

## THE YORÙBÁ CONCEPT OF *ORÍ*, DETERMINISM AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

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### Abstract

The Yoruba concept of *Orí* is central to understanding human destiny, personal identity, and moral agency within Yoruba thought. *Orí* is conceived as the physical and inner or spiritual head that determines an individual's fate. This paper explores the philosophical implications of *orí* in relation to determinism and human responsibility, drawing on the works of several African philosophers. A comparative analysis with Spinoza's substance monism highlights the deterministic elements of *orí*, akin to Spinoza's rejection of free will. However, despite its deterministic undertones, the Yoruba worldview does not absolve individuals of moral responsibility. Instead, it upholds the idea that while one's destiny may be preordained, human actions and ethical choices remain significant. The paper argues that determinism in the context of *orí* does not preclude moral responsibility but rather situates it within a framework that integrates destiny with personal agency.

**Keywords:** Destiny, Fatalism, Free Will, Moral Agency, Responsibility, Spinoza.

### Introduction

The interrogation of the compatibility of human destiny and moral responsibility has long occupied the attention of philosophers across history and cultures. While some accept that humans are free and should take responsibility for all their actions, despite being determined, others vehemently reject this thesis on the grounds that determinism already precludes free will. Within the Yoruba intellectual tradition, the concept of *orí*, translated literally as “head”, captures a rich and complex metaphysical idea that speaks directly to this enduring philosophical concern. More than just the physical head, *orí* represents the inner essence or spiritual component that determines an individual's destiny. It is believed that before birth, each person chooses their *orí*,

thereby preordaining the general trajectory of their earthly life. This idea has led to various interpretations that align *orí* with a form of metaphysical determinism. One thing that stands out is that the Yoruba thought does not view individuals as passive subjects of fate. Instead, it maintains a balance between the determinative influence of *orí* and the necessity of personal effort, moral conduct, and communal relationships. In this way, the Yoruba framework presents a distinctive model where determinism and moral responsibility coexist without friction. In this paper, we investigate this coexistence, asking: if *orí* determines destiny, can individuals still be held morally responsible for their actions? To deepen this analysis, we draw on the works of notable scholars of African origin such as Moses Akin Makinde, Segun Gbadegesin, and Adebisi Ekanola, who have contributed to the philosophical understanding of *orí* in the Yoruba philosophical tradition. Their insights are set in dialogue with the deterministic metaphysics of Baruch Spinoza, whose doctrine of substance monism and denial of free will presents a helpful contrast.

### ***Ori*: The Yoruba Traditional Accounts**

The traditional Yoruba creation account describes how various body parts were created. *Ori*, the most relevant to this discourse, has two meanings. The first refers to the physical head, while the second, sometimes called the inner *orí*, points to a metaphysical entity where one's destiny is reached. Every human had to pick their *ori* from Àjàlá's abode. This act of choosing one's *ori* by oneself is a free act. However, this freedom does not mean that you choose whichever *orí* you want and make of it whatever you will. A critical component of the *orí*, though freely chosen, is that the person who has chosen it is completely oblivious of the features of the *orí* she has chosen, whether the *orí* is a bad one or a good one. So, the act of choosing an *orí*, though freely chosen by the owner, the worth or the details of the *orí* is shrouded in secrecy, the type that could be tagged *ojà òkùnkùn* (covert enterprise). Similar terminologies used in designating *orí* include: *Àyànmó* (self-affixed), *Àkúnleyan* (that which is knelt to be chosen), *Àkúnlegba* (that which is knelt to be received).<sup>1</sup> The *orí* one has chosen shapes, in no small measure and conclusively, the type of life one would have and what would be one's lot on earth. Another way of acquiring destiny in the traditional Yoruba thought system is that the apportionment of destiny is done by Olodumare Itself on individual persons, which receives corroboration by *Olubode* (one who keeps the gate between heaven and earth). Despite the various accounts of how destiny is received, a unifying factor is that destiny is enshrined within *orí*, be it freely chosen by the individual or apportioned to one.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Adebola B. Ekanola, "A Naturalistic Interpretation of the Yorùbá Concepts of Ori" *Philosophia Africana* 9, no. 1 (2006); Olusegun Gbadegesin, "Destiny, Personality and Ultimate Reality of Human Existence: A Yoruba Perspective," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 7, no. 3 (1984); Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (Longman Ltd., 1962): 41-42

<sup>2</sup>. Bolaji E. Idowu, *Olodumare*, 34.

