

Editorial**Dread of Death, Question of Meaning****Editor –in– chief****Dr. Mohammad Mahmoud Mortada**

Since human consciousness arose, death has been the mystery that relentlessly pursues us. It is not just the stopping of the heart or an incidental event in the natural cycle. Rather, it is the point where all our certainties shatter, and the moment when experience halts and presence fades, leaving behind questions without clear answers.

Why do we die? Is death an end or a transition? Is there something beyond the nothingness that keeps its secrets hidden?

Throughout the ages, death has not merely been an individual experience; it has been the cornerstone of civilizations, religions, and philosophies.

From the time of the Pharaonic pyramids to the rituals of primitive peoples, and from the meditations of philosophers to the texts of sacred books, man has been trying to negotiate mortality, to interpret it, to give it meaning, or at least to postpone the moment of confrontation. However, the question remained unanswered, eluding the mind, causing fear, and reshaping man's understanding of life itself.

In modern Western thought, death is no longer a mere mystery awaiting explanation, but rather an existential dilemma in its own right.

With the decline of religious faith in modern philosophies and the absence of traditional concepts of the afterlife, death has become more severe and present in the consciousness of contemporary man. In modern Western philosophy, death has become an end; everything comes to an irreversible end.

This transformation did not rid man of fear; rather, it increased his anxiety. If life is endless, and if death is the final destination, what meaning remains? Is anything worth living if death is inevitable at the end?

Death in Philosophical Thought between Nothingness, Search for Meaning

Since the beginnings of philosophical thought, death has been a central theme in human

reflections on his existence. It raised the most important questions, including: Does life have a purpose if death is inevitable? Is annihilation the only destiny, or there is an extension beyond it?

The answers vary between ancient and modern philosophers, but the anxiety remains constant, reappearing with every attempt to understand fate.

In ancient oriental philosophies such as Buddhism and Hinduism, Death was a recurring cycle of life and death, where a humankind remains in a cycle of rebirth until they reach the state of final liberation (nirvana).

For the Greeks, death was linked to questions of justice and immortality. Plato saw death as a release of the soul from the body, allowing it to move to the realm of ideals, where absolute truth and perfect existence exist. On the other hand, Aristotle saw death as a natural event, but he did not provide a clear idea of what comes after it. Instead, he focused on how to live a virtuous life before death.

However, in the modern times, this perspective was turned upside down. When Nietzsche declared the “Death of God,” he was not just referring to the death of religion, but also the collapse of the traditional concepts that had once granted life meaning beyond death. If there is no other world, then death becomes absolute emptiness, the irreversible end.

Hence, Martin Heidegger developed a new philosophy of death, considering it “the most authentic truth” of human existence. According to him, humankind is “beings-toward-death,” meaning that his awareness of death defines the essence of life, as he live in the shadow of inevitable end. However, this view made death merely a backdrop that defines how life is lived.

Existential anxiety reached its peak with Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. For Sartre, death is the limit that deprives the humankind of fully realizing himself, making life absurd. There is no purpose beyond death, and there is no meaning survives annihilation.

Camus, in turn, saw death as the ultimate proof of life’s absurdity, where all attempts to imbue existence with meaning are mere illusions.

If death is meaningless, then life is also meaningless, raising the most terrifying philosophical question: why wouldn’t suicide be the logical solution to this absurdity?

Thus, instead of providing answers about death, modern philosophy turned it into a crisis with no way out. With the collapse of major religious narratives in Western societies, humankind has become increasingly alone in the face of his fate. If death is the ultimate end, then all the values for which one lived, all moments of love, pain, and triumph, become meaningless, as oblivion will erase them all in the end. Death thus shifted from being a passage to another world to becoming the abyss that swallows everything.

However, is this the only way to understand death, or are there other perspectives that provide a vision that is beyond this nihilism? Did religions provide mere flimsy explanations for death, or did they provide answers more consistent with the depth of the questions humankind asks?

Death in Science: Is It Possible to Escape Annihilation?

