

THE PHENOMENON OF DEATH IN HUMAN EXISTENCE: TOWARDS AUTHENTIC SELFHOOD

Alloy S Ihuah,
Department of Philosophy,
Benue State University, Makurdi
aihuah@bsu.edu.ng



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Abstract

The natural principle of change is inevitable in human existence. In itself, this principle embodies continuity and discontinuity. As to what end man's being transcends to, is an interrogative of important discourse in this paper. Does Man flux from life to death; in nothingness, and from death, in nothingness, to life in somethingness? What does it mean to be human, to die and to experience change and human transcendence? The frequent nature of death, the death of loved ones, colleagues and friends elicit lamentations and sorrows, but more importantly, it expresses human incapacity, fear of the unknown, lack of knowledge of death, and of what it means to die. The book of Job (14:14) interrogates this phenomenon of man thus: If man dies shall he come back to life?. A triad may be further agitated; if a man lives to die, does he die to live? If God is life, is God death also? If life is a means to an end, is death the end? These interrogatives exemplify the character and paradox of human existence; the more the knowledge of man about man, the more Man understands that he knows little about himself. The paper argues further that man by his very essence encapsulates change, discontinuity and continuity in his/her dissolution through death. That death is not an external and public fact that creates a sense of loss and sadness to humanity, but an internal possibility of his being. It is the fulfillment of the Man project of self-liberation, self-transcendence, and a process of surpassing his/her existential condition. In death, man ceases to be the impersonal social being among beings and has been freed from the servitude of the anonymous "they" to his/her own most potentiality for being. A conclusion is argued that, in death, Man further becomes the most vitalizing fact of life and the cardinal indicator of authentic selfhood.

Introduction:

A reading Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, unveils the worries of men about the future; 'the roaring current of change, a current so powerful today that it overturns institutions, shifts our values and shivers our roots'. Today humanity is not only

undergoing shattering stress, disorientation, but also experiencing meaninglessness in being human. The phenomenon of man, starting from the formation of our planet through the emergence of life, and later the end state referred to as the Omega point by de

Chardin is a process of change that intrigues Man. Of particular interest to us here is the question of the somethingness as well as the nothingness of Man; of his death and of what becomes of him after death. Such is what the Heraclitean dictum argues as change; which as it were is a necessary quality of existence.

The major concern of meta-physicians is what becomes of the two composing entities; body-pure *matter* and soul – pure *form* at the disintegration of the physical body. Opinions are divided between the materialists' meta-physician on the one hand, and the idealists on the other. There is yet another, though not too popular school of thought, the agnostics who claim lack of knowledge in so far as the issue of immortality of the soul is concerned. There are those who claim, not without some reason, that they have penetrated the veil which hangs over the every grave that divide this life from the mystery that lies beyond, and have thus looked upon the reality of life after death. For these people the case for incorporeity of the soul is a reality. But the other side of the coin of the argument views such belief as blind faith, evidence of which is insufficient for reasoning men. Such belief they conclude is mythical to say the least.

This paper argues that, the soul; the spiritual substance, immaterial entity survives beyond this physical world. While not leaving out the possibility that the long held belief in incorporeity by geniuses like Plato, Aquinas, Augustine may turn out to be mythical, the essay argues further that, there is mass evidence in nature itself in favor of incorporeity of the soul; that from nothingness before

creation, man came to *be* in creation (somethingness), and in death (body), Man becomes nothingness to transcends to somethingness in spirit (soul).

The Phenomenon of Death

The question of death exemplifies the paradox of human existence. It expresses the limited essence of man in whom fear of destruction and of nothingness from something abound, and the inherent burning desire to transcend his limited being and surpass his present existence and become something out of nothing. Such double think leaves man with no option but to reason about death in personal terms; as an obscenity, a nasty and brutish thing which polite persons will talk about only in low tones. Death, even when unmentionable, remains universal, fearful, imminent, inexorable and inescapable. Philosophers and Theologians alike are unanimous in agreeing on this phenomenon as the one sure fact of life; that one day, with or without warning, quietly or painfully, it is going to stop.

