

Critical Review of Joyzy Pius Egunjobi's Transvitation: The Mystery of the Mysteries of Death.

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Abstract: Issues related to death are many times reflected upon and mankind seems not to find appropriate responses concerning questions about death. Many African cultures accept the theories and assumptions of the Living Dead though while on earth death seems to be a profound mystery which cannot be entirely grasped and comprehended by the human mind and reasoning. Human beings have not stopped to ponder on the question, what happens after death? In answering this question Joyzy Pius Egunjobi proposes the theory of transvitation as an attempt to unlock the mystery of death. This work is a critical review of this theory.

Keywords: Transvitation, Death, Body, Soul, Core, Re-incarnation, Struggle, World, Transmigration, Mystery.

I. Introduction

Joyzy Pius Egunjobi (2004) researched and reflected on the mystery of death. His reflection focuses on the story of a fictitious individual, Bidemi, who got married to a supposed ghost (Angela) with whom he had a son (Junior). Suspecting Angela to be a Ghost, Bidemi dedicated his doctoral thesis to investigating the being of the dead. This work occupies a chapter in Egunjobi's novel titled, *In Love with a Ghost*. It is a tentative response to the questions related to death especially the idea about the living dead. The study brought about his theory of transvitation which is the life of the said dead person which continues in another more perfect form. In other words, it is a change from one state of life to another. Hence, a dead person can appear and disappear.

Though this reflection is very inspiring, thoughtful and brings about convincing ideas about the mystery of death, there are some limitations in terms of arguments, methods, generalizability. **The Study in Review**

In Egunjobi's book he focuses on the experience of Bidemi who is the main character in the story. The researcher narrates Bidemi's thirst for deepening the mystery of death. He points out the idea that Bidemi researched and step by step discovered that his wife was a transvitate, a ghost. Hence, his main thesis was, transvitation: a way of the mystery of the mysteries of death. Reading through the work of Egunjobi one can divide it into ten (9) parts as follows: (i) Bidemi's interest and beliefs, (ii) The components of the world, (iii) What a human being is, (iv) The concept of death, (v) The soul after separation from the body, (vi) The theory of transvitation, (vii) The new old man, (viii) Eternity of man (ix) The Struggle

Bidemi's Interest and Beliefs

Regarding the finality of death, according to Mbari (2005) in her article afterlife: African concepts, many cultures and traditions (Yoruba Culture, Ibo Culture, Zulu Culture and Abaluhya Culture) have a variety of perspectives that are frequently in conflict. Others view death as the beginning of a new chapter, a new life, while some see it as the conclusion of human existence (Mbari, 2005). Bidemi is interested in the mystery of death and the theory on death. Since his days as a student of philosophy in the seminary he never ceased to ponder

upon questions and answers about death. "He believed that it is only a dead man that can perfectly give the account of what happens at death and after; and that God had provided everything in nature, it is left for man to explore and implore into discovering what those things are" (Egunjobi, 2004a, p. 306). However, it is a dead person who can better grasp and comprehend the mysteries around death he continues.

The Components of the World

Egunjobi states that for Bidemi the world is made of many realities: visible and invisible, physical and metaphysical. The physical and visible realities can be taken charge of by science. Therefore, to explain what unseen realities that reveal themselves in visible realities are, he made use of theology and the mystery of miracle. Experimental science has little or nothing to do with those. He further mentions that the world is made of visible, perceivable, sensual, physical, unseen, invisible, mysterious and metaphysical. But he also adds that what makes the world is the totality of struggles because the struggles never end in the world.

What a Human Being is (Struggle)

In developing his thesis Bidemi states that a human being is more rational than the other animals. However, he is in perpetual struggle and battle. To the rationality he adds the instinct and argues that the higher the rationality, the lower the instinct. Struggle for him is part and parcel of human reality and mankind cannot avoid or get rid of it "until he reaches the perfect and incorruptible form of struggle in the bosom of the Supreme and Prime Struggle, his Maker" (Egunjobi, 2004).

According to him, human being is a substance made of matter and form, material and spiritual that can be understood as body, soul and core. The body is composed of the material body and the spiritual body. Those two entities influence each other, and each has something of the other. The soul shares the two bodies. In addition, the core is the mysterious point of encounter, interaction, meeting and intercession between the body and the soul. Egunjobi stresses that for Bidemi while the body can stand on its own the soul cannot. Death then occurs when the core is damaged.

The Concept of Death

"From the vast world of enigmas that disturb men, there is an ineffable subject for human understanding, apart from that of life. Subject that worries and reveals the man, and that he has not been able to decipher, no matter how much he wants to do it. It is about the phenomenon of death"(Montiel, 2003). Bidemi plays as an Epicurean by arguing that death in itself does not exist if it signifies the end of a human being. He also says that there cannot be categories of death. Death is death no matter what caused the death of the person. As previously stated, death occurs when the core is affected and destroyed and there occurs body-soul separation. Death is the dropping of the material body and the taking up of the spiritual one.

