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Afterlife and Immortality in the Death Discourse

Moses Akinnade Jawo
Department of Philosophy, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines the concepts of the afterlife and immortality – two similar terms yet with differences and often used interchangeably. They are crucial in the discourse on death and virtually all scholars centre their discourse on their existence or otherwise. Religion is the proponent of immortality; its arguments were rejected by science for lack of empirical verifiability. Recent scientific research focuses on how humans live immortally and possibly revive the dead. This aligns with religious immortality and contradicts science's understanding of human biology. The debates about life after death are on two polarities: religious and scientific and each has internal inconsistencies. This paper uses the qualitative research method of conceptual clarifications and critical analysis to interrogate the arguments of the two polarities. It realises their inconsistencies are because death is unknowable with humans' present cognitive apparatus, so postulations about life after death are confusing. Therefore, it submits that humans should live within their lifespans for the betterment of humanity. Life after death could be a privilege but should not be the major driving force for doing good. Life is meaningful when well lived, and death is just a natural phenomenon.

Keywords: Afterlife, Death, Immortality, Religion, Science and Technology.

Introduction

The afterlife and immortality are two related, though distinct, concepts. They are crucial and recurrent themes in death discourses. Virtually every contributor addresses these concepts; without them, human death discourse becomes indistinct from that of other organisms. Most philosophical thoughts on death are either for or against the afterlife and immortality. This paper analyses the two concepts and shows their relationship. It also evaluates arguments for and against them. Traditionally, religion is the proponent of immortality; people have learnt to cope with the conundrums of religion's postulated immortality and afterlife. Some of the enigmas include: (1) the presence of many religions but one Supreme Being and each religion presents the afterlife differently; (2) proponents of reincarnation do not adequately address the question of personal identity and survival; (3) advocates of bodily resurrection fail to substantially justify how the dead who have been decomposed, degenerated, cremated or eaten by other humans be restored to life. Science and emerging technology challenge religious beliefs about the afterlife and immortality. Recent scientific research aimed at achieving human immortality and restoring life to the deceased raises further questions. Most research postulations do not guarantee true immortality, as some people will continue to die regardless of their lifespan. Therefore, neither religion nor science has answered the question of the afterlife and immortality.

The afterlife is the belief that humans exist after death in a form that might be related or different from humans' biological existence. The concept is similar to immortality, and they are often used interchangeably, yet they have little differences. The afterlife does not mean endless existence

which immortality entails. That is, the afterlife is about the existence of life after death even if it is for a certain period, while immortality holds that there is infinite existence of life after biological death. Based on the foregoing, all arguments for immortality are sufficient for the afterlife, but all arguments for the afterlife cannot sufficiently justify immortality. Also, all arguments against the afterlife will dispel immortality but all arguments against immortality cannot adequately disperse the afterlife. For instance, it is believed among Africans, particularly the Yoruba people that the soul of the deceased could appear to bereaved relatives who are not yet aware of the demise in an ethereal body. Suppose this is true and the soul ceases to exist thereafter, it is enough to justify an afterlife but not immortality. But if it is true and the soul continues to live forever, it is enough to justify both immortality and the afterlife. In this paper, except indicated, the two concepts will be represented by immortality, which has a broader scope.

The Concept of Immortality

Immortality is the idea, belief, or assumption that humans live continuously, and if they die something in them (the soul) survives. In this sense, death is seen as the destruction of the body but the soul exists continually. Almost every culture on earth believes in immortality, ironically, many people are ready to sacrifice their present living for it. Hence, Bierce [2000] defines immortality as “a toy which people cry for, and on their knees apply for, Dispute, contend and lie for, and if allowed would be right proud Eternally to die for” [119]. This satiric definition highlights humans’ desperation to live continuously at all costs. Whether the soul survives after biological death is a debate among scholars; the religious-inclined and culturally enthusiastic thinkers believe the soul survives death in the following ways: (1) as an incorporeal entity, (2) resurrection of the body or re-embodiment with the soul after death (this could also be in the form of reincarnation); (3) the soul with an ethereal body. Beliefs and thoughts about the soul’s immortality are prevalent among Persians, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Japanese, Chinese, Hindus, Ancient Egyptians, Yoruba, Igbo, Akan and Ewe, among others. Some philosophers like Plato, Descartes and Kant also argued for immortality. Arguably, they were influenced by their cultures because “in a certain obvious sense, we are all children of our circumstances” [Wiredu, 1980, 39].

