



Epistemic Analysis of Ethical Implications of Death in Existentialist Philosophy of Martin Heidegger

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Abstract

This work sought to carry out epistemic analysis of ethical implication of death in the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger. The philosophical deliberation of death centres on the issue of what happened to us when we die? Even though some religious ideologies conceive that human non physical soul exists after death in heaven, hell or purgatory, the existence of this non physical soul still remains a philosophical problem. Martin Heidegger's existential analysis of death is based on the physical world of human experience. Heidegger lamented that there is natural tendency for individual to flee in the face of death and see death as an event experienced by others and not one's own. This mindset constitute an existential problem for individuals not comporting themselves well in preparation for death. This work adopted analytic method of philosophical analysis. This work postulates that Martin Heidegger's notion of "authentic-Being-towards death" is conceived when Dasein (man) is living his/her life in preparation for his/her future death Thus, the ethical implication of death in the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger is conceived in this work in terms of authentic existence, bioethical, religious and cultural dimensions of death.

Key words: death, soul, afterlife, eternity, authentic, existential, immortality, epistemic and existence

1.0 Introduction

Death is a common experience of human existence. Existential philosophers conceive death as facticity of human existence. It is an inescapable fact because everybody must die but nobody knows the time and how it will happen. In the field of Biology, death is one of the basic characteristics of living things. In the words of M. C. Michael, one of the characteristic features that distinguish living things from non living things is that "all living things must die because they have a definite and limited period of existence".¹

In the existentialist terrain, death constitutes the absurdity of human existence. The traumatic experience of death and mourning for the dead leave an indelible vacuum in the mind of people. The bereaved suffers the traumatic experience of depression on the ground that the dead shall no longer come back nor be seen again in this life. Hence, he or she can only exist in loving memory of his or her loved ones.

Death is one of the common themes of existentialist philosophers which constitute a controversial issue. Some existentialist philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre (1905 - 1980) and Albert Camus (1913 - 1960) conceive death in a pessimistic way. Hence, Jean Paul Sartre sees death as “a meaningless absurdity which removes all meaning from human existence”.² His notion of death depicts the futility of human existence. It portrays that all the worldly possessions like wealth, riches, pleasure e.t.c and human struggle in this world are useless in the face of death. Man is a finite being with many limitations. No wonder, Hazel Barnes conceives that mortality grants consolation to human predicaments³ because the moment one realizes that one day he or she will die “makes the problem of life more endurable”. But, Jean Paul Sartre observes that death impedes on human freedom to exist.⁴

In the same line of thought, Albert Camus (1913 - 1960) conceives death negatively as a meaningless absurdity which portrays the futility of human life.⁵ His conception of death forms the basis for his views on suicide and capital punishment. For him, since death is a meaningless absurdity, suicide subsumes human life into futility of human existence. Also, his view on capital punishment is that death sentence shares “our common fate in an absurd universe” which militates against human dignity.⁶

It is evident that Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus present the negative view of death which seems not to have positive value in the life of people. Hence, their idea of death synchronizes with the realist theory of death which perceives death as “the boundary of human life or as the door leading man into the realm of non being”.⁷ This ideology seems to have some negative consequences on human life in terms of their attitude towards death and the way they live their lives.

Nevertheless, the realist conception of death seems not to address the negative impact of death and its role in human life. The inevitability of death is a universal challenge in human life which calls for more meaningful existential interpretation. Unlike the realist theory of death, Martin Heidegger’s conception of death has a positive influence in human life. Contrary to other existentialist philosophers, Martin Heidegger sees death as a meaningful part of human existence which “bestows on human life its uniqueness, individuality and significance”. He conceives that death is something one undergoes by himself alone. In his own word, it is an “ownmost possibility” which lies “ahead-of-itself”.⁸ Thus, he postulates that Dasein lives an authentic life as “authentic Being-towards-death” when he comports himself in preparation for his future death which must surely come to pass.

2.0 Conceptual Clarification of Basic Terms

Death is an ambiguous concept. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, death is “the total cessation of life processes that eventually occurs in all living organisms. The state of human death has been obscured by mystery and superstition, and its precise definition remains controversial, differing according to culture and legal systems”.⁹ Death is something that is common in all living things. Human death is quite different from other living organism because human being is the only animal that is gifted with rationality.

Death is a recurring problem in human life. The operation of death in human life is a mystery. Sometimes, the aged whom everybody is looking up to die will not die and a young man or woman who is sustaining the whole family will die. Death has no sequence in its procedure. It can occur to anybody be it infant, children, adolescent, adult and aged. No one knows when it will occur. Death is a universal challenge that arouses different reactions from people. Many philosophies emanates to address the existential problem of death and how to cope with it but there is no single philosophical ideology that will work out for everybody. This explains why mourning and coping with challenges associated with the dead is not easy because every individual must do it for him or herself.

Death is characterized as one of the human experience of absurdity. In the words of French Algerian absurdist philosopher Albert Camus, “absurdity is the confrontation of human needs, desire for order, meaning and purpose in life with a blank and unreasonable indifference silence of the universe”.¹⁰ The confrontation of human needs implies that it deals with “conflict between the human tendency to seek for meaning in life and the silent answer of the universe”.¹¹ This suggests that there is no intrinsic meaning in life. This depressing feeling of absurdity is evident in the incidence of bereavement and recognition of death. Death is associated with agony, grief, sorrow and mourning in human society. Death has disastrous or catastrophic effects in the society. Some people who could not bear the death of a loved one have died out of heart attack or even committed suicide. But, suicide death is an abomination in our African society.

The different orientation of death among philosophers, scientists, Christians, Muslims, traditionalists e.t.c. have constituted fear and depression in the mind of people with particular reference to its value in human life. Philosophical deliberation of death falls with the philosophical question of personal identity which addresses these questions: “what is a person? What are the persistence conditions for people?” These questions are centred on the question of “what happened to us when we die?” Even though some people conceive that human non physical soul exists after death in heaven, hell or purgatory, the existence of this non physical soul still remains a philosophical problem.¹² Death is shrouded with uncertainty because what happens to people when they die is not known.

