

Western and African Perspectives on Value

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Abstract

Western and African philosophical traditions do not thrive on the same metaphysical assumption, especially when it comes to the nature of value. It is against this backdrop that I probe into Western and African perspectives on value. Having critically unpacked Plato's Form of the Good and Immanuel Kant's noumenon and phenomenon- by discussing how the two philosophers have created vagueness in our understanding of the nature of value from Western perspective, I reveal how African communal lifestyle is based on the value of 'we'. That permits me to argue that Omoluabi, which is an African communal theory of value, is rooted in the value of 'we', therefore, objectively functional. To substantiate this argument, I defend how moral value and aesthetic value are two sides of a coin in Yoruba thought system. The work contributes to knowledge for uniquely drawing attention to how the nature of value can be practically understood from Western and African perspectives.

Keywords: Value, The Good, Noumena, Phenomena, African Communal Ethics, *Omoluabi*

Introduction

Many questions could be raised in a discussion bordering on value. Some possible questions are: what is the nature of value? Is value entirely subjective (like talking about Western or African value) or objective-transcending a particular culture? If moral values are said to evolve from society, then where do they derive their justification from, is it from the

same society? In an attempt to answer these questions, I have divided this work into four sections. In section one, I distinguish intrinsic value from extrinsic value. In section two, I critically discuss the nature of value in Western Philosophy from Plato and Immanuel Kant's standpoints. That affords me to uniquely bring to the fore the implication of Kant's distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena* on the nature of value. In section three, I focus on the second component of the work- African perspective on value. Lastly, in section four, I narrow my discussion down to *Omoluabi* which represents an objective theory of value in African ethics.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Values

Making a clear-cut distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values is essential to the aim of this work. It will help to lay a solid foundation for the discussion around the nature of value. In this connection, intrinsic value is the value that something has in itself. An intrinsically valuable thing is a thing that is valued for its own sake as against being valued for the sake of an end that transcends it. One cogent example of "...intrinsic value is life".¹ The value of life is self-evident to whatever or whoever possesses life. This is because every organism has a natural attitude to defend its own life. The intrinsic value (inherent worth) of life is even difficult to be denied by any human person because one needs to be alive in the first place to be able to argue that life has no intrinsic value.

Creativity also has intrinsic value, for it can be valued as an end in itself. Children are a good example of those that value creativity as an end in itself. Most times, children do not value products of their creative experiences like the way they value creativity itself. I had such an

¹. Rotimi, Omosulu, "Values and the Environment" in D.I.O, Anele, M.N. Onyeaghalaji and P. Osimiri (eds.), *Philosophy of Values: Concepts and Issues*, (Lagos: University of Lagos Press and Bookshop Ltd, 2021), 120.

experience as a child. I used to labour for hours as a child just to learn and master how to create a paper wristwatch. In the real sense of it, the paper wristwatch was not what I valued but the experience of being creative itself. I cherished creativity for its own sake as a child! Blood falls under the category of things that have intrinsic value. Even though blood could be used instrumentally, such as using the blood of Mr. A to save the life of Miss B (through blood transfusion), yet, blood has a value that is intrinsic. There is a kind of herd instinct among humans to understand and value blood as an end in itself. I know that my blood example is related to that of life example, but we must realise that life and blood are two different things.

William David Ross has mentioned “justice (happiness apportioned to merit), pleasure, knowledge and virtue” as things with intrinsic good.² But if Jeremy Bentham should be asked to pick from Ross' list, he would have chosen only pleasure as the only thing with an intrinsic value.³ I will not delve into the controversy that surrounds utilitarian defense of pleasure as the only value worth seeking in this work.

Meanwhile, extrinsic value (also known as instrumental value) is the value that something has based on its utility. An action or object that serves as a means to an end is an extrinsically valuable action or object. In other words, human actions are extrinsically valuable when they produce more satisfaction for the beneficiaries than for the doers of the actions. An object (such as a knife) has only an extrinsic value. Its value depends on its usefulness. That is, the value of a knife is attached to the ends it can be used to achieve. Another example is knowledge. Although it has both

² Anthony, Skelton, “William David Ross” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, para. 27, available at <https://plato.stanford/archives/sum2012/entries/william-david-ross/> (last visited, 26/03/2023)

³ Jeremy, Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, New York: Dover Publications, 2014, (originally published in 1789).

extrinsic and intrinsic values. For instance, there are scholars and people who seek knowledge for knowledge's sake. This means that knowledge, in that context, has intrinsic value. On the contrary, many students especially those in higher institutions seek knowledge mostly for its instrumental value. They seek admission into their respective courses of study in higher institutions in order to have the knowledge that would afford them to get jobs or to have upward social mobility. This accounts for why an extrinsic value is regarded as a derivative value as against an intrinsic value which is a nonderivative value.

