Comparative Study of Eternity and Immortality in New Words and Islamic Sources

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Article history:
Received 12 September 2014
Received in revised form 26 December 2014
Accepted 10 January 2015
Available online 2 February 2015

Keywords:
Eternality, Death, survival, continuation

ABSTRACT

The meaning of death is the reality of losing life or to be more precise interpretation, is the loss of medical living signs, on the other hand, survival and eternity means to maintain the identity of the person after death. So man has two physical and non-physical aspects. Some people have doubted on the fact that whether a man has something else other than the earthly body or not. Western scholars are divided in two groups in believing the fact that whether human identity disappears or remains after death. A group of scholars believe that human life stops after his death and another group argues humans’ life is immoral. In the opposite side, Islamic sources in addition to urging that human’s life exists after death, they want to prove the eternity of human life.

Statement of the problem:

Eternity and immortality is a property of the people of heaven and hell that the holy Quran and the Bible have told about. Dwelling in heaven with God’s grace is justified. Of course, the quality of dwelling in heaven is debatable; man in heaven is eternal, but in the sense that the quality of existence of the human being and God are different in nature, in other words, the nature of self-existence and the nature of possible-being are different. In fact, God’s survival is innate and the survival of Paradise depends on God. Hisham ibn Hakam said to Nezzam in the debate: “the people of Paradise remain because of His existence, where as God remains without their existence”. But dwelling in hell with its subtleness, made speakers and interpreters try the ways of extremes. Philosophy of Hell and its horrible tortures on the one hand and God’s infinite mercy on the other hand has immersed people in deep thought. Hell is a warning to the wicked and unjust people in order not to neglect and save themselves from the pollution of sin and violation. In fact this is an opportunity to revision their belief and behavior that is acceptable and reasonable. But the punishment of hell in the afterlife has created numerous questions. Western scholars as well as Islamic scholars disagree on this issue, while the consensus of Muslims have accepted man’s eternity after death, some Western scientists have serious disagreements on the principle of eternity and death as meaning of transmission. In this article, it has been tried to compare two sets of comments.

Historical background of believing in immortality and eternity:

Some scholars think that immortality is a legendary and it is nothing but deception [19]. However, there is a belief in the immortality in the most ancient and modern peoples. Among prehistoric humans, there is a belief in life after death. Buried food and war tools have been found with their dead bodies in the graves [4]. Ancient Egyptians believed that by going ka (divine whiff that makes eternal life) body breaks down and therefore, life after death is possible only if the body is preserved after death. Therefore, a ceremony of mummy was held and some presents were placed at the tomb of the pharaohs to use them in the afterlife [3]. Belief in immortality has long been existed in the ancient India. The word “Amrta” in farewell which included “a” and “mrtas” means no death [4]. “Atmu” which means breath or life-giving breath or Brahman which means the absolute truth unifies and becomes the same. [17] and joins with the law of Karama. According to Chinese myth belief, spiritual life of soul continues and it lives near its former place and tomb. The food that was put out for them in some certain times is a sacred and common food [27]. There are two groups of ancestors for the old Africans; the first group
is immoral and the second group will be immortalized after death [4]. In Zoroastrianism, it is believed that after the soul separates from the body, it enters into Purgatory until the last day and it will join to the body in the last day [8]. According to Zoroastrian faith, the court is held by the presidency of Seal angel by attendance of oracle, Rashnu and Theresienstadt, and the deeds of the deceased’s life will be completely audited [6]. There is a belief in eternity in the Abraham religions, sometimes with some slight or deeper differences. The Old Testament refers to reviving the man after death (Isaiah chapter 26, verse 19), and the eternity of the human being in heaven or hell (Daniel, chapter 12, verse 2). The issue of revival in the resurrection is also seen in the Jewish prayers [18]. Death and immortality of man after death can be seen as the key concept of Christianity and the New Testament. Concepts such as eternal life, eternal death, spiritual death and rebirth, guides the addresser to it. Refer to Mohammadian, [21] following the word of life and death). The Resurrection is one of the most fundamental issues that have been emphasized in Islam and the Quran. According to the Quran (Al-Imran, 169), death is the beginning of life in a different world. Western scientists in this field are two groups; the first group agrees and the other one disagrees.

