

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2016.022.003](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2016.022.003)

MOHAMMAD AKVAN

Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran

MAHMOOD SEYYED

Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran

DEATH AND IMMORALITY IN AVICENNA'S PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDE

Abstract:

The issue of death and immortality is a philosophical-historical one. Ontologically, it roots in the origin of human existence and teleologically, it follows a prosperity-oriented approach. Death and immortality, in terms of historical view, are the oldest issues and from the philosophical perspective, are considered the most profound human preoccupation. All thoughtful human beings whether those following materialistic attitudes and denying teleological aspects of the human or those believing in his redemption and ultimate happiness haven't ignored the truth of human's death and his desire for immortality. Avicenna as a philosopher who adhered to wisdom and reasoning, in his philosophical framework has discussed the nature of the man's death and immortality and his eternal salvation and also sided with it intellectually. He hasn't reckoned death to be the end of human existence but considered it as a stage in his life. In Avicenna's attitude, death means the liberation of the soul from the physical body and soul as the truth of the man would be eternal and everlasting. In this article, first Avicenna's philosophical attitude about death is explained and analyzed, then we will deal with his arguments for the immortality of the soul.

Keywords:

Avicenna, death, immortality, teleology, human, soul, physical body

Introduction

Human's belief in immortality, the life after death and the eternal life has had a huge influence on the life of this world. In a positive and optimistic attitude, the hope light of prosperity, has kindled the salvation and happiness within him and in a negative and pessimistic attitude has encountered him with the coldness and darkness of despair and aimlessness. On the one hand, death is conceived as a way linking the human to the eternal happiness and life, in fact, death is found to be the passage from one stage of life and entrance to the other stage. On the other hand some attitudes have thought of death as annihilation.

The main question is that what is the relationship between the man's life in this world and that of his after death and how can the correlation be explained and justified through reasoning to be acceptable. Basically what have been the philosophers' responses to this question. The answer to this question matters a lot for the man's quality of life and his movement toward the future. Because it is these responses that determine his life orientation and make the human objectives and values based on purposeful principles and basics.

The main factor and underlying root of human's belief in immortality needs to be traced within him not in the external world which is resulted through mediated knowledge, that is genesis has put the tend to immortality and eternal salvation in his nature. Although this developmental trend, over time and in different social life situations and by means of cultural agents, might experience some ups and downs, it will never decline in the human's developmental nature. This agent, the developmental demand, is constantly encouraging the human to access immortality and eternity.

NATURE OF DEATH

In philosophy, death is interpreted as the split of the soul from the body which naturally takes place by shuffling the order of body structure. In Avicenna's opinion, the truth of death is nothing but the separation of the soul from the body. (Avicenna 2003, p. 121). In the separation of soul from the body, the survival and immortality of the soul get no damages. The soul which is believed to be the human's truth, is continuously stable and everlasting. Avicenna believes that the relationship between life and death is a conflict one and death is nothing but the fact that the human's soul, at the time of death, leaves its activity tools which are its components and are totally called the body. It is the same as what an industrialist does while getting rid of his tools. So in Avicenna's perspective, the truth of death is just the separation and split of soul from the body and while this happens, the soul is not corrupted. If there is any corruption, it is the corruption of body components and the nature of the soul which is the human's nature remains stably. (Avicenna, 199, 294). For Avicenna, death happens the time when the nourishing forces of the body stop working and there is disorder in the body components and its forces. (Toosi, 1996, Vol 3, 147). Avicenna has divided the death into two parts: the voluntary death and natural death, accordingly the life has been divided into two types too, voluntary and natural. By voluntary death he means the

elimination of passions and the demands associated to them and stopping the attention given to them. By voluntary life he means that the human in the worldly life doesn't follow the things like food and drinks. Natural life means the survival and immortality of the soul in the eternal prosperity which is resulted from knowledge and wisdom.

MEANING OF IMMORTALITY

The word immortality means living eternally, existing forever, not dying and continuation of life, incorruptibility and stability (Ibn Fars, 1993, Vol2, 206). Immortality of soul means survival and durability of soul after death forever. Survival or not dying is a concept referring to the immortality and stability of soul. It is necessary for the soul which ensure the continuity of life to remain alive and stable so as to keep sustainable living in another territory after destruction and corruption of the body.

The word immortality can imply two meanings, the first meaning refers to not dying and the second to immortality (Pour Hassan, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, in Avicenna's point of view, immortality is assigned to the soul which is apart from the human's body and can continue its life. It is the soul that is considered the truth and nature of the human and remains constant.