Nonetheless, some individuals reject the notion of immortality within a culture, where it is embraced and cherished. For instance, Onwuka [1983], an African of Igbo descent, where reincarnation as evidence of immortality is cherished, argues that “reincarnation promises nothing but an endless and hopeless cycle of life. Some people use the belief as an excuse… they believe they will have a second chance later” [10]. Also, some philosophers repudiated immortality, perhaps, because of no logical or empirical proof for its existence. Philosophers like Hume and Mill argued that the soul annihilates after separation from the body. Hume [1978] in particular claimed that mental activities can be different from the physical body, but it cannot live without the body. To Nielson, Camus, Schopenhauer, and Barrow, among others, death is the end of humans. Some secular thinkers believe in the immortality of someone’s legendary acts. Here, the dead continue to live in the memory of the living through their deeds. For instance, we can say: ‘Aristotle is immortal’ because his numerous works make people remember him. There is ongoing research on how to enhance humans' continuous living (never dying) with the aid of biotechnology and the mind uploading of a person’s brain into the computer for immortal preservation.

The Nature of the Soul

There is perennial debate among philosophers on the real nature of the soul whether it is a material or immaterial entity. The immaterialist, particularly the dualists like Plato, Descartes and Leibniz argue that humans have two distinct natures the immaterial soul and the material body. To them, the soul is a nonphysical, incorporeal, indestructible and immortal entity responsible for humans’ mental activities. The materialists, who are mostly monists, like Hobbes, Ryle, Place, Armstrong and Smart disagree with the existence of a soul separate from the body. To them, the mental activities attributed to the soul are brain processes. The debate on the nature of the soul also includes the location of the soul, the interaction of the soul with the body which is regarded as the problem of mind-body interactionism and the existence of the soul without the body.

The soul is often believed to be created by God. It is deposited in the body to activate the latter at creation; it is the vital force that necessitates life. There are various versions of the human creation story. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the creation story in Genesis chapter two of the Bible reported that Adam, the first human, was moulded from the earth’s dust. He became a living being when God breathed into his nostrils. The breath is the inception of the soul in humans. This biblical account is similar to the Islamic account of creation; Allah is the creator of humans and the soul is derived from him. The Yorubas, like several other African cultural groups, share a similar creation story and concept of ensoulment. Other African cultures like Akan and Igbo believe the soul is derived from God but they do not necessarily narrate the way it was incepted into the body.

It is agreeable based on the above creation story that the first human ensoul is through the Supreme Being's breath. The question is: when and how does the offspring ensoul happen? Does the soul have regenerative power which enables it to mutate into multiple souls? If offspring ensoul through the reproductive system, then is it the male or the female that passes it to the offspring? If the soul is formed from the combinations of the male and female cells, then does it mean that: (1) the human soul is shared into many pieces; (2) a soul is the combination of different souls? To avoid the above challenges, some believe the soul does not come from either parent; it is attached to a new body at fertilisation, while others believe it was attached at birth [Andrade, 2011]. The implication of ensoulment at birth is that the fetus has no soul irrespective of its stage of development. And if ensoulment is at fertilisation, abortions of pregnancies at any stage are killing and destruction of souls.

Arguments for Immortality

The belief in immortality is dated back to antiquity. From time immemorial, religionists hold that humans are made up of two major substances: the material body and an immaterial soul. At death, the soul vacates the body and lives on, while the body is destroyed. The soul, according to most ancient cultures and religious groups, being the derivation of the Supreme Being in humans is eternal as the Supreme Being is immortal. The nature of the soul and its survival after death as mentioned earlier remain elusive because religious explanations are unverifiable, unconvincing and unintelligible but have influenced many philosophers. Now, many philosophers do not focus on the origin of the soul; they only examine how it survives and the need to believe that immortality is true; that is, they focus on the benefits of believing in immortality. Plato [1997, 49-100] provides a rational argument proving that immortality is true. His position is captured in Socrates' last discussion with his associates before death. Socrates was fearless when confronted with death because death would only befall his body while his real self (his soul), would survive death. He sees life (the soul) as moving in a circular form: living before birth, living to death, and from death to living again. This continuous reincarnation of the soul, according to Plato, is responsible for innate ideas and reminiscence. Innate ideas and reminiscence are possible because the soul apprehends the forms which are the true nature of things. The forms are immaterial, perfect, and eternal. The soul can apprehend them because it shares their nature, therefore, the soul is immortal. The period between death and rebirth shows the soul exists apart from the body.