Opponents of eternity and immortality: Skepticism in the existence of immortality:

David Hume has hesitated about the principles and foundations of the divine religions in several occasions even he is dubious about himself [23] and he has denied the reality of the miracle of the prophets [7]. According to Hume, if the immortality of the soul is only proved by wisdom, it will be difficult. So the reasoning that is usually expressed to prove the immortality of the soul, originates from the latest metaphysical, moral and natural issues. In fact, it is just the Bible has lighted the life and immortality [27]. Hume tries to provide several reasons to be dubious about the possibility of human survival after death and he wants to deviate mind of the reader to think about the issue of immortality with the question “Is it rational to think that the soul is independent of the body?”. Hume opposed three metaphysical, moral and allegorical reasons.

Comparing Hume’s views with the Islamic resources:

Hume has compared unsubstantial essence of the soul with the physical substance in his own reasoning and he has judged about the unsubstantial essence according to what is observed in nature, the essence of is immaterial, while according to his epistemological, he is not allowed to judge about things that are not in the physical area and it is outside the realm of experience and sense. Is it unreasonable and logically impossible to assume that immaterial issue is both eternal and not eternal? [27] Anyone who doubts in anything, he cannot be dubious about his existence, about perception forces like vision and hearing forces, mental and psychological states and if he is dubious in such cases, he will be whether liar or a sick that must be treated [23]. On the other hand, Hume believes that moral reasoning is based on the belief in the justice of God, i.e. giving reward to the righteous and punishment of criminals in the hereafter. Since the cruelty and injustice is obscene, accordingly it originates from defects and therefore God is flawless. It is rationally impossible to imagine that God is tyrant and cruel. Thus, in the absence of another world, we have to attribute oppression and injustice against our Creator; since the world is full of cruelty, injustice and oppression, unjust people aren’t punished in this ecstatic and the righteous will not achieve their rights. As the holy Quran is considered as the main criteria in the Islamic sources, it allocated many verses to the resurrection and its realization; the Quran has reasoned to prove the resurrection in several cases.

Reasons such as the justice of God (p / 28) or Wisdom of God (Al-Dokhan / 38 and Al-Momenun / 115 and Al-Imran 191) or notifying “Deniers don’t believe in the power and knowledge of God” (Aljathiya / 24 and Alsejdeh 10) . On the other hand, a detailed discussion in the Islamic narratives has been presented to prove the resurrection and justice of God. Therefore, the great part of Islamic theology presented numerous reasons to substantiate the Resurrection (Helli, 1996, 487 up to 503). Russell also believes that man’s belief in the immortality after death is not rational, rather it is two kinds of fear and belief in survival [23].

Denial of survival:

Antony Flew, an English philosopher, is one of the Western scholars of the present age who completely denies survival and immortality of man. Basically, he is included in those who believe that the speech of theology is meaningless and religious people do not let anything violates their claims. Therefore, to prevent the cancellation of their claims, they constantly confirm and adjust those claims [7]. He has some speech about human immortality, which leads to the denial of survival after death. Flew evaluates three ways which the man may survive after death through them.

First method:

The Platonic-Cartesian spirit without the body, he does not accept experience without body and says: An individual is the person whom you meet, his purpose is the human body [4]. He imagines the criterion of the
same character as that all human activities are the predicate for physical beings (Same reference, 63). Thinkers such as Murphy, Lamont, and John Perry would believe so (Refer to the same source, 62 and 212).

Second method:
This method is renewal. He rejects the way of recreation because what is recreated is something similar to us, rather than us. Referring to the verses 97 and 98 of Quran (Al-Isra) : " Do they not see that as God created the heavens and the earth, He is able to create the like of them? ", he says: "the second creation, after the complete disappearance of the first creation, even creation of the new entity which isn't recognizable from the first entity, is equal to a substitute version rather than re-creation of the same entity. Punishment of a substitute version or giving reward to him is absurd and outrageous [27]."