Definition of the soul

Plato in the origin of life Plato has found the soul as the origin the body's life and its movement. Origin means the cause so the soul is the thing that is the cause of the body's life and movement. In natural sciences and biology, life means the nutrition and growth, but philosophically, life means the origin of knowledge and power. Since Plato has used the word body to define the life, he, by the word life, means nutrition and growth, that is, the cause of this kind of life in the body is the soul. Because the body possess soul, so it has life too (Plato, 1988, Vol 4, 23577).

Aristotle also defining the term soul has said that the soul is the first perfection for the organic natural body. (Aristotle, in the soul, 30). In this definition, perfection equals actualization, that is, whatever by which a certain kind gets perfect in its nature or traits. So whatever whose nature and truth gets perfect by it, is called the first perfection. Therefore in the definition of soul, what Aristotle's means by first perfection is the thing via which a body becomes a body or a human being becomes a human being.

Avicenna has proposed various definitions for the word soul. He sometimes has defined the soul as the first perfection for the organic natural body indicating the fact that it has components (Avicenna, treatise on the soul, 2004, 8). In this case, in Avicenna's opinion, soul is the first perfection, because the human's nature is developed via it and performs the activities based on authority, thought and will. He sometimes define the soul differently in which he believes "that the soul is perfection for the organic natural body which have a potential life." (Avicenna, 1979, 90). So according to the definition by Avicenna the soul is the first perfection for the natural body that possesses the tools by which it can feed and grow and also performs perceptual tasks such as recognition, voluntary movements and thought. This soul is

assigned to the human (Avicenna, 1979,90).It emerges from the definition that it is only the human who enjoys wisdom and his immortality is connected to the soul.

The reasons for the abstraction of the soul from Avicenna's perspective

Belief in the immortality, abstraction, immateriality of the soul and its survival after the separation from the body, is an absolute principle in Avicenna's philosophical attitude. In his opinion, soul has a spiritual and immaterial nature since the beginning of its belonging to the body but because it needs the body so as to be applicable in the world of nature. After it fulfills the perfection processes, there would be no need to the body.

The presence of the soul in itself

One of the reasons Avicenna mentions for the abstraction and immateriality of soul is the presence of the human's nature for the human himself without any need to other tools. Since whatever whose nature is present for itself and whatever which itself is not absent and hidden for itself, never depends on anything else and relies only on itself. Such a creature is an immaterial and non-physical nature (Avicenna, 1992, 155). This argument of Avicenna is based on the real abstraction of knowledge and awareness. He has the belief that the real science and knowledge are abstract and immaterial. Any creature which has knowledge and awareness, will be an immaterial and abstract. Based on this, the knowledge and awareness of the soul about itself is a reason for its abstraction and immateriality. Because in the case the knowledge and awareness of the soul about itself have been obtained through five senses, the five senses need to be sentient about themselves too. While none of the senses has knowledge and awareness about themselves, it is only the soul that has knowledge about itself and others. So each sense which is considered as a recognition tool, is material and physical and it is just soul that without any intermediaries is conscious of itself and any creature having such characteristics is immaterial and abstract. Consequently the soul is a non-physical, abstract and spiritual existence (Karimian, 2014, p. 97). Avicenna has found this reason as the best argument for the abstraction and immateriality of the soul.

The continuation of comprehension power of the soul despite the body weakness

Another argument through which Avicenna has made attempt to explain the abstraction of the soul, relies on the continuation of the perception power of the soul despite the weakness of the body. All manpower acquire knowledge and awareness by means of physical tools and it is of their features that the continuation of these recognition and awareness make them exhausted and also the continued strong perception makes them powerless and weak so that after a severe perception, it won't be capable of comprehending a weak issue. But the properties of wisdom isn't the same. The intellect while experiencing the perception continuation and severe perception durability, it not only doesn't get weak but also it becomes stronger. So it can be concluded that the perception by the intellect isn't done by physical tools but it

is developed by the soul. That is why it never gets neither tired nor powerless. Therefore, since the features of the soul are not similar to those of material and physical affairs, it is abstract and immaterial.(Avicenna, 2007, 33).

