

OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF DEATH: A CLUE FROM AN ONTOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN HEIDEGGER AND SARTRE

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Abstract

There is hardly any concept in any human language that is as terrifying and frightening as the term *death*, perhaps due to its enigmatic status. In fact, no normal human being, except a suicide which itself has been established to be a mental disorder, wants to die. Even serial killers, when apprehended, are often seen pleading to be allowed to live. To many human beings, the word death is anathema which extinguishes all enthusiasms. The only time, it seems, the mention of death is trivialized is when referring to the death of a distant person not attached to us. In effect, human beings do not want to die but to live endless time and timeless end, to the extent that even those promised a heavenly place of bliss and sage-hood after death are equally caught in the web of the fear of dying. What an existential paradox! Thus, it therefore elicits the question; do human beings really fear death or they fear something else concealed by the phenomenon of death? The position of this paper is in the latter. It posits that concealed by the phenomenon of death, which are more fundamental than the simple act of dying includes; the unknown, the unaccomplished projections, the unceremonious parting of ways with loved ones, sweet memories of human sojourn and the attendant existential goodies. These are the actual undisclosed fears. On the strength of this new understanding, the essay attempts to examine the asymmetrical conversation between Heidegger and Sartre on the value of death, with the goal of teasing out how humans can surmount its fear and actualize earthly possibilities. As an inquiry in existential ontology, it adopts a phenomenological approach. With this method, the paper presents death as not just that event which happens to human beings which leads to cessation of life. Rather, as a being that is and has always been present in the very being of man right from birth. Building on this new dimension, the paper alleys the fear of death among the living.

Keywords: Authenticity, Being-towards, Dasein, Death, Existentialism, Fear

Introduction

Death is arguably the most terrifying and uncannily striking theme in human discourse. It is viewed as the cessation of the connection between our mind and our body. Death is real and marks the final end of an individual's biological and corporeal existence. The

adjectives 'biological and corporeal' are meant to distinguish the nature of death under consideration as against what I call the *consolatory* view that those who died, still live in a way; or as against the notion of life as a prison of the soul. Therefore, biological and corporeal death is the inevitable fate of all men and all families without exception. It is the law of nature that whatever is composed must eventually be decomposed. Death is so enigmatic that Jean Paul Sartre sees nothing good in its being. For him, death makes the human life absurd and meaningless. In his *Being and Nothingness*, he contends that if all the aspirations and achievements of life will be extinguished in death, then death is meaningless and undignifying to human existence.

However, Martin Heidegger presents a radically different interpretation of death. In *Being and Time*, death does not simply spell the end of one's existence. All death is the ending of that which lives, "man's death is not an event that happens to man; it is rather, a phenomenon to be understood existentially" (Omoregbe, 1981, p.31). In opening up this new vista of understanding death, Heidegger aims to formulate a more authentic mode of relating to death; one which goes beyond the notion of death as the coming to an end of life or the final annihilation of all possibilities. This more authentic relation to death is a being-toward-death which he calls a "running ahead [*Vorlaufen*]." Because the certainty of my death is futural, because death will surely come to me out of the future, my anticipation of death in the present makes me, so to speak, ahead of myself. I am *thrown* to the certainty of my own death. Insofar as I exist, I am running ahead of myself, because I am related to a futural possibility that is essentially always a "not yet," namely, my death. This kind of existential attitude towards death, Heidegger says, is a blessing to humanity because it propels us to actualize all our existential possibilities.

For the African, death is a transition to begin another life. It is not the end of life and does not cut off family relationship as it extends to the world of the ancestors. The Christians also hold the same view apart from the idea of ancestral connection. For Bolaji Idowu and J.S. Mbiti as captured in Offiong Asuquo; Olodumare (God) is the creator of death as a means of recalling man to the world of the spirit after his life on earth. Mbiti sees death as the process of removing the living from the physical world and this process is one which every living must partake in (Asuquo, 2011, pp. 171-173). Asuquo was critical of both views, especially, the creationist views of Idowu. To say that God is the creator of death comes with metaphysical, epistemic and moral challenges. Thus, Asuquo contends: The problem with this view is that it does not explain whether it is God who causes premature and undesirable deaths such as those caused by suicide, violence, accidents and drowning. Moreover, will God

deliberately inflict such pains and sorrows that death often brings when He is seen as a loving father? (Asuquo, 2011, p.173).

