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The post-death question in African metaphysics: Engaging Attoe on death and life's meaning

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Aribiah Attoe took issue with the materialist and the non-materialist African conceptions of death by arguing that the reality of death puts pressure on the human conception of life's meaning. He admits the reality of an afterlife experience through a causal principle that sees events in the world as the product of interactions between predetermined past events. It is an afterlife where a decomposing body continues interacting with other things in the world, not an afterlife involving consciousness. While conscious meaning-making ends in the death of the body in Attoe's materialist view, thereby affirming the conclusion that human existence is meaningless and the universe is purposeless, the conviction about life's meaninglessness is also reinforced by the possibility of a second death, that is, the death of the transcendent consciousness in the traditional African view. In this article, I will mount two objections to Attoe's submission. First, I argue that Attoe's refutation of life's meaning may be faulted by a world view devoid of the ideas of the afterlife and immortality. Life's meaninglessness for him should have been limited to the facts of human existence in the world, not the human inability to continue meaning after death. Second, Attoe's conception of death as finality questions his principle of causality that suggests the reality of an endless afterlife. Attoe's overarching submission on life's meaninglessness gives the impression that theories of life's meaning must be anchored on the thought of an afterlife and immortality.

Introduction

The African idea of death has been dominated by views that do not consider death a closure but a transition of subjective consciousness (Mbiti 1970; Onwuanibe 1980; Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata 2014). It presents a conception of death that sees immortality as a principle of normativity worth pursuing. The aim is to conceive of a post-death that does not lose the meaning of human existence, thereby making the hope of immortality the succour to life's struggles. Attoe (2022a; 2022b) thinks the African view of death contradicts the metaphysical order that sees the universe as a material one which rejects the transcendence of consciousness. Attoe proposes a materialistic idea of death that accepts only an afterlife of unconsciousness, noting that what remains after human death is a lifeless body continuing its existence through relationships and interaction with other beings, such as bacteria, worms, plants, etc. He grounds the acceptance of life after death on the causal principle of predetermined historicity that sees events in the world as a product of the predetermined interaction of beings. While the materialistic and the non-materialistic African conceptions of death have a short-lived afterlife experience, Attoe argues that the impossibility of a conscious afterlife in the materialist view and an eternally conscious post-death experience of the non-materialist-African conceptions of death make it difficult to hold a sustained idea of the meaning of human existence and the world, resulting in the conclusion that the universe is purposeless and human existence meaningless.

It could be drawn from Attoe's materialist view that he anchors the idea of life's meaning on the thought of the afterlife and its sustenance. Meaning in life is dislodged on the grounds that the

materialist afterlife experience is unconscious of the acts of meaning-making. The question is: why do we need to hope or actualise eternity to ascertain the meaningfulness of life? I argue that Attoe's refutation of life's meaning can easily be faulted on two grounds. First, if we consider an existential world view without the idea of an afterlife or immortality, the claim of life's meaninglessness in Attoe (2022a; 2022b) will disappear. Implied in Attoe's view is that meaninglessness hinges on the absence of immortality, that is, the absence of the indefinite continuation of conscious existence occasioned by the finality of death. If Attoe takes his physicalist-cum-materialist view of the world seriously, he should not have any business with the thought of a human post-death experience – immortality to the point of ascribing the meaninglessness of life to its non-existence. Life's meaninglessness for him should have been limited to the facts of human existence in the world, not the human inability to continue meaning after death. Second, Attoe's conception of death as finality questions his principle of causality, which ought to affirm the eternal existence of beings (Attoe 2022a; 2022b).

To achieve this aim, I structure the article as follows. In the first section, I discuss the notion of death in African thought and link it with Attoe's idea of death and meaning. In the second section, I raise a few objections to Attoe's claim on the meaninglessness of life. I show that Attoe's ultimate argument on life's meaninglessness rests on the inherited belief and sentiment that there exists a post-death experience relevant to the discussion on life's meaning, which his materialist idea of death could not but affirm. I also discuss the problem with the idea of a second death in the African view, recurrent in Attoe's analysis as evidence of the truth of life's meaninglessness. I demonstrate that Attoe's acceptance of the death of the ancestors, marking the end of consciousness in African thought, and affirming meaninglessness in the African context, rests on some erroneous and self-contradictory claims of Mbiti and Menkiti. I conclude that the question of life's meaninglessness ought not to be grounded on the contradiction in the ideas of the afterlife and the difficulty in sustaining a post-death existence.