Given the above, *orí* is believed to determine the destiny and persona of humans on earth with finitude. Despite this, scholars such as Bolaji Idowu, Olusegun Gbadegesin, and Akin Makinde<sup>3</sup> make a case for the idea that *orí* as a determinant of destiny is not cast in stone. In other words, there are ways in which a bad *orí* can be tweaked to a good one, and a good *orí* changed to a bad one. Relying on the Yoruba tradition, they argue that a bad *orí* can be improved upon or made good through consultation with *Òrúnmìlà* (a deity), *Òtùtù* (sacrifice), and sheer hard work and good neighbourliness. Similarly, an initially good *orí* can be made bad or even worse through the handiwork of forces like *Àjò* (witches), slothful habits and flawed characters.

Makinde, having distinguished between a strict and loose connection between *orí* and human destiny, where the former implies the unchangeability of the *orí* chosen in heaven and the latter means the converse, particularly argues that:

...some people might tend to reject the strong interpretation of Destiny as given above and think, along the line of those who argue for some sort of freedom in human action, that what happens after one has chosen *orí* in heaven should be an open matter. In other words, the situation need not be absolutely closed in heaven. In fact, it might be said that this is precisely what was going on in the mind of *Orunmila* whenever he witnessed an individual choose his own *orí* that is supposed to represent his Destiny in life. In this case, *Orunmila* could know the kind of *orí* an individual chooses and yet think that, for now, the situation is closed, but that those who have the will in life could reopen the case either by an appeal or sacrifice to one's "inner head" in case a bad *orí* had been chosen in heaven, or by messing up the good Destiny presupposed by one's choice of a good *orí*...so once you have made your choice, I also know that you are free to make a good use of it or mess it up in life, or if it was a bad *orí*, you are also free to seek a redress by means of sacrifice or propitiation. That's all there is to it.<sup>4</sup>

Other parts of the body aside from *orí* that a human being is composed include *etí* (ear), *ara* (body), *àṣà* (leg), and *èmi* (lifeforce). Aside from Makinde, other scholars such as Wande Abimbola and Olufemi Morakinyo<sup>5</sup> corroborate this view.

From the above discussion, certain ideas become clearer to aid our understanding.

1. *Orí* is inalterable, yet *etutu* can help alter or ameliorate it

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<sup>3</sup>. Moses Akin Makinde, "An African Concept of Human Personality: The Yoruba Example," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 7, no. 3 (1984): 197-198; Olusegun Gbadegesin, "Destiny, Personality and Ultimate Reality of Human Existence: A Yoruba Perspective," Presented at the second biennial meeting of the Institute for Ultimate Reality and Meaning in Toronto, Canada, August 1983.

<sup>4</sup>. Moses Akin Makinde, "A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba Concepts of *Orí* and Human Destiny," *International Studies in Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (1985): 65-66.

<sup>5</sup>. Olufemi Morakinyo, "The Yorùbá Ayanmo Myth and Mental Health Care in West Africa," *Journal of Culture and Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1983); Wande Abimbola, *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* (Oxford University Press, 1976).

2. *Orí* is either freely chosen or apportioned to one
3. A bad *orí* can be made good, while a good *orí* can be made bad

The contradiction inherent in the idea that *orí* is inalterable and yet can be tweaked with a sacrifice has brought controversy and divergent interpretations among scholars. Wande Abimbola stressed the near inalterability of destiny on earth once *orí* had been chosen. However, he employs the belief in predestination to argue for either a life of success or failure of humans on earth, even as the quality of *orí*, be it that of suffering or that of affluence, is unknown to the bearer.<sup>6</sup> Ebun Oduwole, following Abimbola, also opines that destiny is fixed and thus cannot be changed. It would surely come to pass. No amount of effort can undo the type of *orí* one has chosen.<sup>7</sup> The difficulty with the fatalistic stance is that it seems to fly in the face of reason by discouraging any attempts to change one's destiny and absolving one of any moral responsibility. But are we still not morally held responsible and praised/blamed for our actions? Yes, we do. So, what difference does it make? Modern morality and legal systems are not run based on such considerations.