Plato's theory of immortality implies that humans are a dual substance (dualism); the soul and the body. All dualist theorists believe in or argue for the immortality of the soul. Dualism took another dimension with the work of Descartes [1982, 12]; his thesis on the distinction between the mind (soul) and body; in which the mind is considered separate from the body, and will be indestructible at death is archetypal. From the time of Descartes, the soul and the mind have been classified as identical by most philosophers. All dualist philosophers, however, distinguish it from the brain. This contrasts with materialist monism, which posits that the activities Descartes and other dualists identify with the mind are the brain's work. Some scholars move away from the justification of the existence of the soul but focus on the benefits of the belief in immortality or the afterlife to the social well-being of society. For Kant [2002, 155-157], believing in immortality and the afterlife enables people to act morally because if there is no afterlife, where people will be rewarded or punished for their deeds by God, people will not be motivated to do good to others. Humans are faced with dilemmas of either being moral and happy or immoral and happy in their quest to live well and happily. The belief in a final judgment to come in an afterlife will make them choose the former; the belief makes them conscious that beyond happiness in this present life, there is an afterlife where another happiness or sorrow awaits.

Similar to the above, is an argument in Dostoevsky's [2009] work, which posits that the belief in immortality and God's existence limits people from being wicked because of the judgment to come in the afterlife. So, the consciousness of immortality and God's existence regulates human action. Human-made laws could be circumvented because people can act secretly and not be caught, thereby avoiding punishment, which makes everything permissible when done in secret. But under God's laws, the rewards and punishments of immortality are inescapable. It was further argued that "there was no law of nature that man should love mankind, and that, if there had been any love on earth hitherto, it was not owing to a natural law, but simply because men have believed in immortality" [Dostoevsky, 2009, 81]. The belief in immortality ensures that people are virtuous, because "there is no virtue if there is no immortality" [Dostoevsky, 2009, 8] because it is in the afterlife that people will be rewarded or punished. Removing the belief in God and immortality means everything is permissible.

Moving away from the reward and punishment perspective, Osarchuk and Tatz [1973], researched to ascertain if the belief in the afterlife "helps the individual to deal with anxiety over death" [256]. They concluded that the fear of death in individuals increased their belief in an afterlife [260]. The

belief, therefore, can reduce the pains, anguish, anxieties and fears associated with the awareness of death and when a beloved dies; people are consoled that they will reincarnate and live again and enjoy their life shortened by death in another existence. Others, if they do what is expected of them, will be rewarded in heaven particularly those who believe in the Christian and Islamic versions of immortality, or they will become ancestors and continue to enjoy elated positions in their society, this is particular of some African perspectives. The atheists, secular scientists and thinkers rejected the religious versions of immortality but saw immortality as attainable through legacy and many technological means. They see religion and everything religiously inspired as unreliable. To them, the growth of technology will guarantee the postponement of one's death to a desired time by stopping the process of ageing [DeGrey and Rae 2007]. In that sense, people will remain young at a particular age, highly functional and healthy. In some cases, even when someone dies, those alive can still interact with the dead.

Immortality through legacy is the passing down, leaving behind or passing on (to use a death euphemism) positive and charitable things after death. The living will always remember the deceased through their legacy. While every person leaves something behind for remembrance, negative things are not regarded as legacy. Also, any legacy that is not remembered is immortality. Legacy could be material and nonmaterial. Hunter [2004] categorised legacy into three themes: biological, material and value. She explained that they are not mutually exclusive but overlapping. The other two contain values, but another value was also themed separately because it "refers to the explicit transmission of specific values and beliefs" [333]. Therefore, legacy immortality includes having offspring who continue to remember and venerate their ancestors. Many societies often trace their ancestral sources to some individual, and such individuals continue to exist as immortal. People's legacy can consist of ideas, beliefs, theories or material possessions passed down to future generations. When people's names are inscribed in landmark projects or emoluments, they are immortalised.