The African view of death and meaning: Attoe's refutation

The idea of death in African thought has been an essential topic in African metaphysics and the philosophy of religion because of its connection to the ideas of God, soul and being in African thought. In the African conception, death is not a complete annihilation of persons, but a departure to another state of existence, a transition from the living world to the ancestral world (Mbiti 1970). Death is seen as the separation of the body and spirit. It transforms the living into what is known as the living-dead because the spiritual components of individuals continue to live after they depart from the body (Mbiti 1970; Onwuanibe 1980; Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata 2014). The living-dead represent a status that describes the immortality of life in African thought. It is a status that enables the departed persons (the deceased) to either reincarnate or continue with the affairs of the living from the ancestral world. The African understanding of death is informed by the supernatural-cum-non-materialistic understanding of the world and humanity. This understanding of human people grounds the belief in the spiritual transcendence of persons (Onwuanibe 1980; Ukwamedua 2022). In a non-materialistic conception of the world, one which the traditional African world view holds, the human consciousness has the capacity for interaction, not just with another human person, but with objects in the world, including disembodied consciousness.

The African conception of death is not without some significance. The emphasis on immortality in African thought and culture gives confidence to the individual and their belief in the meaningfulness of life and the world. It serves as a coping mechanism in dealing with the anguish that comes with the thought of death which is generally seen as the end of meaning in life. The thought of immortality is a ground for the demystification of death and the consequent celebration of life in African thought and societies.¹ This post-death analysis and its relation to life's meaning in African thought informs Attoe's inquiry into the idea of death and life's meaning. Attoe notes that in the African context, the reality of an afterlife helps individuals retain acts of meaning that count as requirements for a meaningful life. According to him, "death is actually a fulcrum that allows the individual to pivot

¹ See Attoe (2020) for a detailed discussion on theories of meaning in life identified with African thought.

successfully from meaning in life to meaning after life” (Attoe 2022b, 7). However, since the universe is mainly material, Attoe contrasts the African idea of death with a materialist idea that sees human consciousness as reducible to the physical human body (Attoe 2022b). He grounds this idea of death on a principle of causality known as predeterministic historicity.

Predeterministic historicity is a causal principle against the dominant traditional view of causality in African metaphysics, which sees most events in the world as products of spiritual entities. According to Attoe (2022b, 60), causality in predeterministic historicity is “an active representation of the interactive relationship that must exist among realities in a deterministic world”. Two ideas are dominant in this definition. One is an interactive relationship, and the other is determinism. On the one hand, causal events in the African context, argues Attoe, rest on the principle of relationships dominant in the African world. Therefore, beings in the world engage in active relationships among themselves. It is a relationship that is interactive and produces other events or states of affairs. However, in predeterministic historicity, the relationship between realities, beings or events and their causes must be known and/or identifiable. This principle negates the argument for spiritual causal agents of physical events dominant in traditional African metaphysics. On the other hand, Attoe’s principle of causality is deterministic in that “all events emerge as a result of a previous state of affairs, down to the coming to existence of the reality, finally resting on the first cause – the thing which we call God” (Attoe 2022a, 60).

Attoe holds that in a predetermined world, human life and fate are determined by related causal events. Human actions and decisions are only a function of interactions in a previous state of affairs (Attoe 2022a). He posits that the existence of both animate and inanimate objects is an outcome or effect of a cosmic process that involves the interactions that occur in previous states of affairs. This continuous interaction suggests that death is a product of a determined interaction of being. As a result, death being an effect is meant to be a causal factor for another effect. Death as the non-existence of the physical body is not the end of the causal interaction. However, in Attoe’s materialistic predetermined world, when death occurs, the living human ceases to exist as a conscious being and is transformed into an unconscious state. Rather than the dead continuing to exist as a disembodied, immaterial substance, it exists as a material substance.

