

Destiny and the Problem of Causal Explanation in African (Yoruba) Thought

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Abstract

Destiny functions as a tool for explaining the mysterious forces that underlie the causal events of human activities in the material world. Within African Yoruba metaphysical thought, various paradigms of causal explanation exist, including the traditional perspective of destiny alongside scientific and religious viewpoints. However, at the core of the Yoruba conception of a person, man anchors the concepts of destiny and causality, serving as the central figure. African Yoruba philosophical thought postulates that the metaphysical world somehow predetermines or causally determines the activities and personality of an individual before these aspects manifest in the empirical world. This metaphysical determination, encapsulated in the concept of Òrì (represented by the inner head and symbolised by the physical head), serves as a causal explanatory model for how individuals operate in the earthly realm. The primary focus of this paper lies in examining the nature of the causal relationship between the unforeseen forces emanating from predetermined life and their impacts on human activities in the physical world. Addressing this challenge is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the forces behind human destiny within the context of African Yoruba thought. In summary, this article explores the challenges inherent in causally explaining the forces that shape human destiny in African Yoruba thought. It posits that the Yoruba idea of destiny functions as a conceptual symbol, providing a means to elucidate the metaphysical reality of human life in traditional African societies.

Key words: Destiny, Man, Òrì, Causal Explanation, Yoruba thought.

Introduction

In looking into the multi-dimensional world of African (Yoruba) thought, this article embarks on a careful research of the concept of man. Beyond a mere examination of the notion of man, the study seeks to unravel the complexities of causal explanations inherent in the pursuit of personal goals in human life within the Yoruba cultural context. Additionally, it carefully scrutinises the profound significance of destiny, positioning it as a pivotal causal explanatory model deeply embedded in the Yoruba conceptual scheme.

The narrative extends further to dissect the boundaries of human freedom, woven into the inner minds of Yoruba philosophical thought. This article also evaluates the challenges that emerge within the confines of human freedom. Through this analytical journey, the discussion aims to shed light on the Yoruba idea of destiny as not merely a conceptual construct but as a paradigmatic symbol, offering profound insights into the fundamental reality that shapes and underlies the existence of human life in the vibrant and diverse society of Africa.

The Notion of Man in African-Yoruba Thought

The Yoruba ethnic group, situated in the south-western region of Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Ghana, and Latin America, stands as a prominent entity among Nigeria's diverse ethnicities. Within the context of this ethnic group, man's existence intricately ties cultural diversity to significance. In the cosmology of African Yoruba beliefs, 'eniyan,' the term for man, conceptualises him as possessing tripartite forms-*ara* (body), *emi* (soul or spirit), and *Ori* (inner head). These three components synergistically collaborate to empower man to fulfil his journey on earth. The *ara* (body) is the physical structure, the material, and that which occupies space and time. People commonly attribute agility, fragility, and the capability of physical metamorphosis to it. *Ara* (body) represents not just the body frame but the whole of the material organs of the human body¹. The physical aspect of the body 'ara' enables

it to move from one place to another (mobility); with its constituent elements, it can reproduce (that is, give birth to young ones), create, grow, and eventually die.

That is, cease to exist. The Yoruba classify the *ara* (body) as a prison house or warehouse for the soul, *emi*. It is that material part that represents the flesh and blood, the medium through which he acts and reacts to his physical environment². The body anatomically consists of legs, arms, fingers, toes, eyes, ears, nose, etc. All these parts have some intrinsic connection with the actualization of human destiny in life. The *emi* (soul or spirit) is the unseen or immaterial part of man. According to Balogun³, *emi*, or soul, 'is regarded as the life-giving element. *Emi*, 'the human soul', provides the 'animating force' or energy without which a person cannot be said to be living at all, talk less of being conscious⁴. The *emi*, or 'human soul', in conjunction with *ookan* (heart) and *opolo* (brain), constitutes the seat of wisdom and knowledge. The *emi*'soul' part of man, '*eniyan*', is literally the major part that propels the prosperity of man's destiny in life. This refers to the saying that:

'Bi emi ba wa, ireti mbe'

Meaning, 'when there is life, there is hope'