Legacy immortality can relieve the fears, anxieties and anguish associated with the consciousness of death. After doing good deeds, people find comfort in knowing they will be remembered after death. This could also be a motivating factor for others to contribute their quotas to humanity. In many societies today, the labours of past heroes are benefiting humanity. Some have been immortalised either through their works or emoluments named after them. New generations could be motivated that, if they can do good things, they will also merit such respected positions even after death. Now, the question is can legacy immortality rightfully be immortality in the real sense? Will people not be forgotten irrespective of how long they are remembered; will they not be forgotten with time? Are people whose legacies are celebrated conscious of what is happening after them? What impact does remembering and celebrating people have on them after death? In pursuing legacy when alive, people may be harmed, then, what is the essence of pursuing legacy when it harms others? Also, there could be cook-up stories of people who never existed. These and several issues are challenges to legacy immortality.

Technological Postulations on Immortality

Emerging technologies are postulating immortality through genetic manipulation or modification, nanotechnology, cryonics and mind uploading. Genetic modification also called genome, "genetic engineering, genetic enhancement, germline engineering, germline enhancement, germline therapy, germline manipulation and genome manipulation" [Resnik and Vorhaus, 2006]. According to the WHO, the term is a method for making definite changes to the DNA of a cell or organism. It is either to add, remove or alter the genes. Human genetic modification or gene editing is done in two major ways: Somatic genome editing which is non-heritable and changes the genes in a patient's cells to treat a medical condition like diseases and for enhancements in performance in physical activities; and germline genome editing which is heritable and changes genes in eggs, sperm, or early embryos to try to control the traits of a future child [Center for Genetics and Society, n.d.]. The latter affects all cells of the person and subsequent generations, and this happens in two ways germline cells (not for reproduction) such as in the case of early embryo and germline cells (for reproduction) such as eggs and sperm.

Concerning the discourse on death, the basic assumption of genetic modification is that death (apart from killings) arises from ageing and sicknesses, which are from errors in genetic compositions. If these errors are corrected, humans will stop ageing and falling sick [Harri, 2000 and Howard, 2021, 116]. Therefore, genetic modification aims at: (1.) locating the particular codes in human genes responsible for ageing and making necessary corrections; (2.) strengthening the genes to resist diseases and infections, and if they contract infections and diseases, they will heal and rejuvenate. Then, people would repeatedly rejuvenate all their cells such as neurons, liver, kidneys and heart. Genetic modification has been a common practice in the laboratory for decades with huge successes on organisms, crop plants, domestic animals and disease vectors with

different considerations and varying complexity [Nature Genetics, 2017]. It has been successfully tested on animals particularly mice – which "share about 85 per cent of their genes" with humans. [National Human Genome Research Institute, 2019]. The success recorded in the biological species indicates that it is possible to replicate it in humans [Howard, 2021, 225].

If "life extension is available, affordable, and routinely used to prevent age-related pathological conditions" and sicknesses from deceases and infections "ageing would no longer be a matter of fate" and death would be optional apart from killings [Minerva, 2018, 46]. Therefore, everyone might want to continue rejuvenating but the question is: If people are not dying and they keep producing offspring, what will happen if there is a population explosion? How will wicked people like terrorists, tyrants and monsters, who are naturally taken away by death be checkmates? Many vicious people who are not caught by the long arms of the law are caught up by deceases and age-related pathogens, but since such will not happen, will they not continue to wreak havoc?

Nanotechnology

Nanotechnology deals with tiny cells and sub-atoms below 100 nanometers with appropriate technology. It is believed that there are some minute cells, sub-atoms and molecules that are difficult to identify with the large-scale technology apparatus generally in use. In biomedicine, it envisages that with nanotechnology, the smallest cells could be identified and treated easily [Saini, Saini and Sharma, 2010]. Its advocates argue that it has recorded huge successes in physical science and engineering in manufacturing products which are more effective than earlier ones before its discovery. Thus, replicating it in biomedicine will enable the detection of tiny cells and molecules and their functioning. Any malfunctioning cell will be treated quickly thereby preventing ageing and sicknesses that cause death. Some nanotechnology enthusiasts believe that it will enable the creation of bots and other artificial organs which can replace damaged organs including the brain.