In earnest, the creationist account of death is burdensome, which is why the existentialist intervention with the view that the fact of death lies in the ontological structure of human reality appears more satisfying to the question; from where comes the phenomenon of

death?. Irrespective of this little challenge, the African believes that dying is a homecoming which confers on life its meaning. The African views death as a coming home because human life on earth is a sojourn which began from the world of the spirits to the world of the material, full of troubles and imperfections (Ogungbemi, 1997, pp.1-6). Man is born into struggle. Struggle for food, struggle for shelter, struggle for a better life, struggle against evil and in the end, everything becomes elusive. Thus, the phenomenon of death becomes a transition to a blissful realm of existence where human life finds rest, although it depends on how one lives one's life on earth. This African view is however reinterpreted existentially in Heidegger and Sartre, but stripped off afterlife and creationist contents, in a way that charges humans to take ownership of its ever-present and its possibility. In view of the forgoing, the task in this paper is to provide these authors' views and how such understanding can be channeled into making human earthly sojourn a triumphant existence.

The Phenomenon of Death

While there are those who see death as a cessation of life which reality does not come into being the very day it occurs but had always being present since the day life assumes its being; there are others who believe it is a closing of human earthly account and a mere passage to another form of life. Irrespective of which party wins the debate, the undeniable substance of the argument remains the fact that the subject *death*, has been a mystery throughout the history of human reality on earth. It is so puzzling that the history of it can be said to be a history of self-reflection. Self-reflection in the sense that death itself is about the cessation of being. As such, when human reflects on death, he or she can be said to be engaged in self-reflection because death is his/her fate and destiny. While engaging in this self-reflection, questions which occupy the mind include: who am I? Where do I come from and where will I go after here on earth? Is there an afterlife? If there is an afterlife, what is it like and how can I prepare for it? "But if this life is the fullness of our time, how best might we live it, knowing we are going to die"? (Davis, 2006, p.1)

Humans feel so challenged by this phenomenon of death that we always seek to know what is the meaning of life in itself- if its ultimate destiny is dying. This perennial and ever-present puzzle was reiterated in St Augustine's expression when he averred that:

"Our entire life is nothing but a racing towards death, in the course of which no one is permitted to stop for a little while: all are forced to keep instep, all are driven on the same speed" (Reinhardt, 1960, p.137).

By this, Augustine further lends credence to the view that death is an inevitable necessity of which everything that has life must go through. As stated earlier, it is a mystery. Further reinforced by Igboaja, "it is a mysterious mystery that man is alive today and tomorrow he is no more" (Nyong, 1996, p. 57). For Davies, at the event of death lies not

only the emotion of grief and the breaking of bonds between each other and our place in the world, but also the hope of answering the queries and resolving the injustices of a life time (Davis, 2006). In the light of this reality, humans are consistently involved in search of how to perfect the absurdity of existence, hence, the hope of afterlife existence.

In honest, the first encounter one has of death is always the death of others. In other words, no human being can experience his or her own death. That is why one often hears phrases like; that man, that woman, that person has died. Thus, meaning that he or she is no more. To some scholars, death, since it is a negation of life, is nothing. In other words, anything that has no being, and that brings sorrow and chaos, is valueless. Along this line of thinking, Ira Byock writes:

Phenomenologically, death is nothing. The essential nature of life entails activity, purpose, and making order from disorder. Death is the antithesis of life. Nonlife is inactive, and despite its stillness, death is chaos. Life generates its own meaning. In contrast, on its face death appears devoid of meaning and value (Byock, 2002, p.27).

From the foregoing quote by Byock, death is not a good phenomenon. It is not so because it seems to bring an end to life, full of activities. In his thinking, why should there be death when life is so enjoyable and meaningful. It is only in the act of living that possibilities can become actualities. It is only in life that purpose and dreams can come to fruition. All of these are extinguished with the arrival of death. Thus, Byock concludes that anything that removes meaning is devoid of value and therefore a bad omen. This view brings us to the theme proper, most especially, as discussed by the existentialists of which Heidegger and Sartre represent.