The metaphysical significance of this proverbial statement is that when there is life, the future of man is assured, and without life, his sojourns on earth come to an abrupt end. It is only when a person is alive that he plans to achieve great things in life and accomplish his earthly goals. With life, there is no challenge that man cannot surmount. That is why the physically challenged person goes far in life and achieves what has been destined for him to be. Thus, it is not the physical structures of the body that determine the achievement or prosperity of man in life. For instance, there

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1. S. Ade Ali, "Person: A Yoruba Example", *Journal of Yoruba Folklore* 1, no.2 (1997): 100.
 2. J.O. Lucas, *Religion in West African and Ancient Egypt* (Lagos: Nigeria National Press, 1970), 281
 3. O.A. Balogun, "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation", *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16, no.1 (2007): 120
 4. Balogun, "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought", 117

was a physically challenged man (lame from birth) named '*aro*' who was a shoe cobbler in Ijebu-ode. Somehow, white people visited his area sometimes ago for business transactions, and fortunately for this lame man, some of these white men saw his handiwork and were impressed. Thereafter, he was taken to the state and made to work there. Fortune smiles on him and his family at last.

From this analysis, one can adjudge that the prosperity of man does not lie in the physical ability of the body '*ara*' or that a physically challenged person can be prevented from attaining greatness in life. Determination is the bane of all success. Notably, the qualification of the heart-soul in this way appears closer to the Platonic qualification of the soul as the source and origin of life, the seat of reason and intelligence, and of individual freedom and responsibility. Ade Ali also noted the resemblance between Descartes' description of the soul as a thinking and unextended thing⁵. The '*inner head*' is the greatest part of man, and it is regarded as the destiny carrier of man. Beyond the Platonic and Cartesian dualism points of view, *Òri* symbolises the physical head as one of the vital embodied components of human nature. It is a vital aspect of the human person that determines the actuality and worth of man in the material world.

This *ori* is referred to as *òri-inu* (inner head), that is, the intangible part of '*òri*'. That is, it is not the actual physical head we are carrying about but the metaphysically woven *Òri*. This element plays a vital role in achieving greatness or doom in this physical sphere of life. The Yoruba people believe that when one is prosperous in life, one should acknowledge his *òri*, that is, the '*inner head*'. *Òri* is thought to be the personality-soul that rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of the person. It actualizes the entire life of man. *Òri* is regarded as the guardian and protector of man's destiny. That is why it is opined that if things are not progressing for man, then one should appease his *òri*. This goes with the saying that,

5. Ali, "Person: A Yoruba Example", 56

Òri eni la ba bo, a ba f'orisa sile

(one should appease his head and leave the divinities).

There is no divinity that blesses man without the consent of his *Òri*. Let us reminisce on the issue of *Òri* before its earthly sojourn. It was recorded that right before humans sojourned on earth, every man chose his own *Òri* from *Ajala's* house (the fortress of man's destiny). In *Ajala's* store, there are diverse types of *òri*: burnt, half-baked, well-baked, etc. Those occurrences happened because *Ajala* is regarded as a debtor who tries to evade his debtors, thereby leaving the *ori* in his care for its own fortune. The choice of *Òri* in *Ajala's* store could be through:

'Akunleyan'

This is one of the kinds of man's choice of *òri*. That is the choice the man-made while kneeling down in *Ajala's* storehouse. The choice of *òri* from *Ajala's* storehouse determines the fate one encounters on earth. It is of the opinion that man forgets its interaction in *Ajala's* storehouse before its adventure to the earth. The occurrence at *Ajala's* store is likened to Plato's innate idea of the world of form. The rigour of childbirth makes man forget all that transpired in the pre-world of Plato's Form. *Òri*, in Yoruba thought, is an ideal angle guiding the destiny of man on earth. It serves as a guidance angel, as in a movie by Muiyiwa Ademola, also known as "Authentic". A man's destiny caused unprecedented madness for some times, and after some times, he was healed of the madness. The movie made people understand that the man's destiny hid him from an untimely death that set to consume him on his journey through life.

Òri a fi elomira pamo
K'aye ma ba fi pamo
Majesin a jiya,
Òri Olola ma pe mi

ran nise⁶.

Meaning:

The inner head hides
men from trouble.

The forces of this world
will hide man.

A child will even suffer
unjustly.

Destinies of others will
not enslave mine.