Immortality through ageless living is predicated on the existence of biological species which can live practically without dying. Berthold [2018] identifies biological entities that can suspend their ageing and rejuvenate and live endlessly except when being killed. They include *Turritopsis dohrnii* (a particular jellyfish species) and Hydra. The former grows in a circular – from baby to adult and rejuvenates to a younger one mature enough for reproduction – "it can age in reverse and morph from an adult back into a baby" endlessly [Baraniuk, n.d]. The latter does not grow old because it has regenerative power to rejuvenate. Ageless species can only die through predation. For example, Ming, a 500-year-old quahog clam and the oldest known non-colonial animal died due to human error when researchers accidentally dredged it up for age determination [Berthold, 2018].

Cryonics

Cryonics, also known as cryopreservation and cryosuspension, is the preservation of the body from decay after death. It is done by draining blood from the body and replacing it with 'cryoprotective agents' – antifreeze and organ-preserving compounds – and placing the body in a "chamber filled with liquid nitrogen, where it will theoretically stay preserved at -196 °C" [Vaughan, 2024]. Though cryonics cannot restore life to the body, it preserves the body for the possibility of being active if there is a way life can be restored. Some cryonicists prefer to preserve their brain alone called 'neuropreservation' hoping that in the future it could be possible to create or grow the human body in a lab from scratch and connect the brain to it. Cryonics hopes, that if corpses are kept in a state of stability, in the future, technology will be able to resuscitate them to a normal life and cure the condition that led to their death [Minerva, 2018, 4]. Because the health conditions medical practitioners presently consider beyond treatable and reversible have a very high probability of being handled by future medical practitioners [Cryonisc Institute Technology for Life, n.d.]. Cryonics believes recent successes in biomedical technology could extend to reviving the dead. For instance, people who lived a century ago would not have imagined technological advancements that have made many things possible in our time. Breakthroughs like In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), Embryo Cryopreservation (EC), transplanting of vital organs, separation of conjoined twins and even space travelling (to the moon and Mars).

Also, the hopeless health conditions of some decades ago such as no heartbeat and respiration, the then universally acceptable medical standards of dead pronouncement, have changed with the aid of technology. Many people who would have lived longer have been buried. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), defibrillators, and medications have changed humans' perceptions about when to classify a person as dead. Babies born after 24 weeks of pregnancy are now technologically assisted to survive [Younge, *et al*, 2017]. If truly in the future there is any technology that is capable of resuscitating life back to corpses, cryogenically preserved bodies

would be readily available for resuscitation. Cryonics is an advanced version of the ancient practice of mummification.

Bhatia and Savulescu [2016] raise some philosophical issues against cryonics which could be summarised thus: what is the possibility of the cryonic company remaining operational in case there are financial difficulties and a long delay in the discovery of the technology that would resuscitate life? Is it not potentially exploitative when people commit huge amounts to Cryonic when its promises seem more hype than hope? Is there any difference between cryonics promises and spiritualists who charge payment from people dying with the promise of eternal life? Similarly, is there a fundamental difference between cryonic and religious immortality since they are both based on hope? Now, if it takes cryonic a century to work, will the resuscitated person be able to adapt to the changing culture, environment, and new generation? If it fails or the resuscitated people have damage to their higher brain, is that not a burden to the new generations disposing of corpses or taking care of sentient beings?

Mind Uploading and Digital Afterlife

It is assumed by some people that immortality can be achieved through mind uploading – the transferring of contents or information in the brain to cyberspace, computers and robots [Goertzer, and Ikle, 2012, 1]. This form of immortality does not envisage the biological existence of individuals after death, rather, it proposes that human minds, that is the brain could be uploaded or backed up in computers, cyberspace or robots. When the person whose mind is uploaded dies, the robot or avatar – a graphic representation of the person (in the case of the computer) – would act the same as the person in all circumstances [Chambers, 2010].