Martin Heidegger’s existential analysis of death is quite different from other interpretations of death which sees death as “a distinctive possibility of Dasein” which does not entertain the end of life in terms of immortality, afterlife or eternity.¹³ The ontology of life according to him centres mainly on “this worldly” (the physical world of human experience). But, he buttresses that there is natural tendency for individual to flee in the face of death

and see death as an event experienced by others and not one's own. This mindset constitute an existential problem for individuals not comporting themselves well in preparation for death.

3.0 Martin Heidegger Theory of Death

An existentialist philosopher, Martin Heidegger was born in September 26, 1889 at Messkirch, Germany. He studied Philosophy at University of Freiburg from 1911 – 1915. His philosophy was influenced by Franz Brentano and Aristotle. Franz Brentano wrote a work on Aristotle titled: *On the Manifold Meaning of Being according to Aristotle* which motivated Martin Heidegger to embark on the philosophical inquiry concerning the notion of being. Hence, his study on Aristotle helped to shape his thought on phenomenology. He assisted Edmund Husserl and rose to the rank of Associate Professor in 1922 at the University of Marburg. Later, he succeeded Edmund Husserl “to the chair of philosophy” at University of Freiburg in 1928 and became the Rector of the University in 1933.¹⁴

He resigned his position as Rector of the University and revolted against Nazi dictatorship. Therefore, he embarked on philosophical lectures that are critical of the Nazi interpretation of philosophy for ten years. His philosophical works include: *Being and Time* (1927), “a two-volume study on Nietzsche” (1961) and *The Matter of Thinking* (1969). He died on May 26, 1976 at Freiburg.

3.1 The Possibility of Dasein as Being-Towards- Death

In the second part of his philosophical work: *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger discusses Dasein's possibility. Hence, he describes Dasein as a Being with possibilities and one of the possibilities of Dasein according to him is death. In his view, Dasein (man) is a Being-towards-death i.e. he sees death as something that is lying “ahead-of-itself” in future. For him, Dasein attains its “wholeness” in death.¹⁵ He expresses in this view that no one experiences his own death because it is a facticity that lies ahead in future. But, s/he experiences the death of others.

Furthermore, he conceives the mode of existence of Dasein as a Being-with-others which implies that man is a social being who cannot live in isolation from others. As such, Dasein has the propensity of experiencing or feeling the death of others. He analyses this experience thus:

The ‘deceased’ [Der “Verstorbene”] as distinct from dead person [dem Gestorbenen], has been torn away from those who have ‘remained behind’ [den “Hinterbliebenen”], and is object of ‘concern’ in the ways of funeral rites, interment, and the cult of graves. And that is so because the deceased, in this kind of being, is ‘still more’ than just an item of equipment, environmentally ready-to-hand, about which one can be concerned. In tallying alongside in their mourning and commemoration, those who remained behind are with him, in a mode of respective solitude.¹⁶

The death of others especially people close to us is not a happy experience. So, Heidegger describes this experience further: “the greater the phenomenal appropriateness with which we take the no-longer-Dasein of the deceased, the more plainly is it shown that in such being-with the dead, the authentic being-come-to-an-end

[Zuendegekommensein] of the deceased is precisely the sort of thing we do not experience. Death does indeed reveal itself as a loss, but a loss such as is experienced by those who remain. In suffering this loss, however, we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man ‘suffers’.¹⁷

However, Heidegger envisages that death is something one experiences by himself. In the words of Heidegger, “dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time...dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially... which is in each case one’s own”.¹⁸ Thus, death in his own view is an existential phenomenon which is distinct from “perishing” because perishing connotes coming to “the end of anything that is alive”.

3. 2 Heidegger’s Ontological Analysis of Death as End and Totality of Dasein

Heidegger uses the nomenclature “end” and “totality” to imply “ways in which Dasein gets a definite character ontologically”.¹⁹ In the view of Martin Heidegger, Dasein derives its definite character ontologically at death. In other words, it is death that defines Dasein. Hence, Heidegger expresses that the existential meaning of Dasein’s coming-to-an-end must be taken from Dasein itself.²⁰ Therefore, he enunciates the three basic characteristics or features on how “ending” or death constitutes “Being-a-whole” of Dasein as:

1. there belongs to Dasein, as long as it is, a “not-yet” which it will be – that which is constantly still outstanding; 2. the coming-to-its-end of what-is-not-yet-at-an-end (in which what is still outstanding is liquidated as regards its Being) has the character of no-longer-Dasein; 3. coming-to-an-end implies a mode of being in which the particular Dasein simply cannot be represented by someone else.²¹

The first two characterizations of Dasein imply that death lies ahead as something “not-yet” which must surely come to pass. Hence, Heidegger refers to it as something “still outstanding”. In the words of Heidegger, “when we use this expression we have in view that which indeed “belongs” to an entity but is still missing...For instance, the remainder yet to be received when a debt is to be balanced off, is still outstanding”.²² So, the “not-yet” “which belongs to Dasein” is “its possible death” which must surely come to pass in future. He likens it to “an unripe fruit” which is not yet ripe at the moment but it is within its being or nature to ripe in the future.

In addition, Heidegger sees death as totality of Dasein but the Being of Dasein in his own view does not end in death. He expresses this view as thus:

... “ending” signifies “stopping” and it signifies this in the senses which are ontologically different. The rain stops. It is no longer present-at-hand. The road stops. Such an ending does not make the road disappear, but such a stopping is determinative for the road as this one, which is present-at-hand. Hence ending, as stopping, can signify either “passing over into non-presence-at-hand” or else “Being-present-at-hand only when it comes”. The latter kind of ending, in turn, may either be determinative for something which is present-at-hand *in an unfinished way*,...Even ending in the sense of “disappearing” can still have its modification according to the kind of Being which an entity may have”.²³

Contrary to these notions above, Heidegger conceives thus: “In death, Dasein has not been fulfilled nor has it simply disappeared; it has not become finished nor has it simply disappeared; it has not become finished nor is it wholly at one’s disposal as something ready-to-hand...The ending which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-the-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a Being-towards-the-end [Sein Zum Ende] of this entity”.²⁴ So, Heidegger was saying in this regard is that death is a way of life for man. Death does not have an order of precedence in its procedure because anybody born is old enough to die in so far as s/he is borne.