This is to buttress that fortune and occurrence in one's life solely depend on the destiny of man. That is, fortune and misfortune are causal effects of human destiny. It is in the same vein; Bukola Olomola⁷ (Baba Ara) reiterates that:

Bi a salo, salo bi won gbo
Òri eni lo ye ka bi
K'òri eni mama ya kurete kale
Òri mi gbemi ni ja
Òri ela omo kanakan soso lowo eledumare lo ko yo
Awe b'araye ba p'ori re nibi
Ma sai b'ori re lowo
Wipe k'eleda wa ma ma sun lo.

Meaning:

When our plea fell on deaf ears
We should call on our inner heads.
May our heads not be worthless!
My head fights my cause.
Ela was saved by its òri.

6. S. Allyson, "Ori", *E Gbeje Fori*, A lyric Released in 2005.

7. B. Olomola (Baba Ara) *Ori Eni lo Ye Ka Bi*, A Song Released in 2001

When the evil forces contend with our heads
Plead with your head to save one.
May your destiny never be retarded!

The point here is that when things are falling apart and there is no one to help, then we should call on our inner selves to intervene. It further affirms that there is no divinity that blesses man without the consent of his *òri*. The fulfilment of our destiny is solely based on the choice of *òri* that man chooses. Therefore, the Yoruba explanation of the causal effect of destiny in the life of man might be problematic since we explore the unseen forces or immaterial attributes to explain the material attributes.

The Notion of Causal Explanation in Yoruba Thought

The causal explanation in the traditional Yoruba thought system is fundamentally based on various casual agents such as the Supreme Deity, divinities, and extra-human forces (witches and wizards). Also, humans with supernatural powers (abiku, ogbanje, and iwin) comprise both physical and metaphysical powers. Man (eniyan) is at the very centre of all causal agents on earth. All these casual factors have generated various controversies in African-Yoruba thought. The concept of causality is a genetic connection between phenomena through which one thing (the cause) under certain conditions gives rise to something else (the effect). Causality indicates that one event is the result of the occurrence of another event. That is, there is a causal explanation or relationship between two events.

Aristotle is of the view that we come to know reality in two distinct ways. In the first instance, reality is apprehended through individual things or events as they appear to us, through sense experience. That is, knowledge that is relatively inclined. It excludes the fundamental principles or ultimate causes of the reality that is known. This form of knowing is knowledge through sense experience or perception. That is, knowledge of things as they appear to us, naïve realism.

The second approach is knowledge that lies beyond perceptual experience and is embodied in reasoning. Such realities are beyond the physical, and thereby the rationality of such lies in the metaphysical approach. How does one explain the existence of God or other divinities as causal agents? That is, the knowledge that transcends the physical or material world and is devoid of empirical explanation. It is mystical, going by the religio-metaphysical account of man in the Yoruba traditional thought system. For instance, the creation of man goes beyond the mutual genetic connections between a man and a woman to produce children within a period of nine months. Though the scientists have classified the occurrence under observable entities of males mating females, this cause leads to the effect of pregnancy. From a religious point of view, male mating a female counterpart is just one of the attributes of conception, but this effort can only be guaranteed by God (the supreme-being). The cause of pregnancy is not just the mutual mating of male and female spermatozoa; the effect solely depends on God. The causality in African Yoruba thought solely rested on the supernatural being, which is Eledumare (God in Yoruba tradition). A cause of action here speaks of that which brings about a certain effect⁸. From a philosophical point of view, it is generally observed that an event does not just occur but that something propels it to occur.

The key aspects of the Yoruba worldview are *Olorun*, or *Olodumare*, “the Disposer Supreme to whom belongs the ultimate sanction of anything proposed, the acceptance of any act of worship, and the blessing of any enterprise⁹. From the etymological structure of the name of *Olorun*, that is, *Olu-Orun*, the owner of the heavenly abode; *Asede* or *Adeda*, the creator of the universe; *Eledumare*, the unknown knowers of the universe. He knows everything and remains incorporeal,

8. I.A. Kanu, “Causality in African Ontology” *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no.2 (2014): 54.

9. J.O. Sodipo, “Notes on the Concepts of Cause and Chance in Yoruba Traditional Thought”, *Philosophy and the African Prospect: Selected Essays of Professor J. Olubi Sodipo on Philosophy, Culture, and Society*, Edited by Ayo Fadahunsi and Olusegun Sodipo (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2004), 81

an immortal being.