Third method:
The theory of the astral body, According to Antony Flew, the form of this theory is to looking for affirmative description for the astral body. He says that astral body is really a kind of body, in the way that imaginative body or non-existent or non-physical body, none of them isn't a kind of body. And yet, this false assumption that we have astral body, haven't been proven with none of the currently existing facts. The danger of this theory is that the body nature that is assumed, will be described in a way so that it will be changed into an immaterial soul (Platonic, Cartesian), rather than a more ambiguous and complex body. "A detailed arrogant assumption may gradually become ineffective, the death due to thousands of preconditions." (Same reference, 105)

Comparing Flews' views with Islamic resources:
According to Flew, God's power to create a body similar to the earthly body is irrational and cruel. Firstly, while Quran has rejected the re-creation views of Western scholars, rather the holy Quran has said in many verses that the human's nature is different from the body and interprets it as "self". Secondly, according to Quran (verses 97 and 98 of Al-Isra), expressing similarity, based on assuming that earthly body is impossible to come back after its collapse and changing the bones, is due to the inaccessibility which has been proposed by the infidels. So this similarity is due to comparing the new body with the first earthly body, regardless of the human soul that the consistency of human personality depends on it. And the body collapses but the soul is preserved with God and it is because of the soul is the truth and nature of human existence: "they say: 'what, when we have been destroyed in the earth, shall we indeed be in a new creation? ' indeed, they disbelieve that they will meet their lord. Say: 'The angel of death, who has been given charge of you, will gather you then to your lord you shall be returned." (As-Sajda, 10, 11). Therefore the man, who will be sent, is the same worldly man rather than its likeness [16]. Man's recreation in the hereafter is attributed to his soul, rather than the earthly body in many verses of Quran such as Al-Mutaffiffin, 4, Almomenun 16, and Alghahn 7.

Advocates of Immortality and eternity:
Plato (347 428 BC) was from Athens and he is one of the most prominent philosophers that ever existed. He believed that human beings are composed of two substances: body and soul. Plato argues that the soul is immortal, because the soul is indestructible; it is incorruptible because it is simple. According to Plato's argument, we can reasonably assume that the soul continues to life by itself and when the physical body disintegrates, the soul does not die [7].

Plato's writings in are in the form of conversation. Socrates talks with Alsbyadyz about the real self in the first conversation. The second conversation is from Phaedo. In both of the conversations, he believes that soul is an independent entity; man is the same spirit that uses the body and the soul continues to live after death. The second conversation belongs to Phaedo in which Socrates had been sentenced to death. He is recommended a way to escape, but as he believes that escaping from such a fate at this moment is unethical and he is certain about a better life after death, he rejects it [27]. Plato's arguments in these conversations are around several axes: birth of anti anything from itself, soul cannot be transformable, Divinity of self, tendency of soul to sensible or reasonable things, rejecting opposite, soul is indestructible with its evil, source movement of the soul, eternality of soul, seeking permanent happiness (Refer to Hossein Zadeh and Mesbah, 113 and 117). It is noteworthy that Descartes is the reviver of Plato's views in the West.

Islamic sources compared with Plato's view:
According to the studies about the comparison of Islamic sources with Plato's opinion, there are no common characteristics between the views of Plato and Islamic sources (See Hossein Zadeh and Mesbah, 117 up to 123). Despite great differences in the Peripatetic and illumination school of philosophy on topics such as the commandments of purgatory, material or non-material imagination and physical survival after death [13], according to the holy verses, all of them witness to the immortality of the soul and the criterion of scriptural
evidence in this regard. The Holy Quran and the traditions believe in the immortality of the human soul; it is constant every time and indestructible. Its appearance however changes as physical body.

**John Hick:**

John Hick, English philosopher of the current age, rejected the matter like view of human existence after death and he believes there is a confusion of thought for death at the present time that he interprets it as a confession of one's ignorance [26]. After quoting and denying various beliefs about human immortality, he argues in favor of the views of the New Testament that is spiritual and physical renewal, which is a collection of soul and body, in single form. Then he presents an imaginative experiment of the advents of John Smith, to show that re-creation is conceivable and deserves a rational belief [27]. Then he expresses the dying process and mentions to registered events of the parapsychology of mental Research Society of London, such as mental far-shaking in its various forms (such as the telepathy, insights and forecasting), he tries to establish the theory of survival based on near-death experiences [25,26]. Hick says: "I(present self-conscious) am mortal. But what I think and what I do beneficially or in terms of proving, I am influencing the natural development of creation or creature that is my deeper nature and hence every good and charity which my life is its source, never is lost. Whether this deeper soul and essence will have endless life or it eventually will be the same with eternal truth. We neither know something nor do we need to know about it at the present time" [25].