St. Augustine nicely lends his voice here that, "from the moment man begins to exist in a body which is destined to die, he is involved all the time in a process whose end is death".¹ The Ageless Wisdom of the Buddha captures it more dramatically when it states that;

*...By the example of the change of
days, months, and the four seasons,
Come to realize that the blossoming
spring flower-like body
subject to change, as time passes its
youth fades away,
And the arrival of the lord of death is
certain.*

¹ Read St. Augustine's city of God for further insight

*By the example of the fall of ripened
fruits
Come to realize that...what is born
will die.
By the example of the arising of
reflections in ponds
Come to realize that various
phenomenon appear but have
no true existence.*²

The suggestion here is that, the phenomenon of death is so hard an existential truth that, Man cannot escape its study. Batista Mondin records here that, this inescapable “phenomenon of death is too frequent, striking and painful to allow us to ignore it”.³ It suffices then to reflect this day, on *death* and possibly understand what it means to die, and in particular to fathom what happened to man in his death (*The Big Sleep*). The Sages of Ancient times distinguish two types of deaths, namely, *existential-ontological death* and *public death*. Understood in a reverse order, public death or clinical death is a social fact. It provokes in Man the cessation of the functions necessary for the essential to the body; it is the separation of the body from the soul. This type of death elicits written epitaphs, dirges (sorrowful songs), expression of condolences and sympathies to the dead person's family.

Here understood, death gets treated as an evil, a necessary end and an unfortunate incident that must be overcome by man someday. Taken on this score, Religion and Mythology attempts to provide

answers as to when man would conquer death and thus live forever. *Existential death* or absolute death on the other hand, is the definitive separation of the soul from the body. It is rooted in the very structure of human existence. It is the end of *being-in-the-world*. Argued here, absolute death is not something evil that happens to man that he can overcome by being redeemed from an original sin. It is rather a human experience that begins the very day that man is born, it is potency in wait for actualization; a necessary possibility that puts an end to all material possibilities to make way for an immaterial, indissoluble, incorruptible and immortal spirit. It is not just the ending of life or some unfortunate incident which befalls man but a vitalizing structural component of the human being (Unah, 1996: 96), a "transit area", on the way to a continuation of life by other means. While the former approach presents a disjunction, the latter is a continuum, death being nothing but a corridor into another plane of existence.⁴ It is understood as the cessation of the exercise of force over physical systems. It is the sudden absence of physical effects previously associated with the dead object, a singularity, a discontinuity. It is a terminal change in the state of the hardware.

Batista Mundin captures this unique quality of Man when he says, “to have knowledge seems to belong properly to Man as much as it belongs to him to know thought...Death is for Man such a

² Tulku Tondup “Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom....” In Radha Burnier (Ed), *The Theosophist*, vol.126, November, 2004. P. 67

³ Batista Mundin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, Bangalore, India, Theological, 2007. 263

⁴ **Vaknin Sam**, *Cyclopedia Of Philosophy* Lidija Rangelovska, **A Narcissus Publication Imprint, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia**, 5th Edition, 2009. P. 278

distinction that one cannot renounce it, without which one cannot live. This manifestly means that differently from the other beings, we possess this distinct sign that death is something for us".⁵ It is a biological necessity that undertakes to purify the soul. It is the separation and release of the soul from the body. The question of urgent human importance is whether this biological necessity that occurs in the separation of the body from the spirit marks the end of Man? In every death that occurs, we are led to ask ourselves: what is left of the being of those who die and what will become of us when we are struck by the same scourge?

Humanity is always in this case, first and foremost, asking questions and questioning answers, all in an effort to unravel the mystery of death. How can anyone discover what life means from which we can also understand what death entails? If death ends all, if we have either to hope for good to come or fear evil, we must ask ourselves what we are here for, and how in these circumstances we must conduct ourselves. These interrogatives may have informed Tom Stoppard to query thus, Who are we that so much should converge on our so little deaths...? To be told so little—to such an end—and still, finally to be denied an explanation...?⁶ In seeking metaphysically grounded answers to our interrogatives on the true being of Man, we must be well informed on the rapport between body and soul.