My discussion on intrinsic and extrinsic values is largely influenced by my training in the Western analytic philosophical tradition. As a result, I will now turn my attention to the view of Plato and Immanuel Kant on the nature of value.

Plato and Kant's Perspectives on Value

Any inquiry into the nature of value in philosophy will unavoidably dovetail into a discussion around metaphysics and epistemology of value. Such an inquiry will be metaphysical and epistemological because there is no way a philosopher can talk about what value is in general without making both metaphysical and epistemological claims. If metaphysics is mostly construed as the search for the ultimate reality, it then means that a philosopher's postulation on the nature of value will necessarily encompass an ontological claim on what the ultimate value is. By ontological claim, I mean a claim to something that transcends any particular state of affair. When such a claim is about the nature of value, the philosopher would have committed herself to offer a purest and universal notion of that thing called value. In other words, a philosopher makes an ontological claim on value if s/he argues that value cannot be completely comprehended through any particular or ordinary valuable experience. On the side of epistemology, such a philosopher would claim

to have known what I call 'universal-centripetal force' which drives humans to the realm of value and valuation. The *Absolute Spirit* of Hegel or the *Uncaused cause* of St. Aquinas is an example of a 'universal-centripetal force' that I have in mind. My point here is that an attempt by a philosopher to give us an absolute idea of value is an attempt to structure our minds towards the knowledge of a 'universal-centripetal force', which when clearly known and understood, will help us to unravel the incompleteness in our particular knowledge of value. This is evident in the works of Plato and Immanuel Kant.

Plato (447- 327 BC) discloses in the *Republic*⁴ how justice, fairness, honesty, knowledge, beauty, truth and so on participate in the Form of the Good. He conceives the Good as the ultimate Form and as the foundation for knowing anything that is good or valuable. By this he means that “heterogeneous goods all share the attribute of goodness”⁵ in the world of form. He further informs us not to seek any higher good outside the Form of Good and this should be done through a deep philosophical reasoning. Plato is convinced that there is no value that is greater than the value of the Good.⁶ Meaning that the Good is the totality of all values and it is the ultimate value that makes other things valuable. Robert Merrihew Adams refers to Plato's Form of the Good as “the excellent”.⁷ I agree with Adam's interpretation since Plato's Good is the Good in which no greater good can be conceived of, if I may borrow from Saint Anselm's ontological argument. In so doing, I infer that the Good, in Plato's estimation, represents perfection of value in all ramifications.

⁴. Plato. *Republic*. Translated by Reeve, C. D. C. Vol. 1., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004).

⁵. Stanley, Rosen, *Plato's Republic: A Study*. (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 256.

⁶. Plato. *The Dialogues of Plato*, (translated by B. Jowett), (London: Oxford University Press, 1913)

⁷. Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

Bearing the above in mind, I confirm that Plato's primary ambition in the *Republic* is to offer us an objective knowledge, if not a universal knowledge of value given his allusion to the Form of the Good. This is because the Good is the ultimate value for him and we must all seek it! However, the ambiguity in Plato's claim to knowledge of the ultimate value manifests when he fails to specifically state what the Good is in reality or in concrete terms. While Plato holds that the Good is the ultimate value everyone should crave for, what that ultimate value is in reality remains elusive in his work. His commitment to abstract knowledge of value becomes more evident when he affirms that the Good cannot be identified in any object in the material world. The physical world, as far as Plato is concerned, contains things without permanent identities. That things in the physical world are incapable of furnishing us with authentic knowledge of value because they are impermanent.

The above is the dilemma Plato left us with in a bid to explain to us what the ultimate value is through the Form of the Good. The dilemma is really about whether we should stick to the tangible things in the physical world that give us experiences of value and valuation or we should turn our back against the physical world and begin to search for the ultimate value in the Form of the Good, the Good that Plato himself cannot concretely identify.