“*Eni to mo oyun igbin ninu ikarun*”

Meaning: The individual with knowledge of the gender of a snail fetus

In the cause of life, more is at stake, such as health, wealth, children, reputation, fortune, *etc.* In the Yoruba thought system, all these aforementioned depend solely on God or the gods to manifest. When things come out prosperous for man as he desires, he attributes it to the fact that some gods have taken an interest in him and shew him success. But if it is misfortune that befalls man and his fortune coupled with sickness, these are attributed to supernatural forces unfavourably disposed towards him. The fact is that the “cause and effect” of a thing can effectively be explained from the Yoruba worldview from the point of view of the creation of the world.

It was assumed that after *Olodumare* had completed the *Isalu-aye* (world), he (*Olodumare*) would grant the custody and control of the *Isalu-aye* to the terrestrial forces (divinities) at *Agbede-meji-aye* to take charge of the world. These forces are regarded as the intermediaries between man and God. There are various divinities known, like *Ogun*, *Sango*, *Obatala*, *Esu*, *Orunmila*, the witches, and the wizards. There is no doubt that *Olodumare* is the ultimate cause of all visible processes in the world, but the actions and plans of the lesser gods constitute an important secondary cause¹⁰.

Human beings therefore seek the special favours of these lesser deities through sacrifice and worship because of the important influence they exert on visible processes. In return for acceptable sacrifice and worship, those deities bestow their special powers and protective capacities on men. That is, if one prays through sacrifice and worship, which is acceptable, the deities will prosper his activities and make his ways prosper. Another causal agent is *esu*, and the duty of *esu* is to see that

10. Sodipo, “Notes on the Concepts of Cause and Chance in Yoruba Traditional Thought”, 81-82

any form of sacrifice goes through him to *Olodumare* in order for worshippers to have their prayers answered and to punish those who fail to give the necessary portion of these sacrifices. Here, Sodipo opines further that there are other supernatural forces at work as casual agents in the universe, such as *magic, witches, abiku, ogbanje, emere, etc*¹¹. He buttresses this point by saying that human beings too can use magic to harm their enemies or to prevent them from reaching their destiny.

Beside this, another important causal factor is his *Òri* (the guardian spirit). According to Balogun Oladele, *òri* is the element responsible for a person's personality and represents human destiny. To him, *Òri* is regarded as an immaterial entity, otherwise called 'inner-head' that is intractably connected with human destiny¹². That is, *òri* is the bearer of one's destiny. The prosperity of man is attributed to the choice of *òri* from the *isalu-orun*. Sodipo affirms that the prosperity of man is attributed to his *òri*, but when his *òri* is an unfortunate one, his affairs are usually ill-fated¹³. Balogun opines further that *òri* is not just the bearer of destiny but also regarded as the essence of human personality, which rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of the person¹⁴.

He therefore regards *òri* as *ipin* or *oke-ipori*. As an *ipin* (the individual's lot or portion), he affirms that the Yoruba believe that every individual has the moral right or responsibility to protect and be on good terms with his *òri* in order for one's destiny to come into easy fruition¹⁵. As *oke-ipori*, *òri* is regarded as an *orisa* (leeser god) in its own right. From the Balogun point of view on *òri*, the paper further affirms that *òri* is indeed an *orisa* (deity) worthy of worship. That is why the Yoruba aphorism often says:

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11. Sodipo, "Notes on the Concepts of Cause and Chance in Yoruba Traditional Thought", 82
 12. Balogun, "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought", 118
 13. Sodipo, "Notes on the Concepts of Cause and Chance in Yoruba Traditional Thought", 82
 14. S. Ade Ali, "African Conception of Man and the Paradox of Alterable and Unalterable Destiny in Yoruba Metaphysics" *Journal of Philosophy and Development* 10, no. 1 and 2 (2009): 51
 15. Balogun, "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought", 119

“*Òri eni la ba ma bo, a o ba f’orisa sile*”.