The Issues in the Existentialist Conception of Death

Before we delve into the existentialist view of death, it is compelling that we make some clarifications on the concept of existentialism. Existentialism, designates the series of thinkers in the Post-Hegelian tradition of European philosophy. It became the most influential philosophical movement for several years. Existentialism is better classified as a movement rather than a school. The reason for this is because it is not a coherent system of philosophy like Rationalism, Thomism, Platonism, and the like. The movement is not a homogeneous school of philosophy, but, rather, it should be seen as a style of philosophizing. They generally treat the same themes, although differ in their interpretations, based on their theistic biases. With reference to the two great existentialists under our consideration; Heidegger and Sartre, their strongest point of intersection is that they do not believe in abstract speculation, instead they are interested in concrete human existence and its attendant predicament. As such, their mode of philosophizing begins from man rather than from nature (Unah & Osegenwune, 2010,

p.129). “What they have in common is simply their belief that existence precedes essence; or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be our point of departure” (Sartre, 2007, p.20). Properly conceptualized, to exist means to be set forth or dynamically set in motion, to be constitutive of action, to live precariously and sometimes dangerously, and to work out a consistent course of action in order to introduce meaning and value into an apparently meaningless world. That is why existentialists say that only human beings exist; other things merely are.

This kind of thinking, was the binding cord of philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard (who is often referred to as the father of this movement), Martin Heidegger (although would not like to be called an existentialist), Fredrick Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Simon de Beauvoir , Jean-Paul Sartre and host of others. The condition and quality of the existing human individual remains the kernel of their philosophies, hence they are classified as existentialist thinkers. The biggest among them in contemporary scholarship are Heidegger and Sartre (Omoregbe, 1981, p. 31).

Properly understood, the term existentialism is a derivative of Kierkegaard's frequent use of the word 'existence'. It was the need to understand and find solution to the seeming futility of human existence in an organized society that inspired these thinkers. In addition to this, were the frequent wars and human carnages of the 18th and 19th centuries in a supposedly civilized and rational human society, which disregarded human feelings and aspirations of man. In the aftermath of the first and second world wars, it became clearer that, humanity, left at the mercies of science and technology, was doomed to collective suicide. In response, the existentialist movement emerged as an effort to give the world a human face and save human civilization from total decimation arising from human activities aided by over bloated emphasis on the rational and the calculative.

In the existentialists' determination to make humans live an affirmative, authentic and responsible form of existence, most of the members of the movement denied all forms of abstractions and esoteric values in respect to existence. “Against all objectives and abstractions, existence, for these philosophers, takes precedence over essence” (Nyomg, 1996, 37). They believe that against all odds, man must make every effort to live his life to the optimum on earth. However, they realized that there are some human “givens”, otherwise known as facticity of existence, which might not allow man to affirm himself and achieve all his earthly possibilities. One of these facticities is the phenomenon of *death*, that is, the fact of human temporality.

Accordingly, in response to the aforementioned fundamental questions of existence, that is, what will be the fate of man after his sojourn on earth, the existentialists argued that man is a dying being. Irrespective of their nonconcordant and inharmonious views on other issues such as; afterlife, human freedom and the existence of God, they unanimously agree that death is a phenomenon which every man must experience individually. By *individual death*, they mean that no one can die for another. You will

die your own death, while I die my own death. Secondly, it equally means that there is no collective death except by accident. Even if two people were born together as twins, in the same day and hour, by the same mother, their dying day may not follow the same pattern. Like we observed earlier, although death is a destiny which all living will experience, another fact in it is that no one can experience his own death. People will have to talk about other people's death. It is this fact that brings home the essence of man as a being-with-others. It is in this sense also that "death is said to be a loss, for it is a loss that is experienced not by the deceased himself but by those around him since he is a being-withothers" (Omogbe, 1981, p.32).