Oladele Balogun points out two problems that plague the fatalistic conception of *orí*. First, he argues that scholars who have written on the Yoruba concept of *orí* missed an important point, which is that *orí* is only the determinant of a human's material well-being, such as success in life endeavours, acquisition of wealth, properties and in modern terms, real estate and social influences; and not a human's moral being. Consequently, *orí* does not influence other aspects of human life.<sup>8</sup> The second problem with the fatalistic conclusion on *orí* is that we are not morally justified to hold anyone responsible for her or his actions; that is, we cannot praise or blame anyone for her actions because she would just have been acting in accordance with her *orí*. Thus, character formation is also futile because what we become in the world is not our making but rather what we have chosen before coming to the world. Balogun maintains that a closer reflection shows the Yoruba are neither fatalistic nor deterministic. This is primarily because the Yoruba usually resort to *ebo* (sacrifice) as a means of mutual exchange between the gods and humans to secure a favourable influence on an issue. He alludes to *Ṣòṣò* (leg) as another way humans influence what becomes of them in life. He also referred to the idea of *àfṣwṣà* (self-inflicted strife); thus, everything is not all inalterable. With the above, Balogun argues for soft determinism, which he captures as when humans can validly be held responsible for their actions and when things or 'causes' are beyond them, we credit their *orí*.

<sup>6</sup>. Wande Abimbola, Ifa, 33.

<sup>7</sup>. Ebunoluwa Oduwole, "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny: A Fatalistic Interpretation," *Journal of Philosophy and Development* 2, no. 1 & 2 (1996): 44-45.

<sup>8</sup>. Oladele Abiodun Balogun, "The Concept of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft-Deterministic Interpretation." *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16, no 1 (2007): 125.

Adebola Ekanola, from the standpoint of naturalism, presents an account of how persons could truly be said to be free. He maintains that the trio of environment, heredity and character are key determinants of a person's life. He argues that a much more credible way a person could be said to be free in tandem with the Yoruba notion of *orí* is when the person, through the will, can surmount factors about the environment and genetics that tend to limit her or his capabilities. Ekanola's point is that environmental and genetic factors can influence how one makes decisions. Nonetheless, people can exercise their free will by permitting or not permitting those elements to play out in their lives. The way a person uses her free will is shown in her free choices and deeds, which also point to her character as an offshoot of virtues, as the Yoruba apportion praise and blame for good or bad characters.

Ekanola asserts that factors of environment and genetics control the circumstances of people over which they do not have much control; such factors contribute to how the Yorùbá view some parts of the lives of humans as determined before their birth in heaven. There is no valid reason to substantiate the pre-birth thesis. *Orí* is, therefore, not over and beyond the coming together of many acts of free choices that a person engages in, instead of the conventional argument that *orí* is that which shapes one's destiny, life choices and personal life. The Yorùbá notion of *orí* is what humans make out of their lives through different choices, not simply any pre-birth choice made in heaven. Yorùbá uses the word *orí* to suggest the type of character choice a person makes during her life and to imply an absence of a credible reason in a dire, confusing circumstance where a satisfactory or empirical explanation is lacking.

Akin Makinde departs from the fatalistic positions of the duo of Abimbola and Oduwole. He argues that *orí* is simply in potency rather than actuality, borrowing the Aristotelian phrase. Even though it symbolises human destiny, several conditions are attached to this symbolism. Being in potency, certain acts must accompany it for it to bear positive fruits. Part of what is to be done includes a proper use of one's *ese* (leg), *owo* (hand) and *opolo* (brain), and to crown it all, *etutu* (sacrifice) when that is adjudged important.<sup>9</sup> Makinde maintains, as many scholars have done, especially Abimbola, that a good *orí* chosen in heaven heralds success, and a bad *orí* portends failure. He nonetheless argues, following the belief system of the Yorubas, that the way *orí* can effectively carry out its responsibilities is through the assistance of hard work and *esè* - *ṢṢ* understood both in the physical and the spiritual sense. *EsṢ* is considered an essential aspect of human nature. It represents power and activity. *EsṢ* helps humans labour effectively and perform, so they can bring to reality all that the *orí* they have chosen has in store. Like *orí*, *ṢṢ* is seen as an *Orisa* (deity) which must be given priority of place for a successful life. Hence, sacrifice is not made to *orí* in isolation from the *ese*; they go hand in hand. The necessity of *ese* is further substantiated in a story of the meeting of many *orí* where *ese* was absent. After the meeting, all the

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<sup>9</sup> Moses Akind Makinde, "An African Concept of Human Personality: The Yoruba Example," 194.