The Soul after Separation from the Body

You are currently breathing, moving around, or working. You are living. You can be enjoying life, or you might be miserable. The sun rises and sets, a kid is born somewhere, and someone is always passing away in someplace. Life is only ever a situation that exists temporarily. However, where will you go when you die? This is the most vital issue to answer, regardless of your religious beliefs or lack thereof, as after a brief earthly existence, man moves on to his eternal destiny. (Ecclesiastes 12:5)

Then Where? Your soul cannot be buried at the cemetery where you will be laid to rest. The cremation pyre destroyed your body, but it was unable to consume your soul. Your spirit wouldn't drown even if you were to perish in the ocean's depths.

Bidemi continues his reflection by saying that at death the soul takes up the spiritual body since it has left the material one, this process of ‘dropping-picking up’ he calls it trans-migration of soul. The spiritual body that goes with the soul is the reason of the reappearance of some people even when they are said to have died. When the soul has taken the spiritual body, it has the capacity of appearing and disappearing.

The Theory of Transvitation

He derived the concept of transvitation from two words: trans meaning *change* and vita meaning *life*. Therefore, transvitation means that the life of the claimed dead man continues in another, in a more perfect form. It is then a change of life from one state of life to another. For him, if a human being is able despite the struggles in the world to attain his pure state at the given age of 80; then he is rewarded or else he/she is punished, and re-incarnation follows in order to repeat the struggle. This means that those who attain purity of life and at a ripe age of 80 transvitate once and for all.

II. Evaluation of the Content

According to Egunjobi in his book *In Love With a Ghost*, Bemedi is interested in the mystery of and the theory on death which he believed that it is only a dead man that can perfectly give the account of what happens at death and after hence it is a mystery for the living to express fully what death is.

Feldman, F. (1992) says, if it is impossible to analyze the concept of death, then it is impossible to explain precisely what we mean when we say that something dies. It might be said therefore that, in virtue of this fact, death is mysterious. Death is described as ‘mysterious’, but neither is it clear what this means. Suppose we cannot formulate a satisfactory analysis of the concept of death: in this respect death would be mysterious, but no more so than any other concept that defies analysis. Some have said that what makes death especially mysterious and frightening is the fact that we cannot know what it will be like.

Mike Robbins (2009) states that, “I find death so mysterious because it doesn’t make much rational sense and often seems so random and unfair”. Death still remains a mystery, something that our human mind cannot comprehend and grasp at its totality.

It can be agreed upon that death is another birth, being born again, entering another life. It is in this line that Kirpal (2007) says that a “mortal man is at once transmuted into an immortal spirit” (Egunjobi, 2004). In this sense, though death could be a moment of sorrow, disappointment and despair, could also be a joyous birth into a life more blissful than we can ever think of. It contains in itself very opposed elements, joy vs sorrow, loss vs gain etc. Joy, because the person said to have died enters another state of life which could be more beatific than that which he or she was living in this world. But this can also bring sorrow to the person himself/herself if he/she fails to enter the blissful state and faces another hardship in his after-earth life. The departure of the deceased could also bring distress because his/her departure is a separation and every separation can result in deep pain, sadness and difficult to be accepted by those he/she has left in this world.

Furthermore, death is so mysterious that only the mystery of mysteries can understand it to the fullest. This mystery of mysteries is the author of life and the author of the Atman (the small entity that makes the human existence possible. This mystery of mysteries could be called the way one wants depending on his/her beliefs, religion and culture. Death is a physical end but not a total end. Every human being is a physically mortal being (Diwan, 2016), but spiritually alive.

With these arguments Bemedi’s search about the mystery of was real and relevant to our times because with death there still remains many questions unanswered hence death is still a mystery.

Bemeditalks of the components of the world to be many realities visible and invisible, physical and metaphysical. This is what Gordon (2008) explains to be the atmosphere (air), hydrosphere (water), cryosphere

(frozen portion of Earth) biosphere (living things) pedosphere (soil and humans). People are important agents of environmental change through land use and land cover change and co-option of the hydrologic cycle and biogeochemical cycles and this is what he refers to as 'struggle'.

'All life demands struggle', said Pope Paul VI. Mona Siddiqui (2021) has it that, there is something prophetic in the notion of human struggle, in affirming that facing difficulties is essential for human potential and development. We experience struggle in so many aspects of our lives, in broken relationships, in ambition, in accidents and disease, in lost loves, unrequited and forbidden loves, sickness and death, and unfulfilling jobs and failed dreams. We are struggling for or towards something: this gives struggle a hint of hope and potential, the sense that the present pain – physical or emotional – the present injustice will pass, will end by and through human efforts.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (2021) had this to say about human struggle, "as we know struggle is a part of our life, without struggle we cannot see the truth of the world. Struggle is the real way we live. A person who has come forward by struggling and has reached a higher position today, he will never think ill of anyone and will never cheat in life. This is contrary to Bemedi's idea of struggle that it is just part of life not anything to make the human person better.

Dancy and Davis (2006) assert that death is a "universal, natural, persistent, inescapable, unavoidable, and undeniable fact of life." When death occurs, there is usually an impact on the family and friends of the deceased, the magnitude often depends on whether death was expected or unexpected. Even the dying person goes through periods of fear, anger, and grief, once the inevitability of death becomes apparent.