3.3. Martin Heidegger’s Existential Analysis of Death as Distinct from Other Possible Interpretations

Martin Heidegger envisages that death can be conceived in a general sense as “a phenomenon of life” from the dimensions of biology and physiology as other living things like plants and animals. But, the existential interpretation of death for him serves as the background for any analysis of death which supersedes that of biology or physiology that see death as “ontology of life”.²⁵ Thus, he conceives that the ontological analysis of death does not warrant taking any existential position about the end of Dasein in terms of “after life” or immortality.

On the other hand, the existential interpretation of death according to Martin Heidegger pertains purely to ‘this-worldly’ (physical world) which sees death as a possibility of Dasein’s being and not eternity or any ‘other-worldly’ metaphysical assumption that lies beyond the existential understanding of death. So, the existential understanding or interpretation of death according to him conceives death as “a distinctive possibility of Dasein”.²⁶ In other words, Dasein is considered as a Being-towards-death.

3.3.1. The Existential-Ontological Structure of Dasein as Being-Towards-Death

Martin Heidegger expresses that Dasein is a being-towards-death. Dasein is gradually moving towards its death on daily basis. Hence, Heidegger uses certain terms to designate Dasein as a being-towards-death which is in line with being with others: “ownmost possibility-for-being” which implies that Dasein must die its own death alone. Also, he conceives it as “ownmost non-relational possibility” which means that no one can do it for you or me (Dasein) and “not to be outstripped” implies that death is inevitable. In the words of Martin Heidegger, “as potentiality-for-being, Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Thus, death reveals itself as *that possibility which is one’s ownmost, which is nonrelational, and which is not to be outstripped*...As such, death is something *distinctively impending*”.²⁷

In line with assertion, J. I. Omoregbe portrays that death is “a way of life” for Heidegger. He further asserts in the interpretation of Martin Heidegger’s thought on death that Heidegger conceives that man will die his death without somebody doing it for him which signifies his individuality, singularity, and uniqueness.²⁸

For Martin Heidegger, Dasein as its existence implies, has been thrown into death as the one’s ownmost possibility, which is non-relational and not to be outstripped. This thrownness in his view indicates that death synchronizes with Being-in-the-world which brings about anxiety²⁹ in the mind of people when one recognizes the

reality of one's own death. Anxiety depicts the feeling of human predicament of being thrown there into existence without his consent which shows his limitation.³⁰ No one wants to entertain the thought of his own death.

On a negative note, Heidegger conceives that there is this tendency for man to flee in the face of death which makes him to see death as a thing which is experienced by others and not one's own. This attitude is what Heidegger refers to as fallenness. For him, fallenness means "a fleeing in the face of one's ownmost Being-towards-death".³¹

3.4 Dasein as Inauthentic Being-Towards-Death

This is a very important aspect of Martin Heidegger's philosophy of death which Heidegger seeks to address in the mind of people. Inauthentic existence according to Martin Heidegger is the fallen self of everyday existence which is lost in the world of others.³² In this regard, fallenness as it is conceived above is the inauthentic living in the world of others or what one can call the "they". In the words of Martin Heidegger, "The "they" is constituted by the way things have been publicly interpreted, which expresses itself in idle talk. Idle talk must accordingly make manifest the way in which everyday Dasein interpret for itself its Being-towards-death".³³ Thus, Dasein interprets its Being-towards-death wrongly. It sees death "an event experienced by others". In this sense, Heidegger buttresses that Dasein depicts inauthentic being-towards-death as thus:

In the publicness with which we are with one another in our everyday manner, death is 'known' as a mishap which is constantly occurring – as a 'case of death'. Someone or other 'dies' be he neighbour or stranger...People who are no acquaintances of ours are dying daily and hourly. 'Death' is encountered as a well known event occurring within-the-world. As such, it remains in the inconspicuousness characteristic of what is encountered in an everyday fashion. The "they"...will talk of it in a 'fugitive' manner, either expressly or else in a way which is mostly inhibited, as if to say, "One of those days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us".³⁴

Hence, it conceives death as "infinite something" which is "*not present-at-hand* for oneself". So death is seen a "public occurrence" or event which others or the "they" come upon. Thereby, death loses its basic features such as ownmost possibility, which is non-relational and not be outstripped. It therefore plunges Dasein into the illusion that he will flee from death and come to "tranquillized everydayness of the world of his concern".³⁵

3.5 Dasein as Authentic Being-Towards-Death

Unlike the inauthentic or wrong interpretation of Dasein's Being-towards-death which makes Dasein to see death as an event experienced by others, Martin Heidegger posits that "death must be conceived as one's ownmost possibility, non relational and not to be outstripped".³⁶ What it means is that death ought not to be conceived as a reality or event which is experienced by others. It is quite different from the public interpretation of death as constituted by the "they".