*ori* realised the omission because there was no *Ọ̀Ọ̀* to move them around. The import of the story is that a good *ori* needs *ese* for success because *ese* represents power and activity.

The arguments from the analyses above can be grouped into fatalistic, soft determinism, naturalistic arguments and '*ori* denial' arguments. A closer examination of these arguments shows that some understand and analyse the idea of *ori* in the Yoruba thought system without trying to absolve it of any implications it might entail. Abimbola and Oduwole, who argue for a fatalistic conception of *ori* fall into this camp. The second group of scholars are those who, realising the consequence of making a case for *ori* in itself, make a detour and find a way to douse the implication of arguing for *ori* as it really is. In this second camp are persons such as Balogun, Ekanola, Makinde and even Ofuasia who would rather have us forget about anything metaphysical regarding *ori*.

A question which comes to mind in the disparate interpretations of how *ori* functions is, what is responsible for the divergent explanations of the concept of *ori* among scholars? Why cannot scholars have a unanimous understanding of what *ori* is and the activities of *ori* in human affairs, especially since they are all either Yoruba or of Yoruba descent? Why is the understanding of *ori* such a thorny issue in comparison with other parts of the body? Are the scholars merely pushing their own agenda? In the sense of an inability to accept what the real *ori* is because of the implication it portends, hence, an attempt to give *ori* a more tolerable and acceptable interpretation.

We do not have an answer to all these questions. However, in the argument of the second camp, we realise the supremacy of *ori* over all the other body components. Those components merely aim to help actualise its goal, which is mainly that *ori* is the determinant of a human's destiny. Also, the strength of the arguments of those in the second camp is that humans can validly be held responsible for their actions if *ori* is neither interpreted in a fatalistic nor a deterministic manner. While for those in the first camp, if their interpretation is equally the case, then we humans cannot be validly held responsible for our actions. But is it really the case, as traditionally believed, that determinism absolves humans of moral responsibility? Benedict Spinoza, a seasoned determinist of the modern era, provides an account of determinism grounded in logical monism, which pervades his thought. The paper then attempts to address the lack of moral responsibility often attributed to a position on determinism by using illustrative examples and advances in neuroscience.

### **Benedict de Spinoza on Determinism**

Spinoza's determinism is best understood within the confines of his entire philosophy. Being a substance monist, he claims that it is only one infinite substance, God or Nature, that exists; thus, we have just one substance - God or Nature. According to him, the entire natural world, including

human beings, follows a single set of natural laws. This means that humans are not special to follow a different type of law.<sup>10</sup> Everything is thus ordered and ruled by absolute necessity based on God's mandate. There is no chance occurrence; everything that happens is based on God's mysterious nature, and it cannot be otherwise. In his view, God is the same as Nature and Substance. Thoughts and extension, and every other thing in existence, are the attributes of God, who is infinite. Whatever exists can either be a substance or a mode. *Substance* needs no other thing to exist or be conceived; substances are autonomous beings both theoretically/conceptually and ontologically. A *mode*, however, needs a substance for its existence; it cannot exist outside of a substance. For example, size, shape and feelings of hunger or anger all need substance to exist; they are dependent entities. In his words,

By substance, I mean that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself: in other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception. It follows that a substance cannot be produced by anything external to itself. For in the universe, nothing is granted, save substances and their modifications. By attribute, I mean that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance. By mode, I mean the modifications of substance, or that which exists in, and is conceived through, something other than itself.<sup>11</sup>

Aristotle and Descartes argue that we have many substances in the world, each of them with its modes or properties. For Descartes, a cat is a substance which has the modes of having a furry body, soft, orange and so on. Spinoza, however, departs from this to say that we have just one substance, which is God or Nature. Cats, dogs, people, rocks and houses are not substances in Spinoza's philosophy but rather modes or properties of one substance. Spinoza's substance monism is basically that, every substance has at least one attribute; that two substances cannot share the same attribute because it is only God that has all possible attributes. If this is so, no other substance apart from God can exist. So, we have only one substance in existence – God or Nature, and it has all possible attributes.<sup>12</sup> No other substance can exist because if it does, it will share an attribute with God, while it is not possible for two different substances to have the exact attributes. An attribute is the essence of a substance, as a way of describing it.