Again, in the existentialist belief, contrary to some religious beliefs, death is not transferable. This argument follows from the earlier statement that no one can die for another. This is because, to say one died for another, will mean that the benefactor will not have to die anymore. Furthermore, there is existential belief that our existence implies at the same time, our imminent non-existence and our impending death. For Percy Walker, this is also called "nothingness, nothingness of our life now and then. According to him, we are aware of either a conscious or subconscious level (or a mixture of the two)" (Walker, 2017). Here, a new dimension to the discourse is introduced, that is, death consciousness.

Speaking about death consciousness, Unah, on his part, tries to separate it from public death which according to him is a social fact, and an ordinary way of looking at death. Thus, he writes:

"In this kind of dying and understanding death, epitaphs are written, dirges (sorrowful songs) are presented, condolences and sympathies are expressed by way of commiseration with the living members of the dead person's family" (Unah, 2002, p. 119).

On the contrary, he (Unah) conceives the consciousness of death to mean existentialontological death which according to him is something rooted in the very being of human existence. But again, one needs to ask at this juncture: how does this consciousness of death affect our feelings, our actions, why we act, how we should act? The answer to all these questions can be summarized into two: the consciousness of death makes us to either existentially confront its inevitability and push forth to attain our possibility or we inauthentically resign to fate and give in to fear and passivity. When we resort to fear, we debase our existence to merely what happens at the point of the last breath. Put differently, death consciousness and the event or act of dying are quite distinguishable. The latter is a loss while the former is a gain only if we do not give in to its dominance over the human existential resilience of meaning making. According to Kierkegaard, death consciousness simply brings an underlying sense of anxiety or dread in all that we do. Again, we shall return to this later, but first, let us proceed to engage the views of Sartre on the question of death proper.

Sartre's View on Death as Mortal Blow to Man

At the introductory part of this paper, we briefly captured the views of Heidegger on death as ontologically ingrained in the very fact of human reality. However, Sartre thinks otherwise, “he rejects the view that death is the final cord of a melody giving meaning to what has gone before” (Warbarton, 1998, p. 201). In other words, he refuses to see death as an essential nature of man; neither does he see any essential role which it plays in the affairs of man's existence. In fact, according to him, “death is a meaningless absurdity which removes all meaning from human existence”(Nyong, 1996, p.56). In *Being and Nothingness*, he asserts thus: “What must be noted first is the absurd character of death. In this sense every attempt to consider it as a resolved chord at the end of a melody must be sternly rejected”(Sartre, 1969, p. 533).

For Sartre, death has no meaning whatsoever, it is absurd. He reasons; how can a life full of glorious activities, surrounded by family bonds and loved ones, with all the achievements, with all the pains human go through in the process of raising children, with a view that these children will in turn bring smile on the faces of their parents but behold, this same life is crowned with death on either ways? This pattern of rewarding life, to him, is definitely meaningless and valueless. More so, equally rejected by Sartre, is the view that death is part of individual's life. “Death is not a part of the individual's life of his situation except in very special circumstance, such as death sentence that he knows will be carried out” (Ndubuisi, 2006, p.70). In other words, man is not a being awaiting death as Heidegger opined. Sartre speaks:

“If only deaths from old age existed (or deaths by explicit condemnation), then I could wait for my death. But the unique quality of death is the fact that it can always before the end surprise those who wait for it at such and such a date” (Sartre, 1969, p. 536).

What Sartre tries to debunk in the above quotation is the view that death is a fate which every human being waits for. It is only a convicted person that awaits the day of his death by way of execution. This is a case of a determined situation. But even with that, as observed by Friday Ndubuisi, there are possibilities that there could be a change of government or authority or jail break which will alter the awaited fate. Equally debunked by Sartre, is the notion that death is something which no one can do for another. On the contrary, he contends:

If my acts in the world are considered from the point of view of their functions, their efficacy and their result, it is certain that the other can always do what I can do. For instance, if loving a woman means giving her security, making her happy, raising a home with her, then somebody can love for me. My death can fall in this category. If to die is something meant to inspire, to bear witness to one's country, then

anybody can die in my place. In fact, there is no personalizing virtue that is peculiar to my death. A death becomes mine only if I place myself already in the perspective of subjectivity (Sartre, 1969, pp. 539-540).