Death as Discontinuity

Since the time of Plato five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the discussion of immortality has been conducted by the greatest minds upon the highest levels of human thought in the areas of theology, philosophy, science, psychology and poetry. While some have explored and uncovered the mystery that lies beyond and have thus looked upon the reality of survival after death, others have simply questioned the evidence upon which one is invited to believe in immortality. The evidence, when provided at all, concludes supporters of the myth of immortality theory, may be wholly insufficient for reasoning men, and so nothing but empty verbiage.

When Spinoza attempted a solution to the body-mind problem, saying that both are attributes of one and the same entity, he was most obviously alluding to the logic that for everything that happens in one realm, a corresponding event occurs in the other. For him, the logical order of mind (soul) was identical with the physical order, (the body) and vice versa. By the streak of this logic, it follows that, the argument in support of immortality is a myth.

But of course this is wrong thinking which amounts to poor analogy leading to what Gilbert Ryle calls category – mistake.⁷ The human being is a composition of two substances; the body which is material in space and is subject to the mechanical laws which govern all bodies in space, and

⁵. Batista Munda, *Philosophical Anthropology*, Bangalore, pp. 268-269

⁶. Stoppard, 1981:10)

⁷. Read further elucidation in, Gilbert Ryle *In Body and Mind: Readings in Philosophy* G.N.A. Vessel (ed) London. 1969.

the mind which on the hand is not in space nor is its operations subject to mechanical laws. Unlike pure matter that disintegrates after death, mind which is pure form survives death and continues to exist and function.

Here again we are confronted with the problem of rational evidence. Belief in immortality goes with it reason for believing. But people who believe in the immortality of the soul are hesitant to question, seek, and to find credible rational evidence for their belief. According to Durrow, they do not ask because they know that only silence comes out of the eternal darkness of endless space. As he questions, if people really believed in a beautiful, happy glorious land waiting to receive them when they died, If they believed that all pain and suffering would be left behind, why would they live through weeks, months and even years of pain and torture while a cancer eats its way to the vital parts of the body? Clearly, our organized fight against death speaks volumes; that we don't believe in any real sense, but only hope which can simply be translated as blind faith.

Another reason for discountenancing belief in immortality is said to be the beginning of life and its end. Such argument as to continuation of life (soul) after death is primitive and for primitive man who like the rest of the animals had no conception of life as having a beginning and an end. Today, they say, every one of the ordinary intelligence knows how life begins, and to examine the

beginning of life leads to inevitable conclusions about the way life ends. If a man has a soul, it must creep in somewhere during the period of gradation and growth. After being fertilized by union with another cell, it follows similarly that, at death, such activities as memory, consciousness which portends life, or the soul terminate. Here again Durrow argues that, it is wishful thinking to fathom an idea of immortality. As he put it, no such idea as belief in immortality of the germ cells, fertilized under right conditions, could satisfy the yearnings of the individual for a survival of life after death. He queried:

“if man has a soul that persist after death, that goes to a heaven of the blessed or to hell of the condemned, where are these places? It is not easily imagined as it once was. How does the soul make its journey? What does immortal man find when he gets there, and how will he live after he reaches the end of endless space?”⁸

It may be argued here that the conception of life having a beginning and an end may not be enough a factor to argue against belief in immortality. For one, Durrow's contention that individuation of animal life can begin its development only through fertilization by union with another cell is no longer true in this age of genetic engineering and biotechnology. It is now feasible to develop human life from adult tissues usually through asexual means and the offspring will be highly identical like identical twins (human beings) in every material and spiritual

⁸ Durrow, C “The Myth of Immortality” in *Newsweek* Vol. CXXIX No. 10. 1998. P266

way.⁹ So, inquisitive minds like Durrow,¹⁰ will be preoccupied with such issues as to whether human life developed through asexual means can and should marry, eat, and or laugh etc.