Spinoza's metaphysics aptly represents logical monism, which is the idea that the entire world is a single substance in which none of its parts can logically exist on its own.<sup>13</sup> To this end, everything to him has rational unity in which all things derive their existence from a single substance, God. In

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<sup>10</sup>. Benedict de Spinoza. Transl. R. H. M. Elwes. The Ethics. Part IV: Preface. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3800/3800-h/3800-h.htm>

<sup>11</sup>. Benedict de Spinoza Part I: III, IV, V and proof VI: C.

<sup>12</sup>. Benedict de Spinoza. Transl. R. H. M. Elwes. The Ethics. Part I: Prop VIII, Prop vii, Prop X

<sup>13</sup>. Schaffer, Jonathan, "Monism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/monism/>.

his words:

As God is a being absolutely infinite, of whom no attribute that expresses the essence can be denied (by Def. vi.), and he necessarily exists (by prop. xi.); if any substance besides God were granted, it would have to be explained by some attribute of God, and thus two substances with the same attribute would exist, which (by Prop. v.) is absurd; therefore, besides God, no substance can be granted, or, consequently, be conceived. If it could be conceived, it would necessarily have to be conceived as existent; but this (by the first part of this proof) is absurd. Therefore, besides God, no substance can be granted or conceived. Q.E.D.<sup>14</sup>

Determinism is a direct consequence of Spinoza's notion of substance and logical monism.<sup>15</sup> He thus shares a similarity with Stoicism in that they both accept determinism. While Spinoza did not deny that sometimes we feel free and responsible for a choice or for performing an action, he argues that the reason we have these feelings is that we do not understand the causes of our actions, which determine our desires and motives for certain things. For instance, if a falling stone suddenly had consciousness, it would think that it was falling of its own volition because it would not know the cause of its fall/movement; it would, however, not be free not to fall, even if it imagined that it was. In his words, “men are deceived in that they think themselves free (i.e., they think that, of their own free will, they can either do a thing or forebear doing it), an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined... men are born ignorant of the causes of things.”<sup>16</sup>

In Spinoza, the mind does not have absolute free will; what the mind has is the ability to carry out or not to carry out a particular action, which itself is determined by another cause and by yet another reason and the chain continues endlessly. The mind, he asserts, is a particular and limited mode of thought and so is restricted in freely bringing about its own actions or possessing a complete sense of willing or not willing. Instead, it must be that it is determined to choose one thing over another through a cause, and this cause through another cause, and this chain continues endlessly. He further argues that the mind has no unconditional power of comprehension, desiring, loving, etc. It is either that these powers are completely illusory, or they are nothing more than mere metaphysical or universal objects which we habitually conjure from individual cases.

There is nothing like free will, even when we think or when we act in the physical world. All that happens is based on an order or regularity that has been laid down according to the mysterious or

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<sup>14</sup>. Benedict de Spinoza. Transl. R. H. M. Elwes. PROP. XIV: Proof

<sup>15</sup>. PROP. XVI

<sup>16</sup>. Benedict de Spinoza. Transl. R. H. M. Elwes. The Ethics. Available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3800/3800-h/3800-h.htm>. Accessed on 14-7-2022

impenetrable hands of God. "All things...are in God, and all things which come to pass, come to pass solely through the laws of the infinite nature of God and follow...from the necessity of his essence."<sup>17</sup> Spinoza reduces multiplicity into unity. His denial of free creation and human freedom is further captured: "in nature, there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way... things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced."<sup>18</sup>