Meaning:

*We should rather continue to venerate
our inner heads and not venerate the gods.*

Hence, in some parts of the Yoruba tradition, *ori bibo* (head propitiation) is common among the people. They ask their guardian angel (*ori*) to teach and lead their ways so as not to enter the trap of the evil ones. *Òri*, as *ipin* or *oke-ipori*, is seen as a causal agent in the scheme of causal explanation. The cosmos is conceived as an orderly one in which all significant events are caused and potentially explicable. It therefore follows that if this assertion is correct, then any particular occurrence must have a casual explanation. It is believed that though human beings are at the centre of the universe, there are other forces, as earlier mentioned, that operate on man and those that men operate on to effect changes in their world.

Destiny as a Causal Explanatory Model

Destiny is referred to as "fate," from the Latin word *fatum*. It is a predetermined cause of events¹⁶. Human destiny is the mysterious power believed to control human events. Destiny, or predestination, is the belief that whatever happens or will happen in the life of man has been preordained and happened according to an earlier master plan¹⁷. In Yoruba metaphysics, man is conceived to be more than a mere physical genre; that is, a man is fundamentally composed of physical and spiritual substances. The corporeal substance is regarded as *ara* (body) and the incorporeal substance as *emi* (mind/soul). In Yoruba traditional thought, man is an important causal agent and *òri* is seen as the causal factor. The embodiment is both physical and spiritual in nature. In the spiritual composition of man, *òri* (the guardian angel) is regarded as human destiny. Bolaji Idowu¹⁸, in his model of

16. R. Lisa, *Philosophy East and West* (Hawaii Press, 2003), 537

17. Balogun, "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought", 119

18. E.B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longman, 1962), 173

explanation on causality and destiny, affirms man as intrinsically bound by his destiny. The Yoruba are of the belief that man chooses his earthly destiny in three forms, namely, *akunleyan*, *akunlegba*, and *ayanmo*, or *ipin*¹⁹.

It is this Yoruba belief that shows that destiny is a choice already made in *isalu-orun* (heaven) before coming to the world (*isalu-aye*), and it is readily affixed. *Akunleyan*: That which man chooses while kneeling down determines the kind of *òri* (destiny or guardian angel) chosen from Ajala's storehouse. Destiny is the channel through which significant puzzles and events in the life of man, particularly in Yoruba tradition, can be better explained. The ultimate meaning and purpose of man can only be found in the power believed to control the cause of events. Destiny is synonymous with fate, that is, the aftermath event that occurred to man in his life sojourn. Human destiny is related to the choice of *òri* from the *Isalu-orun*, and it is regarded as the causal factor of all human events.

This is evident in the Bukola Olomola song that:

Bi òri eni ba n be leyin eni
 Bi akunleyano ba pada leyin eni
 Bi araye ba gbeni si nu ina
 Ina a ma tu ni lara ni
 Bi eniyan ba be Sango lowe
 Ariwo lasan lo ma pa
 Òri gbebi kuro lona ojo nlo
 Ki òri mi ma ma jiya mo²⁰.

Meaning:

When our destiny is solidly behind us,
 When our lots have not departed from us
 When the forces of this world put one in the fire
 The fire will soothe the body.

19. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, 173

20. B. Olomola (Baba Ara) *Ori Eni lo Ye Ka Bi*, A Song Released in 2001

When the people seek Sango's wrath
He would only make noise.
My destiny averts calamities on my way.
Let my destiny suffer no more.

From the above lyrics, it is evident that human destiny plays a pivotal role in the cause of man's sojourn on earth. *Òri* (the guardian angel) is loaded with the principle of being successful on earth. The choice of human destiny and its support for one's life is a great opportunity. Despite the fact that *òri* plays a very important role in fulfilling or accomplishing man's lot on earth, there is a greater factor that can be overridden in the cause of choosing our destiny. This factor is regarded as *Olodumare* (the Supreme God or Being). He knows the kind of *òri* suitable for each and every man. This is because:

Ati dade Kiniun ko seyin Eledumare:
For the lion to be crowned king, it must be known to God.
*Òri ti yio ba gbemi, a gbe alawo ire ko ni*²¹

Meaning:

The destiny that would favour man will send a helper on his way.