Besides, questions of metaphysical nature as those of life beyond this world need not necessarily find answers to qualify them as true or false. Indeed, to insist on rational evidence in matters of faith and religion is not a strong enough reason for disbelieve in life after death. As very ably shown in a debate between Carl Sagan and Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, evidence for most religious issues does not necessarily count as supporting reality. Sagan's insistence on backing with evidence reveals our position thus:

*"Carl, do you believe in Love? And he said, of course I do; he was very much in love with his wife, and I said, can you prove love exist? And at first he said, well, certainly, but eventually he agreed that love, like faith, has something unprovable at its core, but that doesn't mean it does not exist."*¹¹

Thus, believe in immortality is not founded on mere superstition, but arguments which appeals to intellect, which may not necessarily require evidence or prove to pass the 'noble' test of acceptability. In our human experience, there is many an idea which we accept for good.

But antagonist of the immortality theory

view such belief as mere wishful thought which ignores facts and enthrones blind faith, wild dreams, hopeless hopes and cowardly fears of the human mind. The most feasible thesis according to the antagonist of the immortality theory is to discountenance the modern scientific doctrine of the indestructibility of matter and force as pure sophistry. They argued that while it is probably true that no matter or force has ever being or even can be destroyed, it is likewise true that there is no connection whatever between the notion that personal consciousness and memory persist after death and the scientific theory that matter and force are indestructible. Giving an analogy of a lump of coal which disintegrates in burning, Durrow argues that the process of change in the human being takes the forms of growth, disease, senility, death and decay. In his words:

*"The thing we call life is nothing other than state of equilibrium which endures for a short span of years between the two opposing tendencies of nature – the one that builds up, and the one that tears down. In old age, the tearing down process has already gained the ascendancy and when intervenes, the equilibrium is finally upset by the complete stoppage of the building process, so that nothing remains but complete disintegration"*¹²

The argument here is that all that remains of the debris is irrevocably dispersed and any idea of survival of any apart of the

^{9.} Durrow "The Myth of Immortality" *Newsweek*: Vol. cxxix, No. 11:1).

^{10.} Durrow *ibid*

^{11.} Read Sagan's views in *News Week*, 1997:51.

^{12.} Durrow, C (1998) "The Myth of Immortality" in *Newsweek* Vol. CXXIX No. 10. 1998. 258

human being exists only in the primitive conceptions of undeveloped minds. Whatever was covertly or overtly referred to as soul, mind or spirit is destroyed, dispersed, disintegrated beyond repair by what we call death. Thus man's refusal to give up the idea of immortality can only be explained in what Schopenhauer call "the will to live: i.e. a continuation of our present state of existence, not an uncertain reincarnation in a mysterious world of which we know nothing.

Accordingly, belief in immortality of the soul is a form of escapism which is unnecessary and undesirable. What is paramount to the human being is not the emotion, demanding a future life, but things that really affect the happiness of the individual here on earth, such as companionship of friends, debts, poverty and disease, food and shelter etc. concerns of this nature save the mortal man from the ever troubling metaphysical problems. At the end of the day's labour we are glad to lose our consciousness in sleep, and intellectual at least, we look forward to the long rest from the stresses and storms that are always incidental to existence.

But this view of man is too simplistic. In proper perspective, man is a being set apart, distinct from all the rest of nature and under divine injunction to complete God's creation. Man's over endowment as a creature of this earth, his surplus equipment for the adventure of his present life speaks volumes. If this life is all, what need has man for all these mental faculties, moral aspirations, spiritual ideals which move him to be distinctly a man as contrasted with the animal? If

existence upon the earth is his only destiny, why should man not prefer the swiftness of the deer, the strength of the lion, the vision of the eagle, to any endowment of mind and heart, as more adequate provision for the purely task for physical survival in a physical world? This most probably explains why St. Augustine evocatively states that, "our soul is restless until it rest in the Lord". By extension, man is incomplete without the feeling or idea of immortality. There is a feeling of emptiness or desire of a life after death which yearns for satisfaction. This emotion or desire is natural and that it persists beyond the grave is no wishful thinking. So, death, as opposed to inertia or entropy, is not something that modern physics is fully equipped to deal with. Physics, by definition, deals with forces and measurable effects. It has nothing to say about force-less, energy-devoid physical states (oxymora), so says Sam Vaknin.¹³

In true perspective, man is equipped not only for this environment, but also for something more. What he is in mind and heart and spirit in the range of his interests and the lift of his soul, can only be explained on the supposition that he is preparing for another and vaster life. What man bears within him is evidence that he is destined for some father port than any upon this shore.