The illustration from the above citation simply implies that even death is transferable. As such, to argue that no one can die for another becomes untenable in the views of Sartre. I think he definitely mistakes the point Heidegger makes by individualization of death as we shall later see. But our preliminary response is that, to die for another as understood in Heideggerian conception, simply means that one who is died for would not have to die anymore. This is definitely an impossibility. Every mortal owes individual death as debt. Again, Sartre equally contends that we cannot determine when we will die; hence, the position that death is the end of human life is not true. To say that man is condemned to die, according to Sartre, is to equate him with a condemned criminal who awaits his death. It is certain that mortal being will die some day, Sartre agrees, but the particular day and time it will happen, no one knows. It can be at one's prime or old age. No one can await death as though it is an event, it is an unforeseeable enigma, and it is equally wrong to believe that I move closer to my death with every passing moment. Again, it is equally fallacious to posit that death confers meaning on life. It is only a subjective being that gives meaning to his life, not from the outside. As much as death does not appear on the foundation of man's freedom, it can only remove meaning from man's life and not add. According to him, death does not give life its meaning. Its principles only remove all meaning from life. If man lives to die, then his life has no more meaning. This is because the problem of life has ended up receiving no solution whatsoever. Explicit and compelling as these views seem to appear, this is the pessimistic picture which Sartre paints of death. However, he agree just like we shall later see in Heidegger, that death ought not be faced with fear, rather, it should be confronted with an existential equanimity of mind through which we push further to affirm our individual freedom.

To Sartre, therefore, even sudden death is always a possibility but not my own possibility. Instead, it is rather a remover of all my possibilities because it brings an end to all that makes me human. Thus, for him; "death, in so far as it can be revealed to me, is not only the always possible nihilation of my possibles, a nihilation outside my possibilities. It is not only the project which destroys all projects and which destroys itself, the impossible destruction of my expectations" (Sartre, 1969).

Against the Sartrean thought-provoking understanding of death, Taylor becomes disturbed and gets soaked in his own thoughts as he interrogates the enigma called death; "dying and then being dead, being no more, being nothing-why this fatal calamity? Why this to crown the most beautiful of lives: lucky the beasts who fear, but know not what they fear. We know; it is concealed from us. We know with the same stark realization as the prisoner being led to the gallows" (Sartre, 1969).

Arising from these gloom and doom dictions which are characteristics of Sartre's conception, Heidegger's approach resonates a succour aimed at freeing humanity from the grips of the fear of death.

Heidegger on the Authentic Mode of Understanding Death as a Being-towards

Heidegger insists that death is one of the fundamental structures of Dasein, that is, it is in the very nature of Dasein. For the purpose of clarity, he uses the term Dasein to designate human being. So, when we talk of Dasein here, we mean human being or man as present in the world. Death for Heidegger does not simply mean an end *per se*. In his view, the death of Dasein does not simply mean end. Rather, Dasein in itself is a being towards the end. It is a way to be, which Dasein acquires as soon as it is. I relate to the possibility of my death with resolute certainty, because what I am most certain of in the world is that I will some day die. I am always a being-toward-death.

According to him, this being-toward-death is precisely what makes my being possible, for death is the most extreme possibility of my existence, my “ownmost potentiality of being [*das eigenste Seinkönnen*]” (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 232-233). Consequently, as soon as man comes to life, he is old enough to die. To that end, in his book, *Being and Time*, he writes: “Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die”(p.289). In this sense, for the Heideggerian understanding, expressions such as: gone so soon, sudden, untimely and premature deaths mean nothing other than exercises in existential and linguistic absurdity.

In an ordinary or layman sense, man prepares, hopes, and looks forward to his death as though it is an event such as a wedding day or a day for birth celebration. As such, quite often, we are reminded of the need to prepare for the last day, the day of death, we are sometimes presented with a case study of someone who had just died as a way of reminding us that such would be our fate someday. But the existential understanding is that the one who has just died did not just die that very day *per se*. The death began many years ago. He/she only lived to actualize it. For Heidegger, death is not an event which happens after man's years on earth. It is present in the very nature of man right from the first day one comes into this world. Expressing this view differently, Unah writes that the phenomenon of death is the most individualistic charade of man. He however notes that it is not just the ending of life *per se*. According to him; “death is not an unfortunate incident which befalls man but a vitalizing structural component of the human being. Man is essentially a being-onto-death. He begins to die the very day he is born. In fact, man is born to die” (Unah & Osegenwunem 2010, p.205).