The issue of karma has a lot to do with the fulfilment of human destiny. Nevertheless, human attitude and attributes also play a role in fulfilling or hindering man's destiny on earth. Good attitudes or virtues project a good image, which in turn propels the wheel of destiny for the better. I once read a story of a man, a police officer, who happened to cause the arrest and killing of an innocent young man just on the basis of fulfilling a command that there must be an offender. Many years later, his own son was returning from overseas and was accidentally killed by robbers at the same spot. Immediately, he had the news. He remembered his attitude towards an innocent departed soul, and he lamented that the death of his son was a nemesis. "The evils that men do lives after them and even outlive them". The forces of this

21. Idowu, *Olodumare*, 174

world can also prevent man from achieving his destiny on earth.

Ori and the Praxis of Causal Agents and Deities

Idowu²² avers that the key aspects of the Yoruba worldview are *Olorun* or *Olodumare*, to whom belongs the ultimate sanction of anything proposed, the acceptance of any act or worship, and the blessing of any enterprise. Oroka²³ added that Chukwu is the name of the Supreme Deity in Igbo, Abasi Ibom in Efik, Oghene in Isoko, and Urhobo. Oroka further stated that for the Isoko people, Oghene is "that framing and overarching firmament, maker of earth and sky, remote and abstract, the one no one knows," while Bradbury²⁴ holds that Osanobua, the name of God in Benin, means "the supplier of love, wealth, health, life, and other necessities needed for sustaining creation.

Mbiti's views appear to be relevant to Benin cosmology because the Yoruba hold that God is good to all men. They, however, attribute the evils and sorrows of life to Him as well; hence, statements such as '*a mu wa Olorun ni*' are often used among the Yoruba to console those suffering calamities, affliction, or bereavement. The rampant death of every male child born into a given family, the premature death of every female child born into a given family, the inability of full-grown daughters or adult males in a given family to have life partners, the mental disorders and diseases found in a given family, and so on, are interpreted to be God's punishment for man's misdoings. National calamities such as drought, epidemics, floods, and the deaths of infants are seen by the Yoruba people as beyond individual human cause or control. They are generally attributed to God's activity or to a spiritual being. If God is taught to be responsible, it is often assumed that he is punishing people for their mischief or for a purpose unknown to anyone in the immediate.

To the Yoruba, Ibo, and Isoko, as well as the Benin, God is paradoxically

22. Idowu, *Olodumare*, 174

23. Oroka

24. R.E. Bradbury, *Benin Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 52

both the giver of life and the one who takes it away. Admittedly, other casual agents like sorcerers, witches, and others may be blamed for the immediate cause, but God is seen or thought of as the ultimate cause. The Yoruba hold that God created death for the purpose of recalling the persons whose times on earth were fulfilled. According to Mbiti²⁵, God is not blamed for calamities, misfortunes, and sorrows that strike men. He is brought into the picture primarily as an attempt to explain what is otherwise difficult for the human mind—an explanation that also serves to comfort those struck by the particular event of suffering. The presence of God in Yoruba cultural heritage helps to sustain moral sanctity, expose human limitations, encourage self-restraint and self-control, and eliminate human malevolence, thereby protecting existing customs, traditions, norms, and values inherent in society. As a result of this causal connection, it is important to mention the following:

Divinities

Divinities are gods believed to be associates of the Supreme Being and deified communal priests and ancestors. Divinities are believed to have non-physical attributes derived from their associations with the Supreme Being. For example, Sodipo²⁶ observed that Esu, the Yoruba trickster, changed the course of something even without the blessing of Olodumare and in defiance of the laws of nature. Orunmila, the god of divination, is believed to be present with Olodumare at the choice of destiny made by every individual coming into the world. This is why, according to Sodipo²⁷, the priests are normally consulted when a new child is born in order to know what the pre-appointed portion of the child is. As earlier mentioned, some other causal agents are deified communal priests and ancestors.

25. J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Limited, 1991), 11

26. J.O. Sodipo, "Notes on the Concept of Cause in Yoruba Traditional Thought", *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (1973): 23

27. Sodipo, "Notes on the Concept of Cause in Yoruba Traditional Thought", 23

They were once members of the community, according to Gbadegesin²⁸, but at death, they became deified because of the extra-ordinary power they wielded while alive. Such powers are believed to be beyond psychical or human means. Sodipo²⁹ recognises Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder, who was a former king in the old Oyo Empire, as an example of deified ancestors. He is described as a powerful and effective ruler who commanded fear and respect while alive. He had extra-ordinary powers that went beyond the natural. According to the common belief, as shown by Bradbury³⁰, when a person is going to be born into the world, he goes to Olodumare, the creator, and tells him what he plans to do with his life on earth and requests the material and spiritual faculties for accomplishing this; thus, this act is known as *Ayanmo* (predestination). He opined thus: If a man is unsuccessful in the world, he is said to have done this badly or to be fighting against the fate that he has determined for himself³¹.