Similar to mind uploading is the digital afterlife, which proposes that humans, before their demise, can create avatars for their digital lives such as Facebook, YouTube and Email. The avatar will learn to emulate them as they interact while alive and closely replicate them before it finally takes over [Parkin, 2015]. The basic assumption here is that someone's digital content on the internet and computers are assets, properties and legacies which must be protected after the owners' demise. The foregoing is important because there are legal terms that the ICT or social media companies inserted as conditions for someone to use their platforms, which forbid someone else from having access to other people's accounts. Apart from the terms and conditions, after the demise of a person the person who takes over the properties might not be the deceased choice, also, the former might erase the identity of the latter and take absolute control of the content he or she is not capable of creating. Similar ethical and legal concerns have been raised against digital immortality and the afterlife, such as who benefits and/or is held responsible for the backup, privacy and misuse of deceased information, autonomy and answer to legal questions [Ohman and Floridi, 2018, 318-320; Step, 2021, 505-510]. The recent advancements in artificial intelligence seem to buttress immortality through mind uploading. Today, people interact with cyborgs, robot avatars and other AI machines to get nearly (if not) accurate information, solutions, suggestions or advice on many issues and inquiries. Accordingly, Beaunoyor and Guitton [2021] argue that the digital afterlife will change the definition of death and how the living and the dead interact and negotiate.

Arguments against Immortality

There are many arguments against the belief in immortality, particularly the religious-influenced beliefs. Some of the arguments say the belief is against nature; because humans as biological entities must exist and die. Some claim that the belief arose because ancient people were unable to explain strange occurrences like dreams and hallucinations; some claim the belief is based on folk psychology; others said it is wishful thinking; and others suggest it is the consequence of humans' various evolved psychological capacities [Stewart-Willians, 2015, xiv]. Some try to destroy the foundation of the belief; they argue against the existence of the soul because if the soul is removed immortality will crumble.

According to Stewart-Willians [2015], immortality is not real; it is a meme or joke, it developed along with other religious beliefs because people could not explain circumstances beyond their imagination in the prescientific era. The belief is transferred from generation to generation because it promises rosy life rewards in the hereafter for well-behaved individuals and perpetual torments for ill-mannered or badly behaved individuals. To Stewart-Williams, the reward is a manipulative social control mechanism, which people use on one another [2015, xvii]. He emphasizes that 'rather than relieving people's fear', it creates more fears that people would not have thought about [Stewart-Willians, 2015, xv]. Some people will have to conform to their cultural and religious beliefs even when they are far away from their people and land, and such beliefs do not align with the beliefs of their new society because of fear of not meriting the afterlife speculated by their original society.

The question is: what is the importance of arguing against or rejecting immortality if it serves as a social control mechanism and comforts people that their loved ones will live again? Stewart-Williams answers that humans 'should face the fact' that their time is finite and is the best opportunity to use the short life span judiciously. He added that: (1) it is true that there is no afterlife and it is very imperative to tell the truth always because it is the truth; (2) the afterlife does not serve any purpose; it causes grief and suffering; (3) doing away with the belief gives accurate reality of the universe; (4) it gives rooms to have a moral obligation to confront the genuine nature of death [Stewart-Willians, 2015, xxiii]. He further said that people do not believe in immortality, hence the concept does not comfort people. People only talk about it (talking the talk) as if they trust it, but when it matters most to act accordingly (walking the walk), they will not [Stewart-Willians, 2015, xxiv]. Agreeable, this reflects the true condition of all extreme positions about death either as a means to another life or as the end of life. Many who hold these views are doubtful and uncomfortable with their beliefs; they only play along. While those who believe death is the end of life hope to elongate their lives as long as possible, those who believe in the afterlife do not wish to die even when death is a necessary condition for immortality.

Now, Stewart-Williams seems to focus on only religious-influenced beliefs in the afterlife, leaving aside the scientific and technologically influenced beliefs. It is understandable if the mind-uploading, genetic modulations and nanotechnology forms are exempted because they are not about the continued living of the dead or life after death but rather the continued access to the memory of the dead by the living or the continued living in the present biological life. Exempting cryonics which preserves corpses with the hope of revival is unacceptable. Since cryonics promises the dead the restoration of life to the body, it means it is not fundamentally different from religious promises of resurrection and reincarnation. They are all beliefs which have not been scientifically proven beyond doubt. If he believes cryonics will achieve its aim, it follows that he is also guilty because he hopes for a life after death just not the model promised by the religion which is based on reward and punishment. According to McCormick [2015, 54], immortality is not logically defensible because known mental activities attributed to the mind or soul depend upon the brain to exist and the brain does not survive biological death, therefore, the soul does not survive biological death. He opined that the advancement in neuroscience has enabled several tests and treatments of people with neuronal diseases and that reveals that human cognition and other mental activities are connected to the brain. He argued that proper brain functioning or healthy brains enhance the "full range of those conscious and mental abilities traditionally attributed to the soul", and improper brain functioning makes people lose such mental activities [McCormick, 2015, 57].