African societies acknowledge death as a necessary end of Man though, it harbours feelings of continuity. In its rich traditions and orature, all humans wear the garment of death though, death is not the end of Man. Awolalu and Dopamu aptly captures

¹³. **Vaknin Sam**, *Cyclopedia Of Philosophy* Lidija Rangelovska, **A Narcissus Publication Imprint, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia**, 5th Edition, 2099. P. 283

this thinking thus;

*That death is not the final end and does not write finish to the life of Man, that death is only a transition from the physical world to the spirit world, and that the deceased is only making a journey from this earth to another place, is seen in the funeral arrangements and burial. The corpse is thoroughly washed; it is laid in state in very good costly cloths in preparation for the journey. It is believed that the deceased is being made ready and fit for the next world.*¹⁴

Most obviously, the idea of immortality is a reality which man enjoys because the signs are already upon him. As William James himself alludes more compellingly, we are under no compulsion to believe in immortality as for example, to believe that “things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, yet we are free to believe, if we so desire without being guilty of superstition”.¹⁵ There is every reason to refuse giving up the idea of immortality because there are perfectly good and sufficient reasons while an intelligent man may intelligently believe in immortality. He may believe in immortality, says John Holmes because there is no reason for not believing in it. True, immortality has never being proved, but it has never being disproved either. As Holmes further put it: As there is no positive testimony to prove it true, so it there no negative testimony to

prove it untrue... and such absence of testimony does not even raise negative presumption.¹⁶

In this case, therefore, the question is open for arduous philosophic inquiry, and so must our mind be open. According to Holmes, “To anyone who feels it conducive either to his satisfaction or to his usefulness to hope for a future state..., there is no hindrance to his indulging that hope”¹⁷ Indeed, it is not senseless to argue that there is no reason for not believing in immortality. This idea is not sentimental but elemental. It is grounded in the necessities and forces we possess as shown by the whole philosophy of evolution, which has given to us that fundamental interpretation of life as the continuous adjustment of inner relations to outer relations. John Holmes argues this position more scientifically and logically thus:

*An organism lives by successfully adjusting itself to the conditions of its environment by developing itself inwardly in such a way as to meet the conditions of reality... life in other words is so definitely a matter of the successful consideration of inner relations with outer relations, that it is altogether impossible to conceive that in any specific relation, the subjective terms is non-existent. What exists within is the sign and symbol and guarantee, of what exists without.*¹⁸

¹⁴. Awolalu and Dopamu 1979, 256

¹⁵. Holmes 1973: 252 Holmes, R. (1973), *Ten Reasons for believing in immortality* in P. Edwards (Ed), *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy...*

¹⁶. *ibid*

¹⁷. *Ibid*

¹⁸. *ibid*

Using the doctrine of conservation of energy, we argue like Sir Oliver Lodge that, 'whatever is, both was and shall be'. Persistence, he says, is the test or criterion. In his words,

*"...that the soul of man is just as much force in the world as magnetism or steam or electric is and that if the cosmic law of conservation forbids the destruction of the latter, it must as well forbid the former. Anything else is inconceivable. The universe cannot be thrifty of its physical and so wasteful of its spiritual resources"*¹⁹

Just as we would laugh at someone who contended that the heat in often metal which disappears under the cooling action of or water, had thereby been destroyed, we would similarly laugh at a men who argues that the personality of a human being, which disappears under the chilling influence of death has thereby been annihilated.