There is a kind of similitude between Plato's Form of the Good and Immanuel Kant's distinction between *noumenon* and *phenomenon* as we have it in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. I am dragging Kant into this conversation because of his contribution to the transcendental notion of value. Kant shares a position similar to Plato when he claims to know the limit of human knowledge. In his view, the human mind is incapable of knowing the *noumena* (things as they are in themselves) but it has the

capacity to know the *phenomena* (things as they appear to us). Kant makes this submission having made a bold statement that the human mind is not playing a passive role in our cognitive process. What he means by this is that the objects of perception do not impose themselves on our minds as John Locke and some empiricists would want us to believe. On the contrary, it is our minds that actively impose themselves on the objects of perception. Kant argues that human mind cannot know what exists outside the space and time or outside the sense-experience.

I therefore take Kant's distinction between *noumenon* and *phenomenon* as another way to communicate to us, the message in Plato's Form of the Good. Why? Because Plato never believed that we could acquire authentic knowledge from things in the physical world. He took them to be mere reflections or imitations of the original things in the world of Forms. In the same vein, Kant insists that we can never know things as they are in themselves, given that our minds are not naturally wired to acquire such knowledge. To connect this to the discussion on the nature of value, it means that Kant is saying we lack the cognitive capacity to know what value is in itself. Thus, our preference for a thing over its equivalence is not an outcome of our understanding of what we are valuing. If, for instance, I place human life on top of animal life on the hierarchy of life, then it means I must have arrived at that conclusion based on my limited understanding of what life truly is while comparing human life with animal life. This is so because I can never know what life is in itself, *à la* Kant. Therefore, the value I have seen in human life at the expense of animal life is due to how life appears to me (*phenomenon*) and not how life is in itself (*noumenon*). To sum up my understanding of Kant here, he is simply saying that we do not know what value is in itself because the real knowledge of value is not present in the sensory world. Is this not the same position being held by Plato when he says things in this world are nothing but imperfect copies of the original things in the world

of Forms? The answer to this question is already obvious in my analysis so far. And that takes me to the second component of this work.

An African perspective on Value

What we have today as African continent used to be a place occupied by various indigenous people who considered communal style of existence the most treasured way in order for them to actualise their potentialities together. In this connection, the value that is common and positive to African indigenous people (which is at the centre of their social interaction) is the value of 'we'. The 'we' value rather than the 'I' value percolates the social landscape of the African people because of African ontological understanding of a person. How an individual commits to the interdependence of life that she shares with other members of the community determines, to a large extent, the personhood of that individual in ancient African societies. Therefore, the African value of “we”, I argue, is a value which encapsulates unflinching kinship solidarity by a people bound together by common destiny. In other words, what drives communal ethics in indigenous African societies is the value of 'we'.

Scholars in African philosophy, such as Sophie Oluwole,⁸ Campbell Shittu Momoh,⁹ Barry Hallen,¹⁰ Tunde Bewaji,¹¹ Mogobe B. Ramose,¹²

⁸ Sophie, Bosede Oluwole, “The Rational Basis of Yoruba Ethical Thinking”, in *The Nigerian Journal of Philosophy*, (4 (1&2), (1984), 14–25. Sophie Bosede Oluwole, *Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy*, (Lagos: Ark Publishers, 2015).

⁹ Campbell Shittu Momoh, *The Substance of African Philosophy*, (Auchi: African Philosophy Projects' Publications, 2000).

¹⁰ Barry Hallen, “Ethical Knowledge in an African Philosophy”, in *Florida Philosophical Review*, (3 (1), (2003), 81-90.

¹¹ John Ayotunde Ishola Bewaji, “Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture”, in Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.), *A Companion to Africa Philosophy*, (Malden, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004)

¹² Mogobe B Ramose, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*. (Harare: Mond Books Publishers, 2005)

Kwame Gyekye,¹³ Thaddeus Metz¹⁴ and Edwin Etieyibo,¹⁵ have written extensively on the communal nature of African Ethics. For instance, Bewaji defends African communal ethics when he argues that in Africa “...moral obligations are primarily social rather than individual, and that communal factors often take precedence over individual rights or interests”.¹⁶ In addition to this, Polycarp Ikuenobe explains that “Communal ethics emphasizes individuals' responsibility, promoting, and contributing to, the welfare of everyone in the community, on which one's own well-being depends. The proper performance of such responsibilities defines, socially and morally, one's personhood, character, and well-being”.¹⁷ I agree with the positions of Bewaji and Ikuenobe because they both implicitly spoke to the value of 'we' in Africa in their bid to explain African communal ethics.