Attoe (2022a, 104ff) says that “for the corpse that is lying on the field, its afterlife consists in its interaction with the microbes that feast on it and the trees/plants that (in interaction with the corpse) extract certain things from it for its growth”. The corpse’s decomposition is made possible by interacting with other elements in the universe that need it for their sustainability. To Attoe, this is one way of thinking about a post-death experience in a material universe.

However, Attoe has little faith in the afterlife. He posits that even the unconscious beings in the afterlife are no longer aware of their past and present moments of meaning, suggesting life’s meaninglessness. They also do not enjoy an eternal afterlife. In the same way, Attoe suggests upon serious inquiry, that life is ultimately meaningless, given the non-sustainable life span of the afterlife experience in the African context. Attoe notes that the reality of the second death in the African view questions the reality of immortality and our awareness of meaning in life. The second death is the final stop for all acts of meaning and the remembrance of the same that qualifies as requirements for the human conception of a meaningful life.

The first form of the second death he referenced speaks to the heart of the African idea of death as captured in the works of Mbiti (1970) and Menkiti (1984). It is grounded on the depersonalisation of the ancestors. In Afro-communitarian thought, personhood, defined as social performance for the well-being of others and the flourishing of the community, defines what we may know of meaning in life. It is what qualifies individuals for a meaningful death and burial and serves as the ticket to the ancestral world where they continue a meaningful existence. The ancestors’ personhood diminishes when their legacies and names are no longer remembered by their descendants and the community. When this stage is achieved, the ancestor enters a state of forgetfulness and loses their memories of meaningful acts and the capacity to continue meaningful contributions to the well-being of the living. The thought of this experience leaves the worry of life’s meaninglessness in the human mind, that is, a life without the continuity of meaningful acts and the remembrance of the same.

However, one may ask, why do the ancestors need the living to remember their names and moments of meaning before their personalisation is sustained? After all, the acts and moments of meaning are individual achievements and a form of self-actualisation. Nonetheless, going by the idea of communalism as a mode of ordering in African thought, it is easier to note that it is necessary that the task of self-development of individuals having the capacity for meaning-making in life is a communal responsibility. As such, those moments of meaning are communally shared, therefore, they remain in the memory of people as they pass them along.

Attoe raises the possibility of communal memory loss through communal mortality to establish the point of the second death. As Attoe shows, communal mortality or death is one of the many reasons why the African view of life's meaning cannot be sustained. In this regard, he alludes to the extinction of communities. He notes that

as we have seen time [and] again, many civilizations have generally come in and out of existence. Beyond this, large chunks of human history have been lost due to factors like non-documentation of history, conflict, natural disasters, etc. More often than not, the fragments of that history are so thin that individual accomplishments of a large section of that community are invariably lost. Thus, there is no guarantee that communal acknowledgement of a life's meaning, sustained after the death of the individual, would be a constant since it is possible for societies to come in and out of existence. In this way, the problem associated with the finality of death still remains (Attoe 2022b, 11).

The third reference to the reality of the second death is the idea that the universe would cease to exist at some point. Beyond Attoe's use of this illustration to establish the fact that the community can die, the idea being pushed with reference to the end of the universe agrees with Attoe's materialist view and how the unconscious afterlife of the decomposing body can end. In addition, the thought of an event that could end the universe and consciousness invokes existential anguish in the human mind and the idea of the meaninglessness of human existence and the world. Attoe argues that the possibility of the universe coming to an end through natural causes results in the end of all interactions and relationships in the material universe. This implies that such an event ultimately denies the unconscious being further interactions with things in the world, making it lose its immortality. Specifically, he referenced the threat of super volcanoes and diseases as well as problems associated with climate and environmental change, among others, to affirm that humanity is at risk of extinction (Attoe 2022b).

There is the impression in Attoe's analysis that the end of humanity is the ultimate end of the universe. However, it is essential to point out that the truth of a person going out of existence differs from that of humanity going extinct. In the same order, the end of humanity, however, does not show that the universe will come to an end. While volcanoes and other natural and health disasters can cause the extinction of human beings, they will not have a similar effect on the universe's continued existence.