Reasons for immortality of soul from Avicenna's point of view

Incorruptibility of the soul

To prove the immortality of the soul, one should prove its incorruptibility. Avicenna tries to explain the immortality of the soul through incorruptibility .corruption means “ the dissipating the form from the mater” (Jorjani, 1991, p. 216)or it means destruction or something.(Al-e- Yasin,1984,p. 407).The soul is potentially invulnerable to corrupt and it isn't dissolved into components. Because the soul has no components. It is simple. So it is incorruptible. Since it is incorruptible, it will be everlasting. As a result, Avicenna believes that the soul is not destroyed by the death of the body. (Avicenna, 1983,p. 202). In Avicenna's opinion, the soul is the main, that is, simple, and any creature which is main and simple, it isn't corruptible. Since the acceptance of corruption is probable to happen, occurrence and decline are the features of something that is consisted of matter and form. Therefore if something is main and simple, that is, it is not consisted of components, then it won't be corruptible. Since the soul is abstract, consequently it is eternal and everlasting. Additionally, the relationship between the soul and body, is not causality ,so by body destruction ,the soul isn't about to destroy .If the body is the providing cause of the soul, then it has to be its maintaining cause as well .Hence along with the body destruction, the soul will disappear. But the body isn't the providing cause of soul then with the body destruction, the soul won't be destroyed. Therefore the soul will constantly remain and live forever.

The correlation between the abstraction of the soul and its immortality

Another reason Avicenna knows necessary for the immortality of the soul, is based on the relationship between the abstraction of the soul and its immortality. If a creature is abstract, immaterial and simple, then destruction and diversity can never find a way to disturb it. Since only the material things are subject to combination and decomposition. In addition to this, there is a fact that every eternal creature is abstract. Because a creature can be permanent and stable and avoid decomposition only when there are no power and force of corruption and potentiality to decompose into its components, in fact it needs to be abstract and immaterial. It can be stated that abstraction and immortality are integral parts of one another. Because every abstract creature is everlasting and everything that is separated from the body and physical characteristics is eternal. So Avicenna believes that if the human's soul is abstract and immaterial, then it will be immortal and incorruptible. As we know the human's soul is abstract, so it is immortal and will remain forever (Avicenna,2003,143).

Conclusion

The issues of soul and its relationship with the body, immortality of the soul are considered very important in religion and philosophy. During the human history, both

the religious believers and philosophers have dealt with the survival and immortality of the soul. Avicenna is a physician, philosopher and a religious man. Therefore the issues of the soul, immortality, redemption and teleology are so significant for him. He believes that the human and human life are targeted and it is the purposeful life that proposes the issues of human redemption, salvation and immortality in another territory. According to him, with death, the human doesn't head for destruction but the developmental procedure of the soul continues and it travels from a material and physical world into a world whose features are different from those of physical world. Because for Avicenna life is the continuation of the soul existence and this continuation sometimes occurs through body tools and sometimes without. Soul immortality and its arrival at the eternal happiness is the same as the continuation of the soul existence and eternity. Avicenna thinks that the human teleology is not limited to the material world and finds it necessary for the human existence to be always accompanied by this teleology. It is this issue which explain and justify the immortality of human soul after death. So Avicenna has belief in both the immortality of the soul giving reasons to prove it, and also the redemption and prosperity, trying to explain them philosophically.

Reference

- Al-e – Yasin, 1984, Faraby's Methods, Beirut, Alemolkotob Publication
- Avicenna, Hossein ibn Abdollah, 2003, Illumination of the last Day, research by Hassan Asi, Tehran, Shams tabrizi Publications
- Discussions, 1992, introduction and research by Mohsen Bidar far, Qom, Bidar Publications An Article on the soul's status, 2007, Darbilion
- Treatment by Natural Medicines, 2004, introduction, correction by Musa Amid, Hamedan, Avicenna university 1988, research by Saeed Zaed, Qom, Marashi library
- Avicenna's treatises, 1979, Qom, Bidar Publications
- Theology of salvation, 1991, translated by Yahya Yasrebi, Tehran, Fekr- e- Rooz Publications
- Ibn Fars, Mohammad, Dictionary of words Derivation, 1983, Qom, Maktab –al –alameslami Publications
- Aristotle, in the soul introduction and research by Abdolrahman Badavi, Beirut, Darolqalam Publications
- Plato, complete collection of Plato's works, 1988, translated by Mohammad Hassan Lotfi, Tehran, Qarazmi Publications
- Pour Hassan, 2009, critical study of arguments against immortality and survival of the soul, journal of philosophy, fifth year, first edition, spring 2009, Tehran, university of Allame Tabatabaee
- Jorjani, 1991, A Book of Expressions, Tehran, NaserKhosro Publications
- Toosi, Khaje Nasir al-Din, 1996, Description of Awareness, Qom, Albalaqe Publications
- Karimian, Seiqalae, 2014, philosophical science on the soul from Avicenna's thought, Qom, Adyan Publications.