While philosophy remained immersed in its existential anxiety, science moved toward treating death as a natural phenomenon that could be analyzed and perhaps overcome. In philosophical thought, if death is an unsolvable dilemma, scientists have viewed it as merely a malfunction in the biological system of organisms, which can be understood, perhaps even postponed or overcome. However, has science succeeded in providing a true answer to death, or has it, despite its progress, merely postponed the confrontation? When considering death from a biological perspective, we find that it is an essential part of the life cycle; cells die systematically at every moment, in a process known as “Apoptosis”, which allows organisms to regenerate and adapt to their environment. Nevertheless, at the macro level, aging and natural deterioration remain.

Scientists did not stop there. Since the 20th century, research has been focused on understanding the mechanisms of aging and death, aiming at prolonging human life. Certain genes have been discovered that control longevity, such as “sirtuin” genes, which play a role in resistance to aging. Processes such as CRISPR DNA editing have also been developed, which allowing for the manipulation of genetic factors that lead to natural death. In recent years, a set of research has emerged that aims not only to postpone death, but also to bypass it entirely. Companies like “Kalevik” and “SINGULARITY” are developing methods to extend lifespans indefinitely, by reorganizing cells or even uploading human consciousness to digital platforms, in what is known as “transhumanism.”

Some scientists, such as Raymond Kurzweil, believe that humans will reach a point where the human brain will be able to integrate with artificial intelligence, allowing consciousness to be transferred to an electronic environment that is not subject to the laws of biology. However, can we truly escape death?

Despite all the scientific progress, there remain huge obstacles. Even if we were able to postpone aging or even upload consciousness to computers, the philosophical question becomes “is the person whose consciousness is uploaded the same person, or merely a digital copy, does postponing death indefinitely truly mean overcoming it, or is it merely a denial of the inevitability that governs everything in the universe?”

Of course, we can prolong life, delay aging, or improve our quality of life, but we cannot—and will never—transcend the moment when everything ends, because death is part of the very nature of existence. The most important question becomes “is death the problem, or is it human fear of it that makes it as a problem, is the search for immortality the solution, or is the true meaning of life only understood with death?”

Therefore, the difference between the scientific and religious views of death becomes apparent; the question becomes not “How do we escape death?” but “How do we understand it?”

Death as Bath to Ultimate Justice

Philosophy has treated death as an existential problem, and science has treated it as a biological phenomenon subject to study. However, religions presented a completely different vision, where death was a point of transition to another life. Religions did not seek to deny or circumvent death, but rather to give it meaning and integrate it into a cosmic order, which makes physical annihilation merely a stage in an endless journey. Despite the differences in its details among religions, this concept has remained addressing human anxiety in better way, and more effective on how one see himself and his destiny.

In the heavenly religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), death is viewed as the moment of separation between two worlds, where the soul transitions from the visible world to the world of the unseen, from temporary life to eternal life. This conceptipn gives death a moral perspective; it becomes the path to an ultimate justice, where the oppressor is held accountable, the doer of good is rewarded, and everyone receives what he deserves.

Despite the radical difference between the visions of some ancient oriental religions on death and the divine vision of it, what they all have in common is that death is part of a well-defined moral order.

While Western philosophy has been unable to provide a definitive answer to death - even though modern science has worked to postpone it without eliminating it - religions have provided a vision that gives death meaning, making it an extension of life, not its end. This conception was more capable of calming human anxiety because it not only described death, but also provided an answer about its cause, purpose, and what comes after it.

Ultimately, the issue of death seems to relate to life itself. If death is merely a meaningless cessation, then life itself loses its value. However, if death is a passage to a wider existence, then life takes on a deeper meaning, and fear of death transforms into preparation for it.

Hence, the Islamic vision of death, which places it within the context of the ultimate purpose of creation, where every life has an extension, every action has its consequences, and everyone will face the truth, from which no one can avoid it.

Islamic Vision of Death as Liberation from Absurdity

A key question emerges at the core of the philosophical issue concerning death: What happens to consciousness after death? Does it end like the body, or does it continue in another form?