The finality of death as the irreversible loss of consciousness in Attoe's materialist conception of death and the traditional African non-materialistic conception diminishes human hope for meaningfulness. These ideas account for the worthlessness of human acts and moments of meaning that ground the orientation of life's meaning. Attoe's idea of life's meaninglessness can be summed up as the inability to continue meaningful action and to be conscious of meaningful past acts and moments. I note that Attoe's conclusion draws strength from the immortality question.

The immortality question and the metaphysics of predeterministic historicity

Attoe's groundwork, the idea of predetermined historicity, does not suggest the kind of premise – death as finality – that grounds his argument on life's meaning. The reality of the finality of death is against the element of continuity entrenched in the metaphysics of predetermined historicity. Relatedly, Attoe's reference to the second death as finality in African thought rests on the mistaken ideas from Mbiti's and Menkiti's philosophy of existence. Also, the thought of the afterlife (post-death) unknowingly drives Attoe's idea of life's meaninglessness, which, from the mood of his analysis, should be discarded at best. Attoe's position on life's meaning would not hold water if

the burden about the afterlife is not in his scheme of ideas.

Attoe's alternative theory of causation, on which his idea of death is grounded, is a novel contribution to the theme of causality in African philosophy. It is a paradigm shift from the dominant supernaturalistic explanation in African philosophy of phenomena in the world. It charges African philosophers to think more of naturalistic responses to causality and other critical themes in African thought. Attoe's alternative explanation to causality in African thought may enhance taking the analysis of issues and ideas in African philosophy seriously, especially for those who take observation and verification as elements of rigour. The quest for scientifically verifiable explanations affirms Attoe's resolve to conceive of death and the afterlife from a materialistic and physically verifiable point of view different from a theist's explanation of death and the afterlife in African philosophy. Attoe defends a notion of death where we can trace what becomes of the physical body and then theorise what could be a possible afterlife existence that does not contradict our instincts and tendencies for rational and empirical verification. However, I think Attoe's notion of death that affirms the meaninglessness of life seems to contradict his casual theory, the idea of predetermined historicity.

If we live in a universe planned for us by the interaction of certain beings, then the thought of the end of life should be difficult. Suppose current realities are products of historical interactions of things. In that case, a future whose cause will be the interaction of the current state of affairs is logically necessary and can be naturally inferred. As a result, there should not be certain forms of interaction either now or in the future that should wipe out the universe, as Attoe seems to agree with Jones et al. (2007). Attoe takes this kind of speculation seriously as a ground for the complete end of memories, plants and all that exists (Attoe 2022b). Such a position has implications for the loss of the first cause and the phenomenon of interactive relationships. Why should we conceive of such a future when the metaphysics of predetermined historicity does not suggest a time in history that is not caused or determined by past events? If the supposed final death is the effect of a cause, it should, by nature, be a cause of future events. Seeing the universe designed as a continuous causal space shows that it may not be entirely purposeless, as Attoe claims.

The thought of the possible extinction of the universe casts a spell on the metaphysics of predetermined historicity. It questions how the metaphysics of predetermined historicity is meant to function in Attoe's analysis, especially with the support it offers the continuous interaction of the decomposing body with the world, affirming the reality of unconscious immortality.

Attoe succumbs to the possibility of an "end of the universe" by drawing our attention to the African metaphysical view that even the ancestors' existence has an endpoint, as captured by Mbiti (1970) and Menkiti (1984; 2004). Mbiti (1970) and Menkiti (1984) note that the ancestors – that is, the living dead, who are occupiers of the ancestral community – will sometimes lose their personal identity and journey into collective immortality, i.e. a state of depersonalisation. This is possible at the point where their names and history are no longer discussed in the living world by people. This usually occurs when the people who witnessed their physical existence are no longer in the physical world to share and sustain their memory through various acts of libation and veneration. The end of personal identity is the terminal stage of individual personhood and its accompanying obligation to the community. These ancestors are now in the stage of personal non-existence and hence are described with the label "it".

Attoe, referencing the preceding analysis, implies that the reality of the ancestors' death presents to believers of the traditional African view that people would not always exist – signalling the irreversible loss of consciousness by death. As a result, the thought of nothingness, which makes individuals question the meaning of life, sets in. I argue that Attoe's acceptance of the end of consciousness in the traditional African view through Mbiti and Menkiti's analysis is impetuous.