Being onto death towards authentic selfhood

The question of what becomes the being of man after death, and of what becomes the being of the individual who suffers death is of consequence in this discourse. Death and any death for that matter, is not, cannot and should not be an external and public fact that creates a sense of loss and saddens humanity, but an internal possibility of the being of man. It is the fulfillment of the man project of self liberation, self transcendence, and a process of surpassing one's existential condition. In death therefore, man ceases

to be the impersonal social *being* among *beings*. In this process of change, Man frees himself from the servitude of the anonymous "they" and thereby opens himself to his own most potentiality for *being*. In death, he further becomes the most vitalizing fact of life; the cardinal indicator of authentic selfhood. In death, man transcends from nothingness to somethingness; the reward of life. Such denotation very well finds placement in African knowledge systems thus:

*Death after a long happy life is glorious
If we live too long and die in poverty and disgrace
We achieve nothing but sorrow
But if death comes prematurely, the faithful should accept
And give thanks to God for a life well spent
Why should man suffer death after all?
The Creator bestowed death to human beings as a blessing
Life is a stream that flows out and flows back
When it flows out; we call it death
When it flows back; we call it rebirth
A stream that does not flow out and flow back
Becomes a stagnant pool full of impurities that threaten good health
Without death there can be no rebirth
Death carries us away; rebirth brings us back
We die as invalids but return in new found health"*²⁰

This African wisdom literature reminds us that, death is a stark reality which every

^{19.} ibid

^{20.} Oluwole, S.B 2007: 33-34 Oluwole, S. B. African Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernization, 1st Valedictory Lecture; Philosophy Department, University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba-Lagos. 2007

man must face individually. It is a possibility which all of us must realize in our own separate ways, and a burden which each man must carry for himself. This is death consciousness/awareness which reminds us to use time actively to realize our projects before it seals off our other possibilities. For in death, all preoccupations, all engagements, all concerns, all caring and all relationships are terminated. Like orphans, we are cast into a vast universe, without being consulted, to die there. It is thus not enough to say that “death is not my portion” or that, “death is not for me”. For to say so is *inauthentic death consciousness* that offends the true essence of human existence. This mode of thinking does not portray man in his unity, reality and totality as a being- towards-death; born –to- die, but as a being in forfeiture or fallenness, who runs and runs to hide away from reality but, can neither hide nor escape death; the limiting condition of his human existence. Heidegger collaborates this point when he

says, “My life is structurally on the way (unterwegs) always ahead of itself... Dasein is a potentiality that can never attain completeness or wholeness (in its existential state). It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is constantly something still to be settled”²¹

Death becomes no longer an external and public fact but an internal possibility of man's being, and so no longer the sad end of a story, but something that enters into the story and invests it with dramatic character.(Unah1996: 96) The sages know this much when they say, *Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein (Man)*. African wisdom literature similarly stresses this inevitability of death and admits that acceptance of death as a fact of life is necessary for an authentic existence. Such is why Africans liken death to a tax levied by God that must be repaid. Yamoel Yashi²² an African ethno philosopher poetically conveys this idea thus;

Tiv	English
Nongo na cii shi kela ngu ga Ayiooo wan Imande ngômô Mama ku ka kpandegh Ku Aôndo ter anger yô Shie ka a kuma uta kenng Yamoel de vaan zee	His lineage has perished Daughter of Imande, my mother, death is a tax levied by God, when it is due, you must pay Yamoel don't lament

This is the point at which we are called upon to cogitate on death and the being of man in death. That death is a debt is obviously affirmed as an inescapable fact of- a fact which also brings the meaning of life into its full efflorescence. A

philosophical rethink of the quip above more than anything illumines our mind concerning the being of man in death. In this existential state, Man experiences something more than what appears to his ordinary consciousness, something that

²¹. Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2009. P. 16

²². Jenkwe, T. E. *Yamoel Yashi: A Study of Tiv Oral Poetry*, Ariaria-Aba, AAU Vitalis Book Company, 1998. P. 30

generates ideas and thoughts, a more subtle spiritual presence that makes him unsatisfied with his purely worldly conquests. Tiv wisdom literature confirms this thinking in its phenomenology of death. It states that, in every man is lodged a light that no power can extinguish, an immortal spirit. Unarguably, death is the supreme possibility of human freedom and the highest expression of life. This point is very well by Leibnitz in a long chain of syllogism. He argues thus,