The phenomenon of death permeates the totality of man's life. It is a possibility of Dasein. In other words, more than just an end, the ending which existential death speaks of is a special kind of ending which end begins from the very beginning. Thus, it becomes safe to assert that man is a dying being whose death begins from the beginning. Reiterating this view further, Omoregbe observes;

Death, in the wildest sense, says Heidegger, is ending of that which lives, but man's death is not an event that happens to man. It is, rather a phenomenon to be understood existentially. An existential interpretation of death shows that it is a phenomenon that involves the whole being of man right from his birth. Dying is not just an event that occurs to man at the close of his life, but man's mode of being. For man is a being-towards death, a being who begins to die the very day he is born and lives all his life towards death (Omoregbe, 1981, p. 36).

For Heidegger therefore, the best way to understand death is to understand it existentially. Such existential understanding of death reveals its absoluteness over all mortal. Hence, for him, it is the “possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (Heidegger, 1962, p.294). The absolute possibility in this sense refers to the fact that in death, all human possibilities are grounded to a halt. In other words, everything about Dasein as a being-in and being-with the world loses meaning in death since he cannot experience his own death. Dasein gains experience of death from the death of others (p.281). Again, this brings about the individualizing fact of death. In essence, Being-towards-death presents death as an anticipated possibility of Dasein. It avails man his individuality and temporality and launches him into achieving all his potentialities.

The Individualizing and Salutary Dimensions of Death

The individualizing phenomenon of death uproots man from the inauthentic and crowd form of being and makes him take ownership of death as his distinct possibility. A being towards death which Dasein acquires right from being, urges him to comport himself existentially without losing guard to “everydayness” demand. This individual character of death, this “ownmost possibility is non-relational” (p.308), meaning that death is not transferrable. Thus, in anticipation, Dasein is unveiled with the understanding “that portentiality-for-being in which its ownmost being is an issue must be taken over by Dasein alone. Death does not just 'belong'to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death lays claim to it as an individual Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation individualizes Dasein down to itself”(p.308). Further captured in Omoregbe, “this individualizing effect of the anticipation of death leads man to a sense of self-awareness; becoming aware of his individuality and possibilities, he becomes aware of his freedom and personal responsibility. He becomes aware of his freedom to die” (Omoregbe, 1981, p.33). The awareness of death propels us to live a more responsible, authentic and purposeful life. That is exactly what Heidegger means by the individualization character of death, and that is part of the characters of death which confers meaning on existence. “Thus, the realization is absolutely certain, that no one can die my death for me, that I can die at any moment... that I might as well not have existed, and that I may at any moment dissolve into nothingness” (Unah &

Osegenwune, 2010, p.205), throws up the radical contingency of my being and instigates me to have a meaningful and purposive engagement with my existential givens.

However, unlike the gloomy picture which the layman's understanding of death conveys, the Heideggerian conception tells us that death is a meaningful part of human life. To the everyday conception of death, death is sorrow, it is grief, it is an ending of a sweet melody and it casts condemnation on the purpose of existence if human life is rewarded with death. But for Heidegger, there is a positive value of death in relation to human earthly engagements. As reemphasized by Nyong, death “confers on human existence its uniqueness and meaning” (1996, p.57). What this means is that when one takes the phenomenon of death as a personal possibility, as something that can happen any moment, one ceases to live a life of crowd, the impersonal form of existence. In this way, according to Unah & Osegenwune, “I free myself from the servitude to the anonymous “they” and thereby open myself up to my own most potentiality for being, actively using time to realize my projects before death supervenes to extinguish all my possibilities. Thus does death becomes the most vitalizing fact of life – the cardinal indicator of authentic selfhood” (2010, p.206).