Mbiti and Menkiti's argument on depersonalisation and Attoe's acceptance of the same are mistaken (see Matolino 2011). Rather than the depersonalisation of the ancestors through collective immortality, their personhood matures and continues as long as the universe exists. My submission is drawn from Mbiti and Menkiti's account that in African thought, the community is a complex web of beings on continuous duty to the world. They argue that individuals become more of a person as they grow, i.e. they attain full personhood as they age. Personhood, or the attainment of selfhood, is

a criterion for duty in this web of beings or collectives. The more a subjective consciousness grows, the fuller their personhood becomes, and the more they contribute to the community. One can argue that the same way individuals journey up the hierarchy from an older person to become total persons, the ancestors' migration to collective immortality should qualify them for total personhood instead of depersonalisation. A journey into a fuller realm of existence should describe the strength of an individual's personhood, thereby connoting more significant obligations to the living and the unborn. One can conclude that the cup of individual personhood can only become fuller for moral functions in the ancestral world and the world of collective immortality, where the ancestors are oblivious to social vices that could affect their full expression of moral virtues and excellence.² Therefore, a state of depersonalisation that suggests an end to causality, existence and meaning in life cannot be valid.

One might object to the above position by saying that since retaining the ancestors' memory is part of what sustains their personhood and "ancestorhood", the absence of such remembrance automatically terminates their existence. One way to respond to this objection is to argue that humans do not suffer such a degree of amnesia as individuals and groups. Even if we have forgotten the name of a particular ancestor, we hardly forget the name of the clans. The moment we remember the clan, we remember its members – recent and long forgotten, at least in a collective sense. We acknowledge their membership of the clan and often make this remembrance known to them through libation without having to mention all specific names. In addition, the ancestors can still live on and perform their numerous duties to the ancestral worlds and the world of the living without our knowledge. Our lack of awareness of their duties does not invalidate their performance. Also, since the ancestral world is a community of ancestors that shares memories through interaction and relationship, would the community of ancestors not keep any ancestor alive through their own interactions and sense of community? Therefore, the argument for the irreversible loss of consciousness that marks the end of the ancestors' existence in the traditional African view does not suffice and does not support the conclusion of meaninglessness in the African context, given Attoe's interpretation.

Outside the thought of a possible end of the universe that questions the phenomenon of causality, one can argue that Attoe's idea of life's meaninglessness is grounded in the contradictions he identified with immortality, a contradiction occasioned by death. What does this imply? In Attoe, the finality of death is responsible for the end of all meaning-making and the lack of its continuity. One can put this differently and say that death is responsible for the absence of eternal acts of meaning in life and the absence of immortal existence. While I believe mortality should not be the primary reference to the meaninglessness of life, from Attoe's analysis, the stopgap death offers to human life is critical to understanding life's meaning. If death ends all forms of meaning in life, implicitly, therefore, life's meaningfulness, in Attoe, would be guaranteed by the existence of immortal life. Life will be meaningful if human beings can continue to exist with their capacity for meaning, even with the awareness of the phenomenon of death in the world. Immortality, then, is desirable.

The thought of the finality of death and the existential challenge it has on meaning in life is a result of human awareness and acceptance of post-death existence. Attoe realised that the persistence of the thought of a post-death existence makes it difficult for his materialistic world view to envision its non-existence. This affirms why it manages to retain an account of an afterlife existence where matter goes to constitute a new life after death. Individuals' desire to map out what they want their life to be after death – how they continue to exist post-death and what memories people will have of them in death – leads to the realisation of the absurdities in the afterlife, the possibility of the lack of awareness. However, if we imagine a world without an understanding of these concerns, without the thought of an immortalised conscious self, Attoe's conception of life's meaninglessness will not stand.

² One may be quick to ask if the loss of personhood of the nameless dead, as claimed by Menkiti (1984), is a product of moral degeneration while still a living dead. If not, what then informs the loss of such personhood acquired through a moral ideal? The disincorporation that begins the journey of the nameless dead questions the truth of Menkiti's idea of personhood as a moral concept.