I am here also expressing my agreement with Magobe B. Ramose's views as contained in his book entitled *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*. He explores the communal ethics of *Ubuntu* to elucidate why in Africa, it is not enough for one to be a human being. What is fundamentally important is for one “to actually become a human being”.¹⁸ In so doing, a person is truly a person in the African context if and only if she always acts according to the overriding interest of the community, she lives in. *Ubuntu*, which can loosely be translated as “I am because we are”, is a philosophy rooted in the value of “we”. It is a philosophy of existence

¹³. Kwame Gyekye, "African Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (2011), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/african-ethics/>>

¹⁴. Thaddeus Metz, "African Ethics" in Hugh LaFollette (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2013)

¹⁵. Edwin Etieyibo, "On the One Concept and Many Accounts of African Ethics", in Chimakonam, J. O., Etieyibo, E., and Odumegwu, I., (eds.), *Essays on Contemporary Issues in African Philosophy*, Cham: Springer, 2016).

¹⁶. Bewaji, "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture", 396.

¹⁷. Polycarp Ikuenobe, "African Communal Ethics" in Wariboko, N. and Falola, T. (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of African Social Ethics*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. (2020), 131.

¹⁸. Ramose, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, 37.

that bounds together the Bantu people of Southern Africa. However, I will not go further in discussing *Ubuntu* in this work. Instead, I will focus on the Yoruba ethics of *Omoluabi* in the next sub-section to properly unravel the African communal value of 'we'. My main concern is to demonstrate how the Yoruba communal ethics is objectively functional. And my argument is intended to deflate the claim in some quarters that African communal ethics or the African value of “we” lacks the capacity to objectively judge actions as right or wrong, as we have it in the Western philosophical tradition.

***Omoluabi* as an Objective Moral Value among the Yoruba**

For a vivid conceptualization of this section, I will begin by quickly making an apt distinction between value and virtue. Value, in philosophical ethics, is the moral belief that guides a person or a people's action. Whereas, virtue is commonly understood as a universally accepted right conduct. This distinction seems to have been blurred by scholars who have written on *Omoluabi*. This is so because there has been a conflation of *Omoluabi* to mean *the epitome of moral value* with *Omoluabi* to mean *the height of moral virtue*. As a point of departure, I will restrict myself only to the understanding of *Omoluabi* as the ultimate moral value among the Yoruba people since it is the moral ideal that every Yoruba person strives to achieve through acceptable right actions. I will also endeavour to bring to the fore some virtues comprised in it to show why it is objectively functional.

While *Omoluabi* is a ubiquitous ethical paradigm within the Yoruba moral worldview, it is also difficult for anyone to fully and concretely identify it in reality, just as Plato informs us that we cannot fully grasp the Form of the Good in the material world. This means that one can only appropriate and exemplify *Omoluabi*'s values and ethos in particular actions. No standard of value is higher than *Omoluabi* for the Yoruba

people. As the term *omoburuku* sums up the climax of moral decadence in a human character, “*Omoluabi* is a Yoruba word used to describe an individual that is well-cultured, morally upright and intelligently sound. The concept of *Omoluabi* places great value on good character, whereby it is used as a measuring standard for intelligence, achievement, and beauty”.¹⁹ Individuals are judged to be at their best character-wise only when they reflect “*Omoluabi* essence”.²⁰ Public office holders are praised or blamed in Yorubaland based on how they personify or distance themselves from the ideal of *Omoluabi* in the discharge of their official duties, in spite of the fact that Western and Arabian cultures have considerably enveloped the authentic African moral systems in this 21st century.