### **The Concept of *Ori* and Its Deterministic Interpretation**

*Ori*, considered within the ambit of Spinoza's philosophy, thus implies that we are determined. However, in the Yoruba thought system, *Ori*, in the context of determinism, does not inhibit or constrain us from making an effort to alter something. In other words, it does not preclude human influence on the type of *Ori* they have chosen. In fact, we are free to make attempts because such trials go a long way in helping us to think that we are free rather than determined; they help our psyche. To resign to determinism is to undermine the authenticity of free will. Humans have free will, and our choices genuinely matter. Nonetheless, what we have chosen is what we have chosen, and all the efforts we make to change, for instance, the course of our lives, are all encompassed in the fulfilment of the *ori*. A popular argument against determinism, espoused by Spinoza, implied by a deterministic *ori*, is that it denies free will and absolves us of moral responsibility. While there seems to be some truth in this, it is also a truism that, as humans, we all somewhat embrace the idea that there is no absolute freedom. This is without prejudice to the almost unanimous idea that true freedom lies in a consideration of the 'other.' A lack of absolute freedom, thus, implies, even if it is in the subtlest of ways, some constraints inferred by the notion of determinism. If this is so, then it means we somewhat already accept the idea that our freedom and responsibility are curtailed in some way, and this, we think, weakens the argument of the naysayers of determinism. Just as the lack of absolute freedom does not necessarily exonerate us of moral responsibility, the same way the deterministic theses of Spinoza and *ori* do not by default mean that we cannot be praised or blamed for our actions. We are determined but responsible.

Based on the arguments of those in the second camp, there are various other parts of the body that aid *ori* in carrying out what it is meant to do. Factors such as genes, environment and character. One cannot but infer that those are factors that, in one way or another, constrain *ori*; thus, *ori* does not act in isolation, indeed. In my opinion, those are causal factors that determine how *ori* would turn out. Given this, it becomes more apparent that we are causally determined through the activities of *ori*. This is because of the constraints of many factors.

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<sup>17</sup>. Benedict de Spinoza.

<sup>18</sup>. Benedict de Spinoza.

Consequently, freedom is not absolute in the sense that despite the *orí* we have chosen with Olodumare, genes and the environment cannot shape it. It is rather that genes and environment work together to fulfil that which had been freely apportioned from heaven. Determinism is thus not inconsistent with free will and moral responsibility. Determinism does not necessarily mean that human nature is fixed because it has been through several stages of evolution to tolerate external influence and modify itself to the demands of those changes. Consequently, the more scientific discoveries regarding human nature, the more responsible humans are to rein in immoral or socially injurious actions.<sup>19</sup>

Further, the evidence of these pervades human endeavour. There is evidence of this in our individual lives in the sense that, given our backgrounds, we tend to develop some features. For instance, certain backgrounds make people more susceptible to kill, maim, rape and engage in other horrible things we would feel moral indignation against than some other people from other backgrounds. So, people are most likely the outcome of their heredity and environment. The point being made is that our nature as humans inhibits us from acting in line with the idea that determinism forecloses moral responsibility. Just as David Blumberg posits, the failure or success of determinism is not dependent on reason, but rather on human temperament. If this is the case, arguments from philosophy will not provide a resolution of the issue.<sup>20</sup> A similar argument is put forward by T. P. Uschanov that “anyone who thinks that a philosophical theory can help us choose whether to hold someone responsible, given determinism, has already unwittingly taken this same determinism off the table. If determinism really is true, then that particular choice is not ours any more than any other choice is.”<sup>21</sup> Consequently, when we argue that we are not determined, we are only trying to sidestep the actual issue, which concerns the survival of moral responsibility, even though we do not recognise determinism as is normally the case.

It is possible that the more we uncover the ill-fated life of a person with a huge character flaw, the more we might feel less indignation towards the person or the need to reprimand the person based on this feeling. Nonetheless, do we feel any less differently based on the background or about the early years of *Boko Haram* terrorists or Nazi leaders, that they could have grown up in one way and could have engaged in just the things they have done? Based on this, would it make us not feel the anger against them and mete out punishment to them because of it? While some may not want to hold them morally responsible, we are of the opinion that many others would still hold them morally responsible for the crimes they committed against humanity. This is because the more

<sup>19</sup>. Nadal Gilgorov, “Determinism and Advances in Neuroscience,” *AMA Journal of Medicine* 14, no 6 (2012): 491. <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/sites/joedb/files/2018-05/msoc1-1206.pdf>