Nevertheless, Martin Heidegger uses the term “authentic-Being-towards-death” to portray the positive approach or mindset which Dasein ought to have towards death. Thus, “authentic-Being-towards-death” according to Martin Heidegger envisions the certainty of death as an ownmost possibility i.e. one’s own possibility that is non relational. Since Martin Heidegger sees death as a way of life for Dasein (man) which is impending or “possible at any moment”, authentic existence is when one is living his/her daily life in anticipation of his/her own future death. In this regard, death gives a sense of direction to individual because when one is living his/her life in expectation of his/her future death it makes the person or individual not to waste his own time in frivolity. In other words, it makes or motivates the individual to live an authentic or responsible life. Heidegger’s philosophical theory of death is good because it deals with the manner people comport themselves in preparation to their death. Martin Heidegger buttresses this idea thus:

Dasein comport itself towards something possible in its possibility by expecting it...Anyone who is intent on something possible, may encounter it unimpeded and undiminished in its ‘whether it comes or does not, or whether it comes after all’...To expect something possible is always to understand it and to ‘have’ with regard to whether and when and how it will be actually present-at-hand...But is essentially waiting for its actualization.³⁷

Thus, Martin Heidegger by conceiving Dasein as Being-towards death means “to comport ourselves towards death” instead of fearing death. In his own view, death is an “ownmost possibility” which “individualizes Dasein down to itself”.³⁸

4.0. Implications of Martin Heidegger’s Conception of Death

Martin Heidegger’s philosophical theory of death has great relevant implications on human life. One can deduce from this study that philosophy is not just an academic discipline; it is a way of life. It is an ideology which serves as a guiding principle that gives direction to people.³⁹ No wonder the Roman stoic, Marcus Aurelius conceives in this study that living a philosophical life is living one’s life in preparation for death. This idea is akin to the view of Socrates and Epicurus which conceive that philosophy plays a good preparatory role for death. Thus, it can serve as an antidote that helps people to conquer the natural fear of death.

Hence, Martin Heidegger’s conception of death is a philosophy which sees the inevitability of death as “ownmost possibility” that will induce individual and people to live their lives in anticipation for death. This philosophy is a good orientation that will guide people to tackle the mysterious and natural fear of death. It is evident from his philosophy that death is not something bad. It is a natural occurrence which everybody must undergo. So, his philosophy of death makes us to understand that human life is complemented by death. One can apply the epistemological argument from polar concept⁴⁰ in addition to Martin Heidegger’s philosophy to derive the meaning of human life in death. It is imperative from this argument that the concept or value of human life is made more meaningful through death. Moreover, the logic of Hegel’s dialectics of ‘binary opposition’ of thesis and antithesis can be applicable to draw the connection or ‘interrelatedness” or “interdependency” existing between life and death.⁴¹ It is evident from this dimension of Hegel’s dialectic that life and death are unity in diversity.

Apart from the acquisition of knowledge and skill which belong to cognitive and psychomotor domains of learning, philosophy also perform an important function of addressing the affective behavioural domain of learning that deals with the development of right character, emotion, attitude and dispositions in life. One begins to wonder why some philosophers in this part of the world are not living the life worthy of their vocation as a philosopher. It is somehow disturbing that some learned Professor and academic Doctors of Philosophy in the various universities across the country are academic giants but moral dwarfs. What it implies is that the good knowledge of philosophy they acquired does not pass through them.

4.1. Authentic Living

Authentic and inauthentic existence is one of the common themes of existentialism. Existentialism is modern philosophical movement that “considers the nature of human condition as a key philosophical position”.⁴² It sought to restore the authentic existence of individual selfhood which was eroded by different philosophical systems of thought, demand and influence of the society. But, inauthentic existence subjugates the unique selfhood of individual under the influence or dictate of the crowd or community mindset. Hence, Martin Heidegger sought to address this negative orientation or framework that immerses individual in the crowd to derive meaning for his existence in his philosophical theory of death which conceives Dasein (man) as inauthentic being towards death. He decries this inauthentic tendency or what he calls “fallenness” that derives Dasein to fear death or flee in the face of death by seeing death as an event or a thing which is experienced by others and not one’s own. He laments in his philosophy that this type of mindset will make people to live an irresponsible life without anticipating their future death. However, Enoch Samuel Stumpf expresses that Soren Kierkegaard (the father of existentialism) uses the analogy of actor and spectator to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic existence as thus:

To be sure, the spectator can be said to exist, but the term *existence* does not properly belong to inert or inactive things, whether these be spectators or stones. Kierkegaard illustrated this distinction by comparing two kinds of people in a wagon, one holding the reins while asleep and the other fully awake. In the first case, the horse goes along the familiar road without any direction from the sleeping person, whereas in the other case the person is truly a driver. Surely, in one sense it can be said that both people exist, but Kierkegaard insists that *existence* must refer to a quality in the individual, namely, his continuous participation in an act. Only the conscious driver exists, and so, too, only a person who is engaged in conscious activity of will and choice can be truly said to exist. Thus, while both the spectator and the actor exist in a sense, only the actor is involved in existence.⁴³

In this regard, one could liken the existence of Heidegger’s notion of Dasein as inauthentic being towards death to that of a spectator in a wagon in this analogy who sleeps while holding the reins, the horse moves “along the familiar road without any direction from the sleeping person” in one hand.

On the other hand, authentic existence in this view implies one taking part in the active participation of human existence through a conscious engagement of man’s free deliberate act of will and choice. Thus, authentic existence means the preservation of the subjectivity of the individual selfhood which is capable of being eroded by

the crowd. Soren Kierkegaard upholds that the separation of the individual from the crowd is a *conditio-sine qua non* for achieving a matured and authentic selfhood.⁴⁴

Again, it is stipulated in this study that Martin Heidegger buttresses the state of existence of Dasein as being with others. Although man is a social being who cannot live in isolation from other, he should not forget that he has his own unique life to live. So, he ought not to allow himself to be subsumed in the crowd mentality nor do things because everybody is doing it. These anomalies could be likened to university students who are engaging in mob action as in the case of rioting. Contrary to mob action which is acting without reason, one ought to do things out of his own personal conviction. Martin Heidegger's philosophy of death portrays this viewpoint when he conceived that Dasein is authentic being towards death. His philosophical theory of death analyses death as one's own possibility which is non relational. Authentic existence for him is when one is living his life in anticipation of his future death. In other words, it has to do with the way individual comports himself in preparation of his death i.e. one living everyday of his life in view of his future death.