Granted that *Omoluabi* is an abstract moral value within the Yoruba moral framework, a human person, as alluded to above, can still be referred to as an *Omoluabi*, depending on the character of the person. Thus, an *Omoluabi* is someone who critically considers the consequence(s) of her action on human and nonhuman entities before acting. Severing relationships with fellow humans (or malevolent actions towards nonhumans) is not an attribute of an *Omoluabi*. It will be uncharacteristic of an *Omoluabi* to act in a morally questionable manner, such as tax-invasion. It is in view of this that Yoruba moral education is geared towards transforming an individual into a dependable and responsible moral player in society. Strong and positive moral character is all that the Yoruba moral education instils in a person. By this, I mean moral training that equips a person to carry out actions for the sake of the community as a whole. In other words, the moral education of the

^{19.} Idowu Olujemisi Majebi and Esther A. Oduoluwo, “The Concept of Omoluabi in Pre-Primary and Primary School Classrooms and Sustenance of Effective Democracy in Nigeria” in *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies*, Vol.XXX (2): (2020), 6.

^{20.} Nahzeem Oluwafemi Mimiko, “The Omoluabi Essence: An Interrogation of the History, Culture and Identity of the Yoruba People in Transitory Context” in *African and Asian Studies*, 16(3), (2017), 1.

Yoruba people is based on the value of 'we' which is embodied in *Omoluabi*.

In this connection, *Omoluabi*, as an ultimate ethical value, is both prescriptive and normative in nature. In its prescriptive sense, an *Omoluabi*, as a moral agent, knows what to do morally whenever her secondary needs (such as having more than enough land to farm) conflict with the primary needs of another person (such as willingly allowing a stranger who is in dire need of a portion of land to farm on her land). A secondary need should be understood here as a need that one can do away with, while a primary need is a need that is highly essential for the survival of the person. In its normative sense, *Omoluabi* is an abstract moral value that helps someone (or a community) to have an unambiguous paradigm for judging actions as morally right or wrong or neutral.

Inherent in *Omoluabi*'s ethic are the following virtues: *Iwa pele* (mildness of character);²¹ *iwa irele* (mildness of character); *suuru* (patience), *owo* (humility/respect), *oro-siso* (appropriate choice of words); *otito* (honesty);²² *iwa jeje* (gentle character); *ogbon inu* (native intelligence).²³ If all of these virtues are packed in a box, a morally cultured Yoruba person is expected to pick *iwa pele* over all other virtues. Because *iwa pele* is a virtue that abhors pomposity, greediness, self-aggrandisement, indolence, disunity, unbridled domination, all-knowing mentality and epistemicide. For instance, *iwa pele* as a virtue would not have emboldened anyone to undermine the knowledge and culture of a people. In contrast, the manner in which the Europeans

^{21.} Roy Clive Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*, London: London University Press.

^{22.} John Ayotunde Ishola Bewaji, Adebola Adebileje and Rotimi Omosulu, *Introduction to Philosophy and Logic*, Ede: Redeemer's University Press, 2014.

^{23.} Oyeade Oyewole and Godwin Azenabor, "A Discourse on Fundamental Principles of Character in an African Moral Philosophy", in *African Journal of History and Culture*, Vol. 10(3): 41-50.

maligned African culture, religion and epistemology during the colonisation of the Africa continent shows lack of *iwa pele* in them. I make bold to say that the virtue of *iwa pele* accounted for why the Yoruba traditional religion (known as *Isese*), was tolerant to the worship of over 400 orisas/deities prior to the contact of the Yoruba people with foreign religions and cultures. Today Christianity and Islam have introduced religious intolerance into the Yorubaland through their claim to what I call religious individualism (i.e Jesus Christ is the only way or Prophet Mohammed is the only Messenger of God with the complete message from Allah, thereby any contrary belief automatically becomes heresy). My argument here is that Yoruba traditional religion is also rooted in the value of 'we' because the virtue of *iwa pele* promotes religious tolerance. In this sense, an *omoluabi* is unavoidably religious tolerant.

Oyebade and Azenabor, citing Abimbola and Abraham, listed the following as common maxims and proverbs that the Yoruba people commonly use so as to keep individuals and society focused on the value of 'we' wrapped in *Omoluabi*:

Maxims-

- I. “*iwa lesin* (character is the ultimate religion)
- II. *iwa lewa* (character is a person's beauty)
- III. *iwa loba awure* (character is the best mystical protection)
- IV. *iwa rere leso eniyan, eyin fun fun leso erin* (just as white teeth enhance a laugh, so does a good character befit a person)”.