**Islamic sources compared with John Hick's view:**

Hick's speech was different in some fields and in some other ways it can be shared with the Islamic sources. According to the Word of God, the soul is the whole reality of human existence that lives in the world and material body not be considered part of his personality; of course the human soul will be visible after death in as many clothes such as likeness form or body. So I (present self-conscious) am not mortal. The word "abada" (eternity) which has been used to refer to life after death in the verses of the Quran, is a witness to this meaning. For example, God has given glad tidings of Paradise for those who believe and do righteous deeds and says: "... they are there for eternity, and for them purified spouses and we shall admit them into plenteous shade" (An-Nisa, 57). The concept of the immortality of the human existence is due to existence of possibility; it isn't because of self-existent. As the Quran says: "All that live on it will perish, yet the face of your lord will abide forever, majestic and splendid" (Ar-Rahman, 26, 27). Therefore eternal life of man as a possible-being continues and it won't be the same with the eternal fact (if it is aimed God). But due to the fact that good or evil actions of the creature belongs to the true human personality and won't be wasted, it is common with the holy Quran. In verses, punishment or reward were mentioned in the form of words like "kasb" " it is what your own hands have earned" (Ash-shura, 30) and "taghdim" " because of what their hands forwarded" (Al-Baqara, 95); that shows the quality of the act in the formation of human personality. One cannot express a clear view about "near death experiences" which Hick considers it as a witness of human survival, because this has not apparently mentioned in the Quran and Hadith.

**Jeffrey Olen:**

Olen, American philosopher of the modern era, has some speech about human immortality in the book "The people and their world" (Malekian, 531). Olen argues about the criteria for personal identity to determine on the assumption that we can say we really remain after death, what remains? Olen then outlines some of the characteristics that make a being a person. They are as follows: The being must: 1. be intelligent, rational 2. Self-conscious, be aware of its existence or have knowledge of self 3. Have beliefs/desires/wants and beliefs about its beliefs/desires/wants 4.be morally responsible for its actions—"subject to moral praise and moral blame" 5. Be able to be treated in accord with our moral community (it must be granted moral (such as respect for the wife) and legal rights (including property rights) 6. Be able to treat us in the same manner 7.be able to communicate verbally and express his purpose by word (by speaking and writing) (same reference, 532, and 533).

Then he investigates all the criteria of the personal identity and considers physical criteria. He believes that the best decision is to say, the purpose of the body is brain and nervous system of the brain and other members have no role in the physical criteria; separating and joining members doesn't change the nature of "self". However, the brain isn’t important for its own sake; rather it is important because it is a container of ego states. So both the physical criterion and the criterion of memories affect personal identity. Physical criterion is important because of ego states as contents and the criteria of memories are also relevant (Same reference, 559). Olen believes that the human brain is like a computer. In this view, there is an assumed brain condition and an assumed mental condition too, since it does appropriate work through the proper schedule, i.e. the human brain incarnates certain abstract descriptions. Olen argues that just as different computers can process the same information exactly, we can also survive in the other body if our identity and our memories remain intact [27]. According to Jeffrey Olan, since the brain disappears, ego states remain and this represents the survival of man after death then we should believe in human immortality.
Comparison of Islamic sources with Jeffrey Olen's view:

There is no common characteristics and similarity between the views of Olen and Islamic sources. If the purpose of ego states in the speech of Olen is the same as human soul which belongs to the body and especially to the mind, there will be great similarities but apparently he has no such purpose. Another point is that although it is not impossible memories remain after the extinction of the brain, it cannot be expected of those who are not religious and do not agree with immortality to believe in the immortality of man, because the mere lack of transformation doesn’t suffice to believe in the immortality and survival of the human. (Malekian, 563)

Wittgenstein:

Austria Wittgenstein (1889-1915) is one of the founders of the field of analytic philosophy in the twentieth century. He does not consider death as the issue of entity, rather says: "Death is not an event in life. We do not experience death. The world isn't changed through death rather it ends"[5]. He searches human happiness and misery in the process of dying and human's approach towards death: "A happy man shouldn’t fear. Even if encounters with death. Fear of encountering death is the sign of wrong life, i.e. bad life"[14]. According to Wittgenstein, death is the end of human life, so immortality does not mean as others have defined. Therefore firstly, he rejects the immortality as continuation of life after death and says: "Not only there is no guarantee for Immortality and eternity of human soul meaning the eternal survival of the soul after death, but also this assumption doesn’t fulfill by no means what they wanted to achieve. Will my eternal life solve a problem? Will this eternal life not be as enigmatic as our present life? Solving the riddle of life in place and time is out of time and place"[5]. Secondly, he believes a kind of immortality for mankind that it is rooted in his life: "If we don’t consider eternity to mean endless time, rather consider it a sense of timelessness, then eternal life will belong to those who live in the present."(Same reference). Apparently, this kind of attitude is more Gnostic rather than philosophical, as Homo thinks like these in issues such as asceticism and piety and even he lived in a manner of asceticism [14].

Comparison of the Islamic resources with the theory of Wittgenstein:

Speaking about the death and believing it in Islamic traditions indicates dramatic differences between Islam and Wittgenstein's theory. The holy Quran attributed the word "khalaqa" (created) to both death and life: "who created death and life (Al-Mulk, 2). So according to the Quran, death and life are two sides of the coin of human life, one side shows earthly life and another indicates the afterlife. Therefore the real personality (= soul) is completely received at the moment of death: "Allah takes away souls at the time of their death" (Az-Zumar, 42).

According to Quran, immortality and eternity of human means continuation of life after death. All the verses that used the word "abadan" (eternity) for life in hell or heaven, refer to immortality and continuation of eternal life. But Wittgenstein thinks of immortality as meaning "living at the moment". Of course, the Quran pays extraordinary attention to the quality of life at the present.

H.H. Price:

Price, American philosopher (19841899), has based his views on the imagination. According to Price, immortality meaningful only in the light of "the other world", because the human perceptual experiences make sense only when a man is aware of the world which he is a part of it. Accordingly, Price explains about the afterlife. Price believes that the world after death is similar to what happens in the world of dreams and visions. When the human sleeps, his senses have no activity, in other words, have no effect on the brain, but at the same time, humans are sentient and they have perceptions [4]. According to Price, next world is composed of spirits which have real mental images about their beliefs and desires: It is possible for spirit to possess visual images and these images are related to each other so that they create dimension, it means that the aspects from the sides (front, behind and sides) get together in the same way that visual representations have been located next to each other. Images of taste, hearing and smell may be present among the set of mental images, and thus they form same interconnected network of images. Even a person might have had visual image of the former life body, this visual image of the body may be the center of the world of personal and mental images i.e. it plays the same role that our body does at the present. The world of these people without physical body has completely been composed of such mental images and that world is eternal [7].

Comparison of the Islamic resources with the theory of Price:

Price's theory has some similarities with Islamic resources in some cases but it is different in the other aspects. He admits the existence of the afterlife is the main point in common. According to Quran the next world is the continuation of life after death is another quality and faith in the hereafter is included in divine faith (such as verses Al-baqara, and 4 Al-anam, 92). The holy verse of Quran (42 Az-zumar) mentions a similarity between death and sleep based on both returning and not returning of the soul to the body. If Price means by stating the similarity between sleep and death is due to inactivity of the body perceptions at this time as described by the Quran, it can be considered as the common point. Some Islamic philosophers have some statements about
imagination power that are close to Price’s view. Mulla Sadra says about imagination power: "The imagination is included in the dignities of soul and thus it is abstract and remains due to the survival of the soul in the hereafter. Degrees of imagination in this world and the hereafter are the result of soul." (See the Mulla Sadra, 1425, 9/20). He says about the body: "This sameness of the heavenly and earthly man is realized if the soul and body preserved in the world hereafter. Quran texts imply to the sameness of heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. "(See the same source, 30.9 & Jay Wainwright, 2011, 258 and 263).

Conclusion:

Some Western scholars have doubted the reality principle called eternal and some others like Russell has denied it. On the contrary, the Quran has granted it and numerous traditions have discussed about its quality. (Refer to Majlesi, 8/351up to 376). Many interpreters are also trying to decrypt it. (Refer to Tabatabae, 11/22 to 35 and Javadi Amoli, 8/376 up to 439). Accepting the reality of immortality, another group of western thinkers have wanted to justify it rationally. So they have differences with Islamic scholars in many cases but there exist less similarity.

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