Even though Martin Heidegger conception of death does not pertain to the end of Dasein in terms of "after life" or immortality, one can use the Christian biblical analogy of the parable of ten virgins in (Matt25: 1-13) to depict Martin Heidegger's authentic and inauthentic being towards death. The five foolish virgin who neglected to put oil in their lamps could be liken to Heidegger's notion of "inauthentic being towards death" while the other five wise virgin that put enough oil in their lamps and still reserve some for emergency exhibited Heidegger's view of "authentic being towards death" who were prepared to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding hall.⁴⁵

4.2. Martin Heidegger's Idealist Theory of Death vis-à-vis Realist theory of Death

Martin Heidegger's idealist theory of death is quite different from the realist theory of death. This study conceives that realist philosophers see death as the limit of human life or one can say "the door leading man into the realm of non being". Thus, the realist view of death sees the end of one's life as termination. In the words of Jeff Mason, "the concept of death has a use for the living, while death itself has no use for anything. All we can say about death is that it is either real or it is not real. If it is real, then the end of one's life is a simple termination. If is not real, then the end of one's embodied life is not true death, but a portal to another life".⁴⁶ In a nutshell, the realist conception of death is the view that human life terminates at death. This is what Aristotle means when he conceives that both body and soul perish at death.

In addition, Aristotle and Epicurus conception of death can be classified under the realist conception of death. In line with Aristotle, Epicurus conceives that human soul is not immortal. For him, death is the removal of sensation that is responsible for the notion of good and evil in human life. It is simply a condition of body enclosing or wrapping up the soul. Hence, other existentialist philosophers' notion of death like Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus which see death as a meaningless absurdity that removes meaning from human life synchronizes with Epicurus conception of death.

Nevertheless, the idealist theory of death tends to give meaning to human life by conceiving that death is not real. According to this theory, the end of human life is not true death rather it is a gateway to another form of life in terms of re-incarnation and (or) immortality as ancient Greek and medieval philosophers portray. Contrary to the ancient Greek and medieval philosophers' idea of death which conceive death in terms of re-incarnation and immortality, Martin Heidegger does not see death in the line of thought of immortality, reincarnation nor other worldly mindset. But, one may still classify Martin Heidegger's conception of death under the idealist theory of death because it gives meaning to human life. It conceives death as an own most future possibility that will make people to comport themselves by living an authentic life in preparation for their future death.

4.3. Martin Heidegger and Bioethical Dimension of Death

Death is one of the basic characteristics of living thing. Hence, every organism including plants and animal die. But, there is this scientific problem of verifying when or how a person is declared dead which has resulted to the current debate whether or not the entire brain death is a valid confirmation for human death.⁴⁷ A person is medically declared dead when the brain that sustain the entire bodily mechanism is confirmed dead. The brain stem is that lower part of the brain that is linked to the spinal cord which plays a very important role in consciousness, movement as well as regulating automatic bodily activities like breathing, heartbeat, blood pressure and so on. Thus, the brain stem death occurs "when a person on an artificial life support machine no longer has any brain functions. This means they will not regain consciousness or be able to breathe without support".⁴⁸ Sustaining human lives in the artificial life support machine have resulted to the many bioethical problems revolving around thanato-ethics (ethics of death). On this note, Beatriz Priscila Costa and Luciano Azevedo Duarte express that "the bioethical discussions about terminality in general are based on three concepts: euthanasia, dysthanasia and orthothanasia".⁴⁹

Euthanasia is a controversial bioethical issue revolving around the pain and indignity of patients suffering from terminal ailment. Even the countries where euthanasia is legalized like Netherland, Belgium and others, it is very difficult to determine the patient voluntary consent in this matter because the patients may not be in the right frame of mind to make decision. This is coupled with the problem of extending this practice to the handicapped, aged, blind and other disabilities. Euthanasia is less implemented than dysthanasia particularly in intensive care units.⁵⁰

On the other hand, dysthanasia is the prolongation of dying through techno-scientific innovations. Though it is assumed that this practice is geared towards to bringing about cure at all cost, it raises a serious ethical problem of respect for life which leads to what the author called "therapeutic obstinacy" thereby causing more harm than good to the patient. But, it is less susceptible to misconduct or neglect as in the case of euthanasia.

Orthothanasia is a synthesis between euthanasia (deals with termination of life) and dysthanasia (elongation of life by all means). It tends to synthesize the moral principle of euthanasia and dysthanasia to enable the patients, his/her relatives and well wishers assisted by team of medical practitioners to welcome the impending death of their person with courage. In the words of Beatriz Priscila Costa and Luciano Azevedo Duarte, “orthothanasia constitute therapeutic measures aimed at humanized death, surrounded by the necessary care”. Physiotherapists are the medical personnel trained to take passionate care of patients with incurable ailment. They encounter great moral challenge in bioethical issues ranging from euthanasia, dysthanasia and orthothanasia. As such, they have to be well informed on “the ethics of palliative care” in order to tackle the challenges associated with their duties. Other medical practitioners ought to assist the physiotherapists to work as a team to take good care of patients suffering from terminal illness. They ought to be well informed on the basic issues bordering on bioethics and medical ethics.

Although Martin Heidegger does not delve into the bioethical issues revolving around the patients and dying, he subscribes to the natural process of dying which militates against euthanasia, and other related concepts like dysthanasia and orthothanasia. His conception of death tends to give meaning to human life by living a good moral lifestyle that can help to prevent certain ailments that may accrue as a result of care free lifestyle in the society.

4.4 Martin Heidegger’s Philosophy of Death and Religious Concept of Death

Martin Heidegger and religious conception of death may be categorized as idealist conception of death which tends to give meaning to human life by conceiving that death is not the real end of life. The religious and Martin Heidegger’s conceptions of death are related in the sense that they tend to help people to see death in positive dimension and to live their lives in preparation for death. But, Martin Heidegger’s conception of death is quite different from the religious conception in the sense that he does not see death in the line of thought of immortality, reincarnation nor other worldly framework.

