasizes:

Nevertheless, man is a being unto immortality. Death from the Igbo-African ontological point of view is but only a vehicle with which man is conveyed to immortality. It is an unavoidable path which every single individual person must unavoidably pass through if one is to be translated and transformed into immortality [12].

Conclusion

The philosophy of immortality which begins at death may be summarized as follows: man is a composite being consisting of a principle of externality, and the material body, which is perishable, changing, and passive and an inner core, the soul which is the ontological foundation of the body, its director and its power of motion. The soul is the image of the unseen God in us, the ultimate principle of being and operation in man. It is the spring of thought and love. At death the body disappears to the earth while the soul continues in being in an invisible and purified state. Even the body that is material, can be said to be immortal in some sense. If we are to take the axiom of chemistry, therefore, matter cannot be destroyed but can only change from one state to the other. On this ground I. N. Onwuatiegwu rightly observes:

But materiality is part of reality. As such, neither the created beings nor the universe in general are static but rather dynamic. Dynamism is the natural condition of existence in the world of the moving and sensible reality. Hence, peoples concepts of reality should be necessarily subjected to constant evaluation and re-evaluation in order to ascertain their validity (Onwuatiegwu, 2021: 25)[7].

There are still so many things to learn, but they are not within the ambiance of this work. Such knowledge is within the ambiance of the process of the ultimate purification of the soul.

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