This way of understanding death distinguishes Dasein (man) from other mode of Being. This is because man alone regards death as the universal and inevitable phenomenon, hence, the consciousness of which equips us to separate ourselves from the crowd's form of life. In other words, it propels man to existentially confront his day to day life challenges, by striving harder to achieve his aspirations – knowing full well that he does not have the whole of eternity to live. Therefore, death is that which ushers life into nothingness state. The awareness of this human temporality “gives vitality to life for it prompts one to urgency of action”(Omogbe, 1981, p.38).

To be sure, Heidegger, in his treatment of death as the mode of being of Dasein, did not state the cause of fear of death neither did he discuss fear in relation to death *per se*. For him, fear is a state of mind and it is towards something which we encounter within the world. In other words, it is a disposition of the mind toward something threatening to self. It has an object, that is, that which threatens the self. Thus, for Heidegger, the phenomenon of fear lies in its threatening character. When that which is threatening is removed, the fear ceases. Fear is an existential possibility of the essential state of mind of human beings (1962, pp.140-143). Fear is the fear of something in particular while anxiety is anxious about nothing in particular, but being-in-the-world as such. Sartre on his part attributes fear to existential freedom, that is, being aware of the enormity of freedom and the attendant burden of responsibility causes a sense of anguish (Ndubuisi, 2006, pp.26-27). Thus, fear for him is an unreflective *escape* and an attempt to negate a threat in the face of helplessness (Sartre, 2004, pp.42-60). Therefore, this clarification makes the effort to relate fear to death and a way to overcoming it ingenuously autochthonous to this research. It is the import of the analysis made on the phenomenon

of death by Heidegger and Sartre that is of particular interest to this study as relevant in addressing the ever-present fear of death.

Overcoming the Fear of Death

Often times, human beings are daily lurked and wrapped in the fear of death, and this ushers us into the state of anxiety and in some cases this perpetual life of anxiety ends up hastening the occurrence of that which we fear. My position is that, ontologically, the origin of this fear is not farfetched. It is fundamentally derived from man's innate disposition for pleasure/happiness and the avoidance of pains/sadness. It is also linked with man's ontological desire to perpetually remain young, healthy without aging. To remain connected with family members, loved ones and the goodies which life confers on existence. In other words, impressions of the things, people and aspirations make on our consciousness in our daily experience of the world, the nothingness and uncertainty which permeate our imagination of death insidiously incite the desire to live and the disdain for death. Therefore, the expression of fear of death is an expression driven by non-willingness to part ways with those impressions on our consciousness for the world of uncertainty. Ironically, even those who believe in an afterlife of blissful realm of reward, still express this fear. This informs the position of this paper on the fact that what people fear about is not the act of dying itself but the unwillingness to let go of the 'known' world for the unknown world.

On the other hand, the existential instruction for the cause of the fear of death is the understanding of death as an event which ushers in the last day on earth. Hence, to overcome this fear, it is necessary to underscore fundamental characteristics of death. These are: the fact that human beings are contingent beings and we probably could not have existed; that death is not an event but ontological structured in our being alive; that we begin to die the very day we take in our first breath on earth; that daily as we take in further breath and count our years, we are gradually bidding goodbye to life and finally, that the fear of death is misplaced because the individualizing factor of death implies that nobody experiences own death. For this reason, why do I need fear that which I cannot experience? Often times, we get so afraid of the event of death to the extent that it throws us into that realm where we become afraid of everything and at the same time, afraid of nothing. Being that this state has no object, according to Unah, "it is both disturbing and easy to smoother; both creative and destructive" (Unah, 1996, p.83). On one hand, it is creative because the mere awareness of our finitude and temporality, should spur us to assert our individuality and actualize our possibilities. It ought to propel us to make hey while the sun shines. On the other hand, it is destructive in the sense that man can decide to resign to fate, throw-in all motivations, become pessimistic and consequently live inauthentically. According to Unah, "it is thus that anxiety snatches a man out of the distracting cares of the world, encloses him in a cubicle of thought where he is urged to either own its self or disown it and take solace in the comforting delusion of the anonymous 'they'" (1996, p.94).