The religious conception of death, on the other hand, tend to give meaning to human life by seeing death in terms of reincarnation, immortality and other worldly values beyond realm of this physical world of human experience. It is imperative at this point to look at different religious conceptions of death in order to make a comparative analysis between Martin Heidegger’s concept of death with the notion of death in different religions.

4.4. 1. African Traditional Religion ATR

Death is conceived in African traditional religion (ATR) as “a transition of human beings from the physical world of the living to the spiritual world of the spirit”.⁵¹ The spiritual world of the spirit in the African cosmology is a place where the revered ancestors live. According to Egbeke Aja, the physical world of the living and the spiritual world of the spirit are joined together and interact communally.⁵² African family constitute both the living descendants and the ancestors. Ancestors are the living dead in the spirit world making endless voyage into the

physical world. In the words of Francis Arinze, “the ancestors are felt to be present, watching over household, directly concerned in all the affairs of the family and property, given abundant harvest and fertility”.⁵³

Ancestors serve as a mediator between living descendants and God. They convey the prayers of the living descendants to God. No wonder, Africans worship the cult of ancestors in order to bring good fortune and to prevent danger from the family. On this note, Laurenti Magesa observes that ancestors commune with the living descendants through dreams, possession and divination.⁵⁴ In Igbo traditional thought for instance, ancestors and the mother earth (ani) which is the earth goddess are custodian of morality.⁵⁵ So, any violation of public morality is a taboo which can affect the whole community drastically. In line with this view, John Mbiti buttresses that ancestors can cause trouble when the community laws are infringed.⁵⁶ In African traditional religion (ATR), certain essential criteria will qualify the dead to descend into the spirit world as ancestors: (i) the person must have lived a good life on earth, (ii) the person must have gotten married and begotten children, (iii) the person must have died a good death and (iv) the person must have been given a befitting funeral.

The first criterion of living a good life on earth is in line with Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of death. Even though African notion of death in African Traditional Religion (ATR) is quite different from Martin Heidegger’s theory of death, the first essential criterion of living a good life as one of the necessary conditions that will make the dead to join the ancestral world synchronizes with Martin Heidegger’s conception of death which will make people to see death as one’s own possibility that is impending. Thus, it will drive people to comport themselves in preparation of their future death.

Contrary to Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of death, it is believed in African traditional religion (ATR) that the soul is immortal. The souls of dead ancestors will reincarnate in new born children. The African belief in reincarnation signifies that human soul does not die. Parents name their children with the names of good ancestors. Again, evidence of reincarnation is also inherent in the practice masquerade. Ik. N. Ogbukagu portrays that masquerade symbolizes the images of dead relatives who came from spirit world for some reasons like celebration of festivals and funerals.⁵⁷

4.4.2. Christianity

Christians believe in life after death. They see death as separation of the soul from the body. The souls of the righteous for them shall rise again on the last day. The doctrine of resurrection from the dead is central to Christian faith. Death for Christians is not seen as something bad. For them, death is transformation of life. The Christian religious offices given to the dead show the Christian faith in the resurrection of the dead. Christians are admonished not to mourn for the dead like people without faith because God is the author of both life and death.

Again, they see death as punishment for the sins of our first parents; Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit which brought about death into this world. But, Christians uphold that God did not leave his people to die in sin. He sent his only begotten son to die on the cross to atone for sins of mankind. Jesus Christ, the son of God overthrows the power of death by rising from the dead which brought resurrection for Christian believers.

Christians believe in life after death. For them, after death comes judgment. God will judge both the righteous and sinner. After judgment by God and angels, the righteous will ascend into Heaven to enjoy the Heavenly bliss of seeing God face to face. But, the sinners who died in mortal sin will descend into Hell for eternal damnation. The souls of men who died with venial sin will into purgatory where they will purified before entering into Heaven.

It is the belief of Christians that Christ's death on the cross of Calvary brought salvation to all mankind. So, for them, the good souls who died before the coming of Christ went to limbo or what St. Thomas Aquinas called "Abraham's bosom". According to Christian Catholic theology, Limbo was the place of rest for believers who died before the coming of Christ enjoyed the same happiness like the souls in Heaven but the only difference is that they did not see God face to face.

Both Limbo and purgatory for Catholics are located at the upper part of Hell which is a place of temporary abode. Christ descended into the upper part of Hell after death to free the good souls in Limbo and opened the gate of Heaven for everybody. But, the lower part of Hell fire is a place of eternal damnation for souls who died with mortal sin.

Thus, living an authentic Christian life for believers is living the life in preparation for death. For it is written in the Holy Scripture in Mark8:36 "For what shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul?"⁵⁸ Hence, living an authentic Christian faith is in line with Martin Heidegger philosophical theory of death who conceive death as one's own future possibility that will make the individual to live an authentic in anticipation to death. But, one can say that Christian belief in the theology of Limbo, Heaven, Purgatory and Hell can only be accepted with faith because no one can prove with philosophical reason about the existence of these places of abode on the last day. Although the scholastic philosophers and other Christian scholars have attempted to use philosophy to prove theology, no one can be sure truly that there is Limbo, Heaven, Purgatory and Hell. Philosophy unlike theology that applies the principle of faith "credo ut intelligem" meaning "I believe in order to understand", the tool of operation of philosophy is logic. No one has proven logically the existence of these metaphysical places of eternal abodes. But, it does not mean that eternal places of abode may or may not exist. The point I am trying to make is that people should follow Martin Heidegger's philosophical theory of death to live an authentic life in preparation for future death so that if at last Heaven and Hell exist, one will not regret missing Heaven.

4.4.3. Islam

The Islamic conception of death and life after may share a similar view to Christian belief on death and eternity. The religious term which is applied in “life after death” for Islam is “Akhirah”. The Muslims believe that life and death belong to Allah. So, it is Allah that decides when a person will live or die. When a person died, the person will stay in the tomb until the Day of Judgment which they refer to as “Yawm al-din” when everybody will appear before Allah for judgment. This judgment on the last day for Allah is what they called “the resurrection of the body”.