The materialist philosophy, which dominated modern Western thought, originated from the assumption that consciousness is merely a brain function, if the brain ceases, consciousness ends completely. However, this assumption is nothing more than a reflection of a narrow materialistic perspective, where the mind is viewed as a machine and life is seen as a sensory experience that ends in annihilation. In contrast, the Qur'an presents a completely different

vision, where death is not the end of consciousness. Rather, it is a point of revelation, where consciousness becomes more expansive and perceptive than it was in the worldly life. As this verse clarifies: {You were certainly in unmindfulness of this, and We have removed from you your cover, so your sight, this Day, is sharp.} [Qaf, verse: 22]. Death removes the veils that limited human perception in this worldly life. Therefore, death is a transition to a sharper, more present consciousness, where one sees the truth that was hidden behind the veil of matter. The Qur'an confirms this idea by describing the afterlife as "the true life." Allah Almighty says: {And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is the life, if only they knew.} [Al-Ankabut, verse: 64]. The Qur'an here presents a radical vision that differs from the materialistic view, which is the life we live now is not real life; it is merely a shadow, an unfinished experience. True life, however, begins after death, where perception is clearer and consciousness is more expansive.

If philosophers have made death a source of existential anxiety, and if science has attempted to resist it without transcending it, the Quranic vision transforms death into a moment of revelation, when a person realizes for the first time the ultimate truth that had eluded them in this world. While the Western question about death is: "What comes after annihilation?", the Islamic question is completely different: "How do we prepare for real life?". The difference between the two questions is what determines the difference between existential anxiety and deep faith.

Based on all that has been discussed, this issue of "Etiqad" journal tackles the question of death, addressing a range of questions and dilemmas raised about it. In this context, the article "Death According to Materialist Philosophers" examines the visions of the naturalistic and materialist school of thought in Western philosophy, tracing its development from the Greek era to the present day. The researcher presents the opinions of prominent philosophers throughout various historical periods regarding death and annihilation, and then analyzes their doctrine, which denies life after death, or offers an interpretation of immortality, in a way that contrasts with the teachings of the heavenly religions.

Meanwhile, the article «Brain Death, Organ Transplantation, Biotechnological Immortality - Fundamental Theological Study», addresses the attempts of some scientists and computer engineers to explain consciousness by reducing it to biological and neural processes within the human brain, and the possibility of simulating human consciousness and transferring it via complex computer systems. Therefore, humankind can experience immortality after the death of the bodies. At the end of the article, the author criticizes this reductive vision of human consciousness, corrects the concept of immortality and eternity, and the impossibility of cloning human consciousness while preserving the unity of the conscious personality.

The article, «Sanctity of Suicide According to Voluntary Action Philosophy», discusses the philosophy of the sanctity of suicide and the Islamic vision about the meaning of life, human responsibility within it, and the purpose of creation and existence in the worldly life. It also

emphasizes that human beings are responsible for all their actions in any case he faces, and that man must endure the hardships and trials of life, according to a purposeful Islamic cosmic vision that saves him from lost in absurdity and nihilism.

In an attempt to explain another meaning of death, which is voluntary, worldly death, the article «Voluntary Death, Journey to Truth» attempts to explain the vision of some schools of Islamic ethics. This is regarding how a humankind can be liberated from worldly attachments; achieve spiritual death from the world of appearances and perceptions, whereby a cognitive, heartfelt vision is revealed, transporting one toward the world of truth and meaning.

Discussing the existence of a separate world of ideals, the author of the article «Explaining Near-Death Experiences, Based on Suhrawardi's Theory of Ideals' World» delves into the experiences of those who have come close to death. This interpretation is based on the idea of an ideal world that exists separately from the physical world, yet is simultaneously a part of its core and truth. According to this view, those who have come close to death have, in fact, entered that world, a realm characterized by heightened perception, awareness, and an understanding of things beyond the capacity of ordinary senses.

In conclusion, we hope this issue will be well-received by readers, offering the desired benefit, Allah willing, and contributing to the academic and cultural arena with critical and analytical tools to address other intellectual currents.

Praise be to Allah, both now and always.