Therefore, for Heidegger, the authentic mode to relate to death is to confront its fear headon and understand it as part of the existential structure of human being as a being-ontodeath, which journey we begin the very day we took the first breath. And because it is the absolute possibility of all impossibilities, the only thing we can do of it is to view it in the light that “I am to die”. By this mindset, the significance of death is brought home to me. In so doing, death becomes no longer an external and public fact, but an internal possibility of my own being. It becomes no longer the sad end of a sweet story, but something that enters into the story and invests it with a dramatic character (Unah, 1996). It is in the light of this awareness can man achieve his authentic personal existence.

Again, for Heidegger, death is linked to the notion of authenticity. Our most authentic mode of being is being-towards-death. Death is our own-most possibility. Unlike Sartre, it can not be passed off to another person, and its importance to us cannot be diminished by heroic rhetoric. We know that people die all the time, and we know that one day we too will die but the death that will come upon us will not be an event. It is right within us here and now. We know people who have died. But death is non-relational: death is the extinguishing of all relations, and our knowledge of the death of others has no parallel to our own death. To know about the death of another does nothing to prepare us for our own death because ours is right here with us. As an intellectual conversation, the existential logic does demand that the most plausible position on any issue, whatsoever, is one which upholds the flourishing of the concrete human being and which equips man to surmount his thrown facticities towards self-affirmation. It is for this reason that this essay considers the Heideggerian position more comforting owing that it charges man not to give in to the fear of death, instead, cease the fact of its inevitability and its ever-present status to chart a good earthly course for himself and the world at large, always bearing the phenomenon of time in mind.

Conclusion

The authentic way is to face death not as an event, but as always a “not yet” which constitutes every moment and second of my existence. This means that I anticipate death not as an actuality that I expect, but as an omnipresent, immanent possibility to which I am always already thrown. In other words, one countenances death as constitutive possibility, that is, as constituting life. Put differently, it means that the notion of life implies the absolute possibility of death. So, if one asks the question why death, the answer would simply be; because there is life. For Heidegger, death is a possibility of being which Da-sein had to take upon itself at birth and must be confronted with an existential doggedness, not with a defeatist or surrendering mentality but with authentic selfhood. The being-possible of death is not a possibility of something that may become actual, for death is an existential possibility that is at the same time an impossibility to the extent that it cannot, strictly speaking, be actualized. In other words, that death is not an actuality means that death can never be present *as such* because it is beyond the reach of cognition and therefore not available to phenomenal experience. Heidegger insists that, as a futural possibility (i.e., as a certain *end* that cannot be bypassed), being-toward-

death is what makes the present possible. Being-toward-death is what possibilizes the present. Heidegger views death as that which throws Dasein back upon its “ownmost potentiality-of-being and discloses his ontological structure as possibility. In the final analysis, it is worthy to note that what is most significant in Heidegger's view on death is not that it has any meaning in the true sense of the word but that the awareness of the temporality of human earthly sojourn has the propensity to reawaken our sense of urgency for active participation towards the actualization of self-affirmation, radical finitude and autochthonous footprints on the sands of time, against the risk of resigning to the irresponsible world of 'they’” often occasioned by the consciousness of human finitude. Again, more instructive from the existentialists' account of human finitude includes the point that even death as an event ought not be feared since no man experiences his own death. According to Lucretius as made available by Anthony Kenny: “for thou shall sleep, and never wake again, And quitting life, shall quit thy living pain. But we, thy friends shall all those sorrows find which in forgetful death thou leaves behind. No time shall dry our tears, nor drive thee from our mind. The worst that can befall thee, measure right, is a sound slumber, and a long goodnight” (Kenny, 2004, p.102).

From his view, once we understand the material nature of the soul, we realize that death ought not be feared. This is because a dead body cannot feel and death leaves no self behind to suffer. It is those who survive who are left with grief and speak about the event. But again, this is not to say that we should live our lives in such a soulless manner that our death becomes a hell to the living. Instead, it instructs us that while we are alive, we should strive to live a life worthy of blissful memories when we might have gone. This is because, in most cases, it is the living that bears the grief, brunt and consequences of our irresponsible and wayward earthly existence. This stirs up the new realm for future scholarship, that is, the 'otherness' of human actions.

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