This Islamic religious belief of “the resurrection of the body” is seems to be similar to the Jehovah Witness doctrine of the last day which believes that when a person died, the person will remain in the grave until the Day of Judgment when they will be judged according to their deeds on earth.

Like Christians, the Muslims view death as parting of the soul from the body which is the starting point of after life for them. The good people will go to Paradise which they refer as “Jannah” after the Day of Judgment and the bad people will go to Hell which is “Jahannam” for them where they suffer. There are many stages of life after death in Islam. The first stage is what they refer to as “Barzakh” which is a stage of the body “waiting” in the grave or tomb whether the person is buried, burnt to ashes or eaten by animal until the judgment day.⁵⁹

The second stage is what they call “Blowing of the Trumpet”. This second stage is the beginning of the Judgment Day when the trumpet is blown by the angel “Hazrat Israfil”. The trumpet is blown by this angel twice to resurrect the people to a place of meeting. Then, the third stage is place of judgment which they called “Qiyama” (apocalypse). The fourth stage is “Resurrection after Death” when the dead are risen from their tomb and taken to Allah for judgment. For them, the dead is raised both in body and spirit. The fifth stage is “Gathering Place” where the dead converge to accept “the Book of Deeds”. The sixth stage is “Receiving the Book of Deeds”. The souls assemble to take ‘the Book of Deeds’ which contains the documentation of each person’s good and bad actions. The seventh stage is “Reckoning”. This is the time when the souls are judged according the good and bad action they performed while on earth and every soul will be paid according to their deeds on earth. The eighth stage is “Scale or Mizan”. It is here that the scale of the souls’ action is weighed and if the good deed weighs more than the bad one, the soul rewarded with “salvation”. But, if it is the other way round, the soul will be chastised. For them, the chastised souls in Hell can go to Heaven after completing their punishment. The ninth stage is “River and Pool of Kawthar”. For Muslim, the river of the pool of paradise will flow here on the Day of Judgment when ‘Prophet Hazrat Muhammad’ will be taken “the Pool of Kawthar” and whoever gets to this pool first will be became ‘a Prophet’. The tenth stage “Sirat” is ‘the bridge of Hell and Paradise’ where each soul will cross. The tempo of crossing this bridge depends on the type of life of the person lived while on earth. The eleventh stage is “Intercession” when sinners will pray the prophets to ask Allah for forgiveness. The just that did not have any sin will rise to greater level. The twelfth stage is “Purgatory” (Araf). It is the time when Allah determines who goes to

Heaven and Hell. The thirteenth and fourteenth stages are “Hell” and “Paradise” where the damned souls are punished in Hell fire and the good souls enjoy the good life in Heaven.⁶⁰

Muslim conception of death and after life is based on the Islamic faith just like other religions above It shares similar orientation with African traditional religion (ATR) and Christianity on the need to live authentic religious life on earth. This is akin to Martin Heidegger’s notion of “authentic-Being-towards death” which implies that death is possible at any time. So authentic existence for him is when one is living his/her life in preparation for their future death. Other religions of the world like Buddhism and Hinduism also endorses living good moral life as antidote for salvation.

4.5. Martin Heidegger and Cultural Dimensions of Death

Every individual in the society is born into a family. Family serves as the basic unit of the society. Different communities that make up the civil society in a country or state are a conglomeration of different families. Every citizen of a country or state is traced down to a particular family which individualizes a person and nurtures him into becoming a part of the community.⁶¹ In time of sickness or death, it is the family members that takes care of the individual and carry out the death or funeral ceremonies in the situation of death which distinguishes a person from other things that merely exists like plants and animals. Hence, Heidegger’s philosophical theory of death conceives that death individualizes a person because he sees death as one’s own possible that is non relational. Since death is impending or inevitable, authentic existence for Heidegger is when one is living his life in preparation for death.

Furthermore, Martin Heidegger uses certain terminology like “demise” to depict that the end of being of Dasein is unlike perishing which is used to connate the death of other things or being like plants and animals. On this note, Maya Mandalinci conceives that the concept of “demise” which is used for the being of Dasein is not the same with perishing of other beings as a result of the cultural or customary death rituals that are distinctive of Dasein as “Being-with-others”.⁶²

At this point, it is important for us to look into these cultural or customary death rituals or funerals which distinguish Dasein from other beings. The contemporary African societies today are distorted by the infiltration of Western culture. As such, death rituals in the contemporary African society are a combination of Christian burial rite cum traditional funeral ceremony. For example, when a person die in our present Nigeria Igbo community, the person is either buried or put in the mortuary form embalmment until the day of his/her funeral ceremony will be organized by family members and well wishers.

On that day, the ambulance will convey the corpse from the mortuary from where it is embalmed to his/her home town early in the morning for the burial mass in the church. The priest or minister will celebrate the last mass or service and performs other burial rites for the person. After which s/he will buried or interred in his compound at

home. Immediately, the church group or members will commence their own funeral ceremony/prayer and conclude.