Let us consider the first aspect of life's meaning, which is the idea of meaning in life. Imagine that I conceive meaning in life as the intellectual achievements I have or intend to have. The thought and eventual acquisition of those feats would translate to my understanding of a meaningful existence. While I am still alive, it will aid my conception of life's meaning. There are two implications of this idea. First, suppose I cannot guarantee my afterlife existence. I will not expect my orientation of meaning and the satisfaction I get from my achievements to be altered by the thought of the lack of any form of post-death existence. The thought that consciousness may not continue in eternity would not bring existential anguish because of the resolve to formulate an idea of meaning based on my current experience. Second, since my idea of meaningfulness is personal, I may not be worried that people's thoughts about me after death count so much as indices for forming my ideas of life's meaning. I am morally justified to hold this orientation. Irrespective of what happens to my legacies and the community I leave behind, my conviction of meaningful life is limited to the one I share when alive.³

It appears that we have endless expectations of life and meaning. The challenge in Attoe's work is not that certain decisions and actions may count as meaning in life, but that the absurdity of death makes them count as nothing in a world where meaning must be "something" acceptable to others.⁴ The overstretching of the idea of life's meaningfulness leads to the pursuit of an objective criterion for it. The objective criterion makes humans worry about what becomes of the individual achievements after death and how they continue to count as meaning. This objective criterion, which also drives Attoe, rests on human uncertainty of what becomes of a person after death.

The temptation to seek meaning in life is usually driven by an understanding of the meaning of life shared by a social system. The individual agency does not usually drive it. The pressure for meaning in life is commonly associated with social systems such as Afro-communitarianism⁵, where personhood, the status of an ideal individual, is communal conferment and is synonymous with achieving a meaningful life (Molefe 2020).⁶ In this social thought, it is almost impossible for personhood to be self-defined. This line of thought usually drives an understanding of meaningfulness that sees the afterlife as a form of meaning in life where the criteria for "ancesthood" are informed by collective thought. Attoe's idea of meaning in life and the meaning of life rests on the thought of a collective assumption and is not subjective, therefore it is easier for him to dislodge the idea of a purposeful universe and a meaningful life given the apparent contradiction in those lines of thought.

Let us consider the second aspect of life's meaning, which is the idea of the meaning of life. The idea of the meaning of life suggests evaluating not just the lives of individuals, but humanity. It is mainly about the "why" of human existence. It speaks about the purpose of the universe and the rationale for a human journey that will be terminated by death. Here, death is seen as finality. I follow this argument up with the notion of procreation and the intention to do so. Despite our daily confrontation with death, in that we have the consciousness that humans are existentially dying

3 The worry about what counts as meaning is based on our desire to seek what connects meaningful acts to evaluate an individual's life as either meaningful or meaningless. It is not worthless to decide on such normative principles for pronouncement, but numerous criteria of meaning would make it difficult to know what acts are tagged as meaningless and what are not. In what context are actions either meaningful or meaningless?

4 It is not that Attoe disregards the African normative view of acts and moments of meaning that lead to the thought of life as meaningful. Attoe only disagrees with the sustainability and eternity of the capacity for meaningful acts and moments. Given that the capacity for acts of meaning will someday cease in the face of the second death according to Attoe, life's meaningfulness hinged on a fading capacity for acts of meaning is questionable.

5 Here, I refer to the traditional view of Afro-communitarianism that prioritises communal primacy in the relationship between persons and community and emphasises the moral theory of personhood.