In Yoruba traditional thought, as opined by Sodipo³² man's *Ori* (the guardian spirit) is an important causal factor. He explained that *Orion* is the bearer of one's destiny. If a man's *Ori* is a fortune one, then the person is destined luck and his affairs usually prosper, but if this *Ori* is an unfortunate one, then his affairs are usually ill fated³³. Also, Omijeh³⁴ explained that *Ori*, in one sense, is a person and, in another, a counterpart and guide in the spirit world. After the individual (the living person) is born, *Ori* remains in the spirit world to act as a guide and intermediary with Olodumare. Omijeh's comment seems to imply that *Ori*'s task is to stand behind his counterpart when the latter is making his request to the creator and to ensure that his

28. S. Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Reality* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 32

29. Sodipo, "Notes on the Concept of Cause in Yoruba Traditional Thought", 20

30. Bradbury, *Benin Studies*, 10

31. Bradbury, *Benin Studies*, 10-11

32. Sodipo, "Notes on the Concept of Cause in Yoruba Traditional Thought", 18

33. Sodipo, "Notes on the Concept of Cause in Yoruba Traditional Thought", 18

34. M.E. Omijeh, "The Significance of Orhue in Bini Symbolism, in Adegbola" E.A. (ed), *Traditional Religion in West Africa* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1983, p.23)

counterpart does not forget anything. Unsuccessful individuals sometimes make offerings to their Ori to secure their intercession with the creator. Misfortune can therefore be explained in terms of a failure to choose well or to keep to the chosen life programme.

The sufferer is said to have a bad Ori', and prayers and offerings must be addressed to the Ori, asking it to intervene. Omijeh explained that, at one level, the Ori represents the innate potential for social achievement with which each individual is believed to be endowed. Predestination is seen as a limiting factor in an individual's capacity to achieve success through his own actions. He also observed that "though one who has a stroke of good luck should, and often does, thank his Ori, it is more often involved in the context of failure and misfortune. In operation, Ori seems to have the ability to beget, bear, and keep healthy children. According to Egharevba³⁵, when a person goes before Olodumare to tell him what he or she wishes to be in the world-whether a farmer or a trader, a thief or a chief-and he asks for all these things, material and spiritual, which will enable him to carry through the chosen role successfully, it is Ori's function to stand by and advise him and remind him to ask for everything he will need. Once the person has been born, Ori's task is to guide him along the chosen path and ensure his wellbeing. If the person is an irredeemable social failure, it can be said that his or her behaviour is bad³⁶.

However, as close as a man and his Ori seem to be, they are still thought of as independent agents, so there is a possibility of conflict between them. Ori must therefore be propitiated in the same way as other super-natural entities, and failure to do so results in trouble. Egharegba's views show that Ori is a personification of predestiny. Ori is the way a man has to go. In other words, it is the symbolic recognition that people are born with different endowments and potentialities for social achievement. It appears that the reception of the Ori is, in fact, a mechanism

35. J. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1968), 28

36. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, 28

for shifting guilt arising from failure to some objects outside this world. The same process that follows from childlessness, failure in examinations, or abject poverty is probably made more bearable if one can blame one's condition on something outside oneself and outside human society.

The fact that Ori is, in one sense, an independent entity allows this to be done and also leaves open the door for hope, for Ori can be approached to set things right; however, the notion that Ori is really another aspect of oneself underscores the fact that failure is a personal decision and ultimately in one's own hands. This “semidetached” character of Ori is thus a very subtle piece of symbolism. In theory of cause, the successful man is as much as or more beholden to his Ori, and people do thank their Ori with offerings from time to time, but in practice, there is a strong tendency to blame one's Ori for failures and to attribute success to one's hand, that is, to one's sense and enterprise.