Thereafter, the kinsmen will commence the funeral ceremony when the relatives, in-laws, friends and well wishers will come for condolence with songs and gifts to the bereaved family and they will be welcomed, received and entertained with drinks, food and other edibles. The local canon shots are released to them before they enter into the compound. It is believed that these shots are geared to project and escort the deceased to the spiritual world of the dead (ala mmuo). The family of the diseased will also entertain the daughters of the kindred (umuokpu) both married or unmarried in the place meant for them with food, drinks and other requirements according to the custom and tradition of the land or place. They convey their kind gestures with songs and other exhibition which are meant to entertain the public signifying that the funeral ceremony or what one may call “the second burial” was successful.⁶³

The traditions of burial of the dead differ from place to place which are highly ritualized. Interment is the common practice in Africa and other parts of the world where a dead body is buried or lowered into the ground. Other forms of dealing with the dead bodies are “embalming” or “mummification”, cremation, cryopreservation⁶⁴ and so on. Mummification is a method of “preserving a dead body by treating it with special oils and wrapping it in cloth”.⁶⁵ It is an advanced form of embalming practiced in Ancient Egypt for additional delaying the decay process.⁶⁶ Again, another method of disposing the dead body is cremation. It is an alternative method to interment which is practiced in India, Nepal and some part of Europe whereby the dead body is burnt to ashes. Sometimes, the mineral portions of bones that are not burned are crushed into powder. It is either scattered into the sea or any other place, preserved by relatives or interred in a monumental place.⁶⁷ On the other hand, cryopreservation, is the method of preserving the cells, tissue, organ of the dead body that are prone to decay by freezing or cooling to extremely low temperatures.⁶⁸ The chemical process which might cause decay to the body is hindered by this procedure. But, this method is being investigated as a result of its intrinsic toxic nature to the cells or any organs or parts of the body. The negative effects of this damage can be reduced by cryoprotectants.⁶⁹ Thus, the use of any of the above mentioned methods of preserving or disposing the dead body depends on culture and tradition of the place and time.

5.0. Evaluation of Martin Heidegger’s Idealist Theory of Death

Martin Heidegger’s conception of death and its relevant implication on human lives have been conceive in this study that philosophy plays a crucial role of addressing the affective behavioural domain of learning that deals with the development of right character, emotion, attitude and dispositions in life. This is applicable to people in many ways in terms of authentic existence, bioethical, religious and cultural dimensions.

On the authentic existence, his philosophical theory of death tends to reorient the negative mindset of people which tend to derive people to live an irresponsible or what Heidegger may term “inauthentic life” by conceiving death as a thing or event which experienced by others and one’s own. Bringing this point from the bioethical aspect of life is very difficult because it is not always easy to determine when a patient is declared dead from the medical point of view. Thus, sustaining human lives in the artificial life support machine have resulted to bioethical dilemma revolving around thanato-ethics (ethics of death). Martin Heidegger’s does not go into the bioethical issues that centre on patients and dying.

Then, in the aspect of religious life, different religions of the world such as Christianity, Islam, Hindu, Shintoism and Buddhism share a similar orientation with Martin Heidegger on the need to live good moral life as antidote for salvation. This is synchronizes with Martin Heidegger’s notion of “authentic-Being-towards death” which implies that death is evitable which can come at any time. Thus, authentic existence for him is when Dasein (man) is living his/her life in preparation for his/her future death.

Finally, Martin Heidegger’s philosophical theory of death is examined from cultural dimension. Death is conceived in terms of culture and tradition which individualizes a person from other living things like plants and animal. Martin Heidegger uses the nomenclature “demise” to show that the end of being of Dasein is not the same with perishing of other beings. Thus, the cultural or customary death rituals are the distinctive feature of the being of Dasein which connotes with its mode of existence as Being-with-others. It is important at this point to look at the critical examination of Martin Heidegger’s conception of death

5.1. Critical Examination

Martin Heidegger has contributed so much to the philosophical problem of understanding the meaning of death in this contemporary period. His philosophy tends to highlight the practical relevance death has on people lives in the society. But, there are certain loopholes in his philosophy of death. In the first instance, Heidegger’s philosophical theory of death is devoid of metaphysical aspect of reality in the sense that it does not see death in the line of thought of immortality, or any other worldly or metaphysical framework. However, metaphysical realm is a very important aspect of reality. This world is spiritual than physical. Man is a finite being so there is still the need for man to resort to the metaphysical essence of higher power in order to tackle the problems of this physical world of human experience.

Furthermore, Heidegger’s view of authentic existence is criticized as being selfish without love or ethical consideration of others.⁷⁰ Even, his conception of death as one’s ownmost possibility which is non relational can be seen as not considering the social dimension of life that is consonant with mode of existence of Dasein as Being with others. On the other hand, the social dimension is important for human survival because Aristotle conceives that man is a social being who cannot survive in isolation from others.⁷¹ Even though his notion of Dasein as inauthentic being is tenable, it should not undermine one’s social responsibility of burying the dead which is call to

natural law, tending burial or funeral by consoling the bereaved as well as participating actively in the social activities that distinguishes individual as a members of the community or social group where s/he belongs.

Martin Heidegger's notion of death seems not to be extensive in the sense he considers death mainly from the aspect of personal experience. But, death can be understood from many dimensions in terms of biological, social, religious aspect and so on.⁷² Death cannot be restricted to only to personal experience. Thus, there is the need for people to have a holistic view of different dimensions of death in order to enhance a better understanding. Notwithstanding these lacunas in Martin Heidegger's philosophical theory of death, his notion of death is still very relevant in this contemporary period.

5.2. Conclusion

This work has carried out the epistemic analysis of ethical Implication of Death in Martin Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. The secularization of this modern age which emanated as a result of the modern scientific revolution made Martin Heidegger to give a meaningful interpretation of life in his existential philosophy of death that is devoid of religion. Hence, he conceives death as a distinctive possibility of Dasein that will derive him to live an authentic life in the society. His existential philosophy has it that death is what individualizes a man.

Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy of death is tenable in the 21st century world to change people's negative orientation towards death which will serve to conquer the natural fear of death and also to console the bereaved who are mourning the death of their loved ones for them to move on in life by understanding through this philosophy that man attains his wholeness in death. Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy is laudable. Death is something noble because this whole world will not contain us if people are not dying. There are millions and billions of generation that existed before us. Everybody in this present generation will still die to enable the future generations to emerge. Thus, one ought not to live an inauthentic life by being a spectator in the field of life. What is important in this life is for people to lay everlasting legacies that will make the future generations to remember them in all works of life. Albert Einstein laid an everlasting legacy that will make the whole world to remember him as one of the world's greatest scientists.

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