*The soul is a thing whose activity is thinking;
A thing whose activity is thinking is one whose
activity is immediately apprehended and without any
representations of parts therein is one whose activity
does not contain parts is one whose activity is not motion;
A thing whose activity is not motion is not a body;
What is not a body is not in space;
What is not in space is insusceptible of motion;
is insusceptible of motion is indissoluble;
What is indissoluble is incorruptible;
What is incorruptible is immortal.
Therefore, the Soul is immortal.*²³

Here understood, Man is a unique being among beings; he is a being set apart, distinct from all the rest of nature and under divine injunction to gravitate towards the completion of God's creation. This is what Teilhard de Chardin thinks of

Man and the world in which he lives when he says "by its radial nucleus it finds its shape and its natural consistency in gravitating against the tide of probability towards a divine focus of mind which draws it onward".²⁴ The implication here is that, Man's soul is made to transcend somaticity and so, man's soul is restless until it accords with its authentic essence of imperishable existence. Man is thus not a vain passion but a possible possibility, an image of God, a mode of the substance, incarnate spirit and utopia being. This conception of man may have informed Shakespeare's exclamation, thus,

*What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable!
In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god!
The paragon of animals.*(quoted from Batista²⁵)

In death therefore, Man changes and discontinues existence to continue existence from apparent nothingness to somethigness. The exhortation to fellow Athenians by Socrates "not to care for bodies and money before... how your soul will be the best possible",²⁶ was no doubt an indication to the effect that, not only does he believe in the city's gods, but also in the existence of the soul as something not only distinct from the body, but that it is purified in wait for its continued existence after death. Such is the beauty of death that Addie W. Williams repeatedly and poetically chronicles that,

Death can be beautiful - when it

^{23.} Leibnitz

^{24.} " Teilhard de Chardin, 1965:271.

^{25.} Mundin, B, *Philosophical Anthropology*, Bangalore, India, Theological, 1997. P. 187

^{26.} Apology. 30b

gives release from suffering and pain. Death can be beautiful when it magnifies love through the comfort, the compassion and sympathy of friends and relatives. Death can be beautiful when it binds those yet living more closely together, when it revives memories of a life which in its totality displayed a richness of texture and a strength of design in which the selflessness, tenderness compassion and generosity were merged. Death can be beautiful when in coming it opens the doors of life again - a life revealed in God's beyond and evermore. Death can be a gift, a reward, a promise fulfilled, the essence of God's love. The sorrow itself that trails the wake of death is a quality and measure of love that is creative in that it requires us to re-examine the values we hold. It causes us to question the validity of our lives, it opens our hearts to renewed appreciation of those whom we still have to love and underscores the possibility of unpredictable loss.²⁷

This much was the justified true belief of Socrates even as he was convicted to death. He asserts that, his labours to perfect the Athenian society shall never be in vain. He defends this position by asserting that his judges along with him, "should be of good hope toward death," because "there is nothing bad for a good man, whether living or dead, and that the gods are not without care for his troubles"²⁸ By this confession, Socrates,

appears to be saying that, change, as it occurs in death, dissolves the body into nothing though, something continues to be; the soul (of a good man) experiences liberation from the body and continues its existence as a separate entity. This conclusion most obviously compels John Fiske to convincingly assert that, "I believe in the immortality of the soul as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work". True there are postulations which suggest that all arguments in support of the immortality theory are based on assumption and that arguments based on assumption are inconclusive, without real evidence and may be false. Robert Browning's poem, 'cleon' reveals this human fact thus:

*"...every day my sense of joy grows more acute, my soul... enlarged more keen, while everyday my hairs fall more and more, my hand shakes, and the heavy years increase, the harrow quickening still from year to year, when I shall know most and yet least enjoy. ... Imagine to (our) need. Some future state..."*²⁹

A similar desire for another life after death is captured by Tennyson:

Yet we trust that somehow good will be the final goal of ill, to pangs of nature, sins of will, defects of out and taints of blood. That nothing walks with aimless feet; that not one life shall be destroyed or cast as rubbish to the void, when God hath made the pile complete... I stretch my hands of faith, and grope and gather dust and chaff and call to

²⁷. Addie W. Williams, Death can be beautiful **Addie Williams**&Katie Fairchild, Death Can Be eautiful, Retrieve from <http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewarticle.asp%3Fid%3D13415>

²⁸. Plato's Apology, (Ap. 41c-d).