The Limit of Human Freedom and the Problem Arising

In order for man to be successful or fail in life, his freedom in the struggle for the attainment of his goal in life is limited by the events arising from the premonition surrounding his choice of *òri* (guardian angel) from his pre-incarnate existence. This is to say that the limit of human freedom is based on the fact that the Yoruba explanation of destiny signifies a limited or guided freedom within the context of the ontological framework of the spiritual comportment of his destiny, metaphysically symbolised by man's *òri*. That is, it is significant or apparent that it is only when man is conscious that he can do anything meaningful towards the attainment or realisation of his destiny and/or a goal in life.

This is why the Yoruba will say:

Eni ti aye ti da ori re ru,
ko le mu ipin se.

Meaning:

He who is insane cannot fulfil destiny.

Human destiny, in this sense, creates a vacuum or barrier for a fatalistic conception of destiny. This conception therefore rules out a destiny that is not conscious of the freedom that is intrinsic in the ontology of human destiny. Hence, the argument is that the fact that man is hard-working is not enough of a panacea for measuring or determining the success or failure of man in life. Rather, the paper is of the position that man, in actualizing his freedom, must also ensure that his will is in consonance with the spirit of his destiny.

It is on this note that the traditional Yoruba man (as well as the Yoruba ontology) seeks the support of his destiny in all his efforts in life. The paradox of alterable or unalterable destiny is another motivating factor in the African Yoruba explanatory model of man's destiny. There are many factors responsible for altering humans' destiny in the Yoruba explanatory model. Such mystical evil forces as witchcraft, wizards, death (*iku*), diseases (*arun*), afflictions (*afise*), and some other demonic forces do cause harm to a person's life and sometimes frustrate a prosperous destiny. These forces are regarded as *atunida* (destiny destroyers). It is on this note that Ade Ali³⁷ pontificates further that:

Such things like murder, poison, protracted illness, accident, war, violence and affliction all constitute a big threat to the realisation to human destiny... and that human destiny can as well alter by man himself... through sacrifice man's expression of freedom positively or negatively, rationality and man's character.

They, therefore, alter and frustrate the smooth journey of noble men and prolong the actualization of the 'good destiny' of man. *Enu* (mouth, i.e., unguarded

³⁷. S. Ade Ali, "The Yoruba Conception of Human Destiny: A Critical Analysis", *Journal of Philosophy and Development* 1, no. 2 (2008): 49

mouth), one of the delicate parts of man, can also act as a factor limiting human freedom in Yoruba cosmological thought. *Enu* is a symbolic part used in eating and talking, but studies show that it is equally delicate and can be devastating in altering a human's destiny. This is why the Yoruba will say:

Enu eni l'a fi n pe t'emi dire
It is a man's mouth that begets fortune.

This means that a man's mouth can cause irredeemable damage to his life and good destiny if he engages in the reckless use of his mouth. It is on this note that the Yoruba moral ontology cautions that “it is not all that eyes see, that mouth should say,”

Translated:

K i í se gbogbo ohun ti oju ba ri ni enu nso.

Furthermore, Yoruba morality places significant emphasis on moral admonitions, highlighting the value attributed to an individual's interactions within society. Living a virtuous life garners more respect than merely being a wealthy but morally bankrupt person. This principle is reflected in the Yoruba aphorism, which also states that:

Bi eniyan ba jale lekan,
To wa daso aran bori,
Aso ole lo da bora³⁸

Meaning:

If a man steals and then adorns himself with beautiful clothing,
It is nothing more than wearing stolen items.

Conclusion

In light of the aforementioned aphorism, we derive the conclusion that human destiny inherently signifies and implies the crucial requirement of moral values for

³⁸. Idowu, *Olodumare*, 16

the fulfilment of one's life journey. A well-defined and promising destiny, devoid of moral character, holds little to no value. Conversely, an unrestrained character, lacking moral virtues, does not merit a meaningful existence.

This underscores the notion that, while freedom is an inherent aspect of human destiny, various malevolent forces in life can impede the realisation of one's full potential. Consequently, this paper contends that the freedom necessary for the achievement and fulfilment of destiny is, indeed, limited. The symbiotic relationship between moral values, destiny, and the constraints posed by external forces highlights the detailed balance required for a meaningful and purposeful human existence.

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