Proverbs-

- I. “*abo oro la so fun Omoluabi, to ba de inu e, a d'odindi* (a word is sufficient for the wise)
- II. *Omoluabi ki ta fa ko ma wa* (*Omoluabi* follows a course to the end)
- III. *iwa lorisa, baa ba ti huu ni fi gbe ni* (character is like an orisa)

(deity); if we worship well, we get its protection, and if we behave well, we benefit);

- IV. *iponju ki mu Omoluabi ko di abese* (*Omoluabi* betrays no character even in hardship)”²⁴

A Yoruba proverb that appeals to me but not included in the above is *eeḡi ni iwa ko seeḡi pamo* (character is like smoke, it cannot be covered up by anyone forever). This proverb enjoins us to always cultivate the best of character since one's core character is what one often exhibits in any interpersonal relationship.

To further showcase the value of 'we' as embedded in *Omoluabi*, I will discuss the relationship between character and beauty within the Yoruba moral paradigm in the sub-section hereunder.

Morality and Beauty in Yoruba Ethics

The Yoruba word for beauty is *ewa*. There is no specific word for morality in Yoruba language, but *iwa* can be literally translated as good character or good conduct. The maxim *iwa rere ni eso eniyan* (good character is the beauty of a person) and the term *iwalewa* (good character is beauty) actually speak to the nexus between morality and beauty in Yoruba moral worldview.²⁵ *Iwa* is not only a moral term but also an aesthetic term because morality and beauty are not independent of each other in Yoruba thought system. As a result, beauty is identical with the character of a person than with the physical appearance of a person in Yoruba thought system. A man or woman of questionable character cannot be described as a beautiful person, even if her physical

²⁴. Oyelade and Azenabor, “A Discourse on Fundamental Principles of Character in an African Moral Philosophy”, 14.

²⁵. Olatunji Alabi Oyeshile, “Morality and its Rationale: The Yoruba Example,” *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, No, 11&12, (2002). 92; Lawrence Ojo Bamikole, *On Value Philosophy* (An Inaugural Professorial Lecture), Kingston: The University of the west Indies Press, (2020). 22.

appearance seems alluring.

Ifa literally corpus (which is the Yoruba oral divination system) draws attention to the importance of *iwa* (character) in interpersonal relationship. In fact, there are many verses of *Ifa* corpus that lay emphasis on good character and how good character is the road to success in any human endeavour. In particular, *Oyeku Meji* which is a verse of *Ifa*, dwells on *iwa* in this sense, “Raise it up, pull it down, twist it as you may, the essence does not change. What matters most is *iwa* (good character-virtue). You may be wealthy, have many children and build several houses; all come to nothing if you lack good character. A life without Moral Rectitude is nothing but vanity”,²⁶ (Oluwole, 2015: 64). In addition, a Yoruba poet, J.F. Odunjo, aptly captures the intersection between morality and beauty in the poem hereunder:

Toju iwa re, ore mi
 Ola a maa si lo ni ile
 Ewa a si maa sa lara eniyan
 Bi o lowo, bi o ko ni iwa
 Tani je finu too bi o ba sohun rere
 Bi o si je obinrin rogbodo,
 Bi o ba jina si iwa ti eda un fe
 Tani je fe o sile bi aya

Translation

Mind your character, my friend
 Wealth can vanish from one's home
 Beauty also can fade away from persons
 If you are wealthy and you lack character
 Who will ever trust you if you succeed?

²⁶. Sophie, Bosede Oluwole, “The Rational Basis of Yoruba Ethical Thinking”, 64.

And even if you are a well-built woman
If your character falls below people expectation
Who will ever get married to you?²⁷

In this connection, any work of art that aims to provoke immoral behaviour or bad character in the society will not be valued or cherished by the Yoruba people. In the same vein, a person of bad character is already predisposed to ugliness in Yoruba thought system. The foregoing explains why the value of 'we' rather than the value of 'I' underlines African communal ethics and it is therefore objectively functional.

Conclusion

As a philosophical term, value is directly connected to our existence as human beings. In every sphere of our life, it is either we are practicing value or we are valuing what we practice. This explains why I have critically discussed the nature of value from Western and African perspectives for the purpose of comparative ethics. Even though my discussion on the nature of value is not all that could be known from the two philosophical traditions (Western and African), the takeaway from this work is that the concept of value in philosophy can be critically interrogated from Western and African standpoints, for a better understanding. This is what I have achieved with this work! Any subjective or objective view on the work is also a contribution to the understanding of the nature of value.

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