6 Molefe (2020) considers the notion of personhood, which is the idea of living a flourishing moral life as constitutive of an African account of a meaningful life. He notes that human beings can seek moral excellence and perfection. This moral perfection guarantees the achievement of personhood, consequent on which a meaningful existence is assured. The goal of pursuing moral excellence and fulfilling social expectations requisite for personhood is to benefit the lives of individuals and not only the community (see also Metz 2020). Having a meaningful life is linked to the experience of having a dignified human existence, which is what being a person in African thought entails. This claim is meaningful insofar as the duties that symbolise personhood are the duties that benefit others. It is otherwise not so if we are not sure how much of the individual's interest is included in the demand of duties to others. How much of the interest for self-realisation is received and accommodated in the duties I owe to others? Also, the limits and degrees of the duties an individual has to others are not clearly defined (see Famakinwa 2010).

beings, we are still not perturbed by the anguish of death but proceed to procreate. While I consider this as humanity's disregard for death, the significance is that the universe keeps growing through continuous procreation and death. The idea of procreation and death may be considered the natural order of the universe, which should help us think about the universe's purpose and the possibility of a meaningful existence of the universe and the fate of the humans in it. If operating in the naturally ordered arrangement is anything to go by, the notion of the meaning of life should not be difficult to arrive at. Therefore, death cannot be seen as a symbol or expression of life's meaninglessness in a universe with order and purpose. Hence, procreation and even death should be seen as natural orders to promote the permanency of the universe.

A closer look at Attoe's principle of causality and the question of immortality raised in this article can lead to a meaningful submission regarding Attoe's idea of life's meaning. The idea of continuity and transformation entrenched in the metaphysics of predeterministic historicity agrees with the ideas of immortality. Where to begin is to note how underutilised the idea of transformation in Attoe's principle of causality is. Why should we think that the final transformation cycle for conscious beings is to remain unconscious with plants and microbes? A question that comes to mind is why can there not be a further transformation of the dead – unconscious matter to conscious being? Or could there not be other types of transformation different from the life-death-life? Denying such a possibility exposes the error in Attoe's idea of causality.

The reality of the second death as the final death in the traditional African definition of death captured by both Mbiti and Menkiti arguably has an influence on Attoe's idea of death as finality in his materialistic account. Consequently, Attoe falls into the temptation of not being able to define death without an afterlife, like the African metaphysicians before him – the conception he adopts to question life's meaning by relying on the incapacity of a conscious afterlife. The idea of the afterlife is the core premise for Attoe's claim about life's meaning. However, Attoe's disregard for and the lack of faith in afterlife experiences should dissuade him from making conclusions about life's meaning from such a reality. Since Attoe argues that human consciousness is reducible to the physical human body, his conclusion on life's meaninglessness should be grounded on human experience in the physical world (Attoe 2022b). Attoe's argument on life's meaninglessness should be restricted to the contradictions in the idea of meaning in life before encountering death. It should not be about meaning after life or the lack of it.

Utilising Attoe's idea of transformation and causality in relation to the phenomena of immortality can help in thinking about a possible path to meaning in his analysis. Exploring the causal idea of predeterministic historicity, we can begin to debate the idea of immortal beings as something plausible when the finality of death is withdrawn and the potential of the concept transformation is enhanced. The idea of immortal beings removes the contradiction that makes life meaningless in Attoe's view and agrees with the African view of existence, given my interpretation of Mbiti and Menkiti's view of the afterlife, that is, the possibility of the continued existence of the ancestors. I suggest that for Attoe to utilise his principle of causality, he must seek an idea of life's meaning not informed by the idea of death as finality. Taking death seriously on the question of life's meaning affects how Attoe's metaphysics of predeterministic historicity should be received. Immortality and the eternal existence of being could inform Attoe's quest for meaning.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that Attoe's submission on the meaninglessness of life rests on the premise of a post-death experience which his idea of metaphysics should avoid in the search for the meaning of life. Attoe's idea of life's meaning should have been about the realities in the world that confronts humans; it should not have anything to do with the extension of human consciousness beyond the physical and the inability to extend consciousness. I argued that Attoe's project is mistaken in his selection of evidence. Part of such evidence is the idea of death as finality, which contradicts his idea of predeterministic historicity as a causal principle. I discussed Attoe's reference to the African view of death and meaning as an essential aspect of his project. The traditional African view of death and meaning being dominant is critical to Attoe's analysis and presentation of the materialist conception. I have shown, however, how Attoe's interpretation of the traditional

African view needs to be revised. While critiquing Attoe's idea of life's meaning on the grounds that it rests on the assumption of the significance of immortality, it is essential to see how the traditional African view of immortality can interact with Attoe's idea of causality for life's meaning in thinking about the idea of immortal beings.

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