But why do we die in the first place? According to (Bigthink, 2019), setting spiritual and existential responses aside, the simple answer is that nature is done with us after a certain point. Success in life, evolutionarily speaking, is passing on one's genes to offspring. As such, most species die soon after their fecund days end. This is contrary to Bemedi who says that death in itself does not exist if it signifies the end of a human being.

Robert Frost also goes contrary to Bemedi thus, "The death of the body, particularly of the brain, is then seen as the absolute end of any form of conscious activity. Belief in the posthumous journey of the soul, afterlife, or reincarnation is usually ridiculed as a product of wishful thinking of people who are unable to accept the obvious biological imperative of death, the absolute nature of which has been scientifically proven beyond any reasonable doubt".

According to Idowu (1962), the common Yoruba belief is that death is a creation of 'Olodumare' the creator, he was made for the purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is accomplished. This also talks about the of the human person which is contrary to Bemedi. Hence, death is an unavoidable lot of every human person who comes into the world. For Mbiti (1980) death is a process, which removes a person slowly, progressively and gradually from the 'Sasa' period to the 'Zamani'. The Sasa period means the time of physical existence on earth and the period after death within which the departed is remembered by relatives and friends who knew him. When the last of these survivors die off, the departed now enters the 'Zamani' which is complete death, meaning the person ceases to be completely even in the hereafter. Death in many African culture is seen as a rite of passage to ancestorship for the elders who after death are live in the supernatural realm and have the power to protect, bless or curse. This is Bemedi's basis of argument.

Moreover, there can be unexpected death or an expected death. Unexpected death seems to be more painful to the living parents, friends and relatives than to the dead person himself or herself. Whereas, the expected death could be more painful to the dying than to his/her family members and friends. In the former, the living do not have adequate time to prepare psychologically and emotionally. While in the latter, the living do have time to get somehow ready to welcome the death of the dying person. It can therefore, be a bit easier for family

members and relatives to cope with and accept the expected death than the unexpected. However, Bimedi concludes that, death is death, no matter how it occurs.

If at all the person that is said to have died is becoming immortal while in this world, he/she was mortal, then there could also be some reasons as to why one should be joyful and even celebrate that achievement of the person considered dead. When the dead person was in this world, he/she belonged to a body, a family, a community and a society, hence, his/her departure could be considered as a loss, and every loss creates an emptiness which could be difficult to fill and compensate. The separation between the body and the soul can also be a great moment of pain to the person who is to depart. However, it could be a gain in another sphere, where the said dead person is reborn to. Moreover, death could be seen as the rising and the setting of the sun. As the sun arises in one part of the world, it is setting in another part. Therefore, we can say that we do not die, we take another form, we move, we evolve, we change, we get transformed. This idea contributes to insisting on the dynamic aspect of life. Death is death in a given place, at the same time birth in another place. Thus, "death and life are Correlative" (Kirpal, 2007): one is the other. The two form one like the two faces of the same coin. Death should never be seen as destruction, but it means change, peeling off.

According to Nadende (2017), death is separation of man's search for human fulfilment and the freedom to pursue all opportunities for realization of life. Indeed, every human person has the potential, abilities and first possibility of looking for life accomplishment but death in its absurdity holds the terminal end of all. Death as an event and phenomenon, yields to the end and beginning of life. The new and real sense of life is in the human preparation and readiness for dying. This in a way means that death is an avoidable event and phenomenon in the course of maturing to everlasting life.

Then Egunjobi introduces the term transvitation which means that the life of the claimed dead man continues in another, in a more perfect form. This is what Deepak (2006) asks, what happens to the spirit after the body dies? In his book 'Life After Death: The Burden of Proof' is a book that tells you that there's a part of yourself that never dies, that there is a core consciousness that is eternal, that is non-local. For that consciousness, it is impossible to die after the death of the physical body. Your core being has no existence in locality, in space or time. And because it's outside of space or time, it is eternal.

III. Conclusion

To conclude this review, we can say that the topic discussed in this article was well thought about looking at the coherence in the argumentation. This topic remains a crucial one which has been raising many questions over centuries. Any discussion about the mystery of death is still very relevant and needs to be continuously researched on though the answers related to it can remain hidden to any human endeavor and reasoning.

The concepts found in this article especially the expression transvitation seems to be very innovative and proper to the author of the article. It is a well-researched topic and the ideas are scholarly and academically viable. The study pointed out that death remains a mystery though as such it does not exist because it is simply a change of state of being. Therefore, someone can be born, live, die and the same person be born again, live and die again.

Being a mystery, it can be argued that we can say something about death but not everything about it, because it is beyond human reach. Can we strongly state that human being is eternal simply because death is a transition to another life? As death is a mystery, human being also is a mystery. Only the Mystery of mysteries (God) can understand all and say everything about other mysteries including death. However, Egunjobi does not make this study a closed issue but through his article he triggers other thoughts and opens for further discussion and research about this topic that could be the center of interest for many.

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