McCormick emphasises that drugs, foods and other substances affect the brain functioning; either altering or enhancing the way it functions. The consumables or pills change the brain chemistry which then changes the chemical events or reactions in the brain and produce changes in mental activities. Affected people can change from positive mental activities to negative ones and vice versa. In that case, mental functions are not separable or autonomous from brain functions. McCormick further asserted that there are no mental activities or consciousness unconnected to the brain. Also, if the brain chemistry is altered or the brain is destroyed, all mental activities attributed to the soul will cease. He added that if there is a contrary to the above, it can justify the existence of mental activities which are not of the brain. It seems McCormick is giving more to the brain here than what is empirically known with its functions. The brain is crucial and essential in producing human mental activities, however, there are some mental activities for which neuroscience cannot satisfactorily explain. For instance, how does the brain produce mental activities where people have accurate dreams of future events or occurrences which they did not ruminate about? Also, people have pre-knowledge and predictions, stating exact details of future events and occurrences. If situations such as the above exist, it means the brain cannot solely produce consciousness [Jawo, 2020, 116 – 137].

To dispel immortality, Mercer [2015] argued against the soul's existence, since immortality is built around it. He opined that all human behaviours are subject to their genetic composition, and people's behaviours are based on their personality [Mercer, 2015, 69-81]. Hence, people's personalities are determined by their genetic composition. Mercer's conclusion suggests that, if A = C, and B = C, then, B = A. Here, Mercer fails to realise that people's behaviour changes from negative to positive or vice versa without altering their genes. The environment and social interaction change people's characters and behaviour. Also, people's behaviour can change by personal introspection, meditation and reflections without them changing their environments or social interactions. In the above, their genetic codes do not change. Genetic compositions are complex and have the potency of many character traits or behaviours. The ones developed or in dominance at a time determine people's behavior. The other potency can take dominance later because of certain events or conditions. The problem here is that the genes and human character

will become indeterminate and unpredictable. Then, asserting that something indeterminate is the sole producer or solely responsible for another thing seems reckless.

Conclusion

The way awareness and thoughts on death shape human behaviours and interactions in all spheres of life cannot be emphasised. This is why every walk of life and virtually all fields of inquiry are interested in the discourse on death. Human intellectual capacity gave them a unique opportunity to rationalise their existence, demise and what becomes of them thereafter. It cannot be conclusively ascertained that other species, particularly sentient beings, do not ratiocinate their existence, demise and afterlife; they might have gotten answers to the questions about immortality millennia past that continue to shape their patterns of living. For humans, the questions about immortality have been perennial for millennia without hope for a satisfactory answer.

Religion has provided the most reasonable answers to the questions in the past and people have learnt to cope with the conundrums surrounding its answers. The emerging technology which challenges the religious-influenced answers that provide solace to people only raises more questions. For instance, how is it justifiable that mind uploading and digital immortality guaranteed immortality when the human person is no more? The artificial representative, the cyborg, robot or avatar cannot be the person, so where is the person? Also, if rejuvenation is achieved through genetic modification and nanotechnology, people will no longer die of sicknesses and old age-related ailments. But when people are killed by other means, what becomes of them? Any form of immortality in which people will die irrespective of how long they have lived is not an immortality. Living long is desirable but not guaranteed today, even for the strongest people with healthy immune systems and genes, because threats to lives are beyond old age-related diseases and sicknesses. Threats from wars executed with manufactured guns, bombs and nuclear power are more real and beyond technological postulations for living long. Also, disasters such as drought, earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, floods and volcano eruptions can take the whole world away at once. This shows that humans need better answers to questions about the meaning of life and what becomes of people after death.

Based on the foregoing, humans should live within their short existence and limit for the betterment of humanity: care for the needy, sick and aged, diminish suffering, devising means to elongate life. Immortality and the afterlife should be seen as a privilege, not the major driving force for doing what is good. If there is no life after death or it exists but those who attained it are not conscious of their past which was a prerequisite, it becomes inconsequential. Building one's life on triviality is a waste. If there is life after death, its prerequisite is living the good life (behaviour), then living the good life without the hope for a life after death will still merit it and that is better than hoping in vain. Life is meaningful when well lived, and death is just a natural phenomenon.

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