²⁹. Holmes 1993:256). Holmes, R. (1973), *Ten Reasons for believing in immortality* in P. 256

*what I feel is lord of all. And faintly trust the large hope*³⁰ (Ibid 260).

Although antagonists of immortality theory reject these poetic lines as the many unfruitful wishes of humanity, many people from the rudest to the most civilized yearn for another life, insisting that nature never creates a desire without providing the means for its satisfaction. Man, we may conclude, is equipped for this environment, and also for something more. What he is can only be explained on the supposition that he is preparing for another and a vaster life. The overwhelming conviction of John Holmes is also referenced here in support the somethingness of life after death. In his words:

*I have never seen any reason for arbitrarily separation of our mind from the companionship of other mind. There is such thing, even for the independent thinker, as a consensus of best opinion which cannot be defied without the weigh test of reason. And in this matter of immortality, there a consensus best opinion which constitutes to my mind, one of the most remarkable phenomena in the whole history of human thinking.*³¹

Thus, in agreement with great scientists like Aristotle, Darwin and Edenton, renowned philosophers like Plato, Kant and Bergson; erudite poets like Sophocles, Goethe, and Robert Browning; Touch –

stone ethical teachers and public leaders like Socrates, Tolstoy and mahatma Gandhi, etc, we declare like Voltaire that, “reason agree with revelation... that the soul is immortal”, and so we need not trouble ourselves about the manner of future existence, the power which gave existence is able to continue it in existence in any form”³² (Wards 973:234). Interestingly, this form of existence is that which is also called the intelligible spiritual substance. John Locke makes a solid point in this regard by stating that, from the viewpoint of substance in general, spiritual substances are at least as intelligible and indestructible as material substances.

The great Socrates in his much trumpeted principle of paired opposites in which he says, “Whatever comes to be comes out of its opposites or a circle. Based on the paired theory, it therefore follows that life ends in death and death must give way to life”. Similarly, his theory of reminiscence talks about a feeling that we experience something before in the past life, recalled by our senses as ideas or forms. Death is just the separation of the soul from the body. Like ideas or form, the soul is indestructible and immortal. In death, change occurs and discontinuity appears though, there is continuity of the soul after its ultimate purification through knowledge and refrain from bodily pleasures. Socrates himself rhetorically queries, “...if a Man has trained himself throughout his life to live in state as close

³⁰. Tennyson: Tennyson, A, in, Chapman,C. The Case for Christianity, Herts, England Lion Publishing,1982.

³¹. Tennyson, A, in, Chapman,C. The Case for Christianity. P. 260, Tennyson, A, in, Chapman,C. The Case for Christianity, p. 254.

³². Wards 973-234

as possible to death, would it not be ridiculous to be distressed when death comes to him?”³³

Conclusion

In death, the body changes, and life dissolves into nothing and, Man becomes nothing. But in nothingness by virtue of consciousness and self-knowledge, the soul; the immortal spirit is liberated to become something. Therefore, in death, there is somethingness from nothingness. This most obviously explains why humanity welcomes death as a necessary condition of his existence. In his convinced and justified true belief, man must believe that what lies behind him and lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us (the soul) and continues to exist after him. This is the point that has been convincingly fortified above that, man in his existential state is always pressing forward in death into the future as unfinished, *a not-yet, a no-thing and not yet a something*, but a forward directionality of life; a somethingness. Not only does our death comes to us through the deaths of others, it is a potentiality of *being* for man himself and a process onto actuality. That there is a possibility of nothingness in death though, by leading human existence to its authenticity in death, the somethingness of the being of man is made possible.

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