<sup>20</sup>. David Blumberg, “Determinism and Moral Responsibility,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 5, no. 3 (1971): .209

<sup>21</sup>. Tommi P. Uschanov. *Determinism, Self-Reference and Morality*, (2013): 5. Available at: <https://www.mv.helsinki.fi/home/tuschano/writings/determinism-revision.pdf>. Accessed on 27-7-2022.

atrocities people commit, the more it becomes difficult to hold back our feelings of indignation and not behave as a result of those feelings. It is important to bear in mind that if we give reins to our feelings, it is not as if we are in opposition to our nature as humans, but rather, we are making good such human nature in an aspect where the final judge is not just reason. Given this, we cannot but assert that, ultimately, it is our nature as humans that disprove the determinist.<sup>22</sup>

The appeal to nature regarding determinism is further seen in the fact that hard-core determinists, such as Spinoza, are at the forefront of the defence of the human spirit with his primary works, including a sophisticated and well-articulated political treatise. Another case in point is the philosopher Baron d'Holbach, who was not just a thoroughgoing hard determinist but also a social reformer and a distinguished intellectual in Europe at the time. John Hospers is another illustration of a hard determinist who vied for the presidency of the United States of America in 1972 under the *Libertarian* Party. The party holds the idea that individual liberty is far too small in contemporary liberal democracies.<sup>23</sup> While it is very easy to criticise this trio as not being faithful to a particular ideology, it, however, goes to indicate, just as Saul Smilansky, a contemporary determinist, states, “it is implausible to think that we could maintain the appropriate seriousness of moral attitude and not lose confidence in our basic beliefs, reactions, and practices.”<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the Yoruba concept of *Orí* as both a physical and inner head that shapes human destiny and moral agency. By engaging the perspectives of Moses Akin Makinde, Segun Gbadegesin, and Adebisi Ekanola, we have examined how *Orí* functions within the Yoruba philosophical system, particularly in relation to determinism. The comparison with Spinoza's substance monism has provided further insight into deterministic frameworks. We demonstrated that, like Spinoza's rejection of free will, the Yoruba understanding of *Orí* also suggests a form of preordained existence. However, unlike Spinoza's rigid determinism, which leaves little room for moral responsibility and accountability, the Yoruba worldview maintains a balance between destiny and human responsibility.

The key argument presented here is that determinism within the *Orí* framework does not negate human responsibility. While *Orí* determines the broad contours of an individual's life path, Yoruba thought acknowledges the role of personal choices, ethical conduct, and communal obligations in shaping one's existence. For the Yorubas, individuals must actively align themselves with their *Orí* through good character (*ìwà pẹ̀lẹ́*) and wise decision-making. It is possible for an individual to possess and exhibit all these personal traits but still not be

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<sup>22</sup> David Blumberg. “Determinism and Moral Responsibility,” 210.

<sup>23</sup> Saul Smilansky, *Freewill and Illusion* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 204.

<sup>24</sup> Saul Smilansky, *Freewill and Illusion*, 204.

prosperous. Determinism might still be at work. This is where making propitiations becomes essential. However, this is also possible in soft determinism. Hard determinism is what will be, will be. Soft determinism implies that determinism and moral responsibility need not be mutually exclusive. Instead, they are harmonised in a dynamic relationship, where destiny provides a structure, but human agency operates within it to bring about meaningful outcomes. This idea is evident in many of the Yoruba wise sayings aimed at promoting good conduct and decent living.

Finally, the point of all these analyses regarding determinism and moral responsibility is to hopefully weaken the popular idea that they do not co-exist. The strict dichotomy between free will and determinism is challenged by proposing a model where fate and ethical agency interact. While Spinoza's philosophy implies that all events, which include human action, are causally determined within a single, unified substance, Yoruba thought retains room for agency within a divinely ordained structure. We posit that although the Yoruba concept of *ori* implies a kind of determinism, it does not eliminate the possibility of moral responsibility. Instead, it offers a nuanced conception of personhood where destiny and ethical agency are intertwined. With *ori*, we are hard-determined, and it does not automatically mean that we do not have moral responsibility. Thus, *Ori* serves not as a deterministic constraint but as a framework within which individuals navigate their existence, making choices that affirm their moral and existential significance.

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