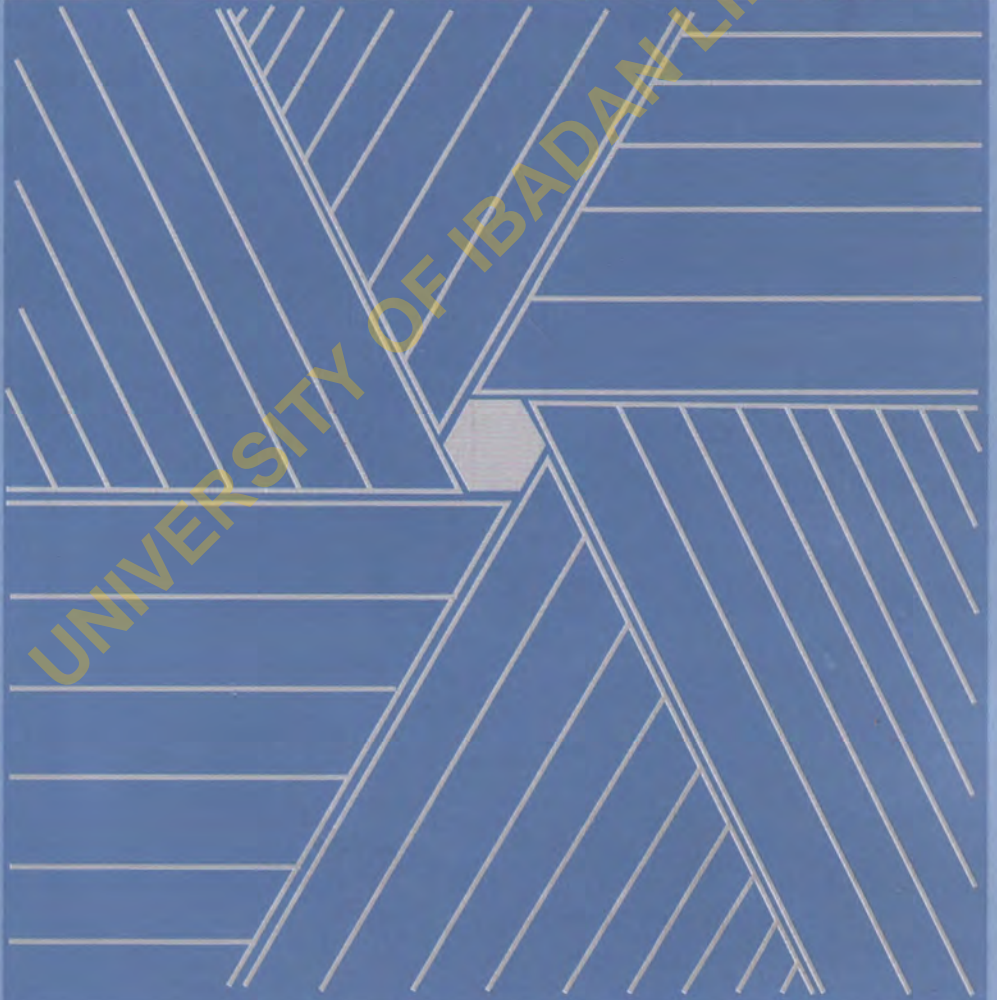


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# AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

Volume 6, 2016

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CONTENTS	Page
A Perspective on Human Propensities <i>Godwin Sogolo</i>	1
Should Racial and Ethnic Categories be Eliminated? <i>Albert G. Mosley</i>	21
Aristotle's Human Virtue and Yorùbá Worldview of Omọlúàbí: An Ethical-Cultural Interpretation <i>Bosede Adefiola Adebawale &amp; Folake Onayemi</i>	27
A Comparative Analysis of Plato and Aristotle's Metaphysics and Implications for the Art <i>Damina Ilodigwe</i>	45
Limitations of Scientific Method in Analysing Traditional Herbal Medicine <i>Olaleye Samuel Kayode</i>	63
An Evaluation of the Moral Doctrine of Spinoza and the Ethical Theory of Emotivism <i>O.G.F. Nwaorgu</i>	81
The Moral Economic Root of Africa's Political Leadership Failure <i>Anthony o. Chukwu</i>	99
A Re-Visit to the Concept of Freewill and Ideas of Causality in Yoruba Religion <i>Gbadamosi Oluwatoyin Adebola</i>	117
Epistemology Humanized: Its Implication for African Epistemology <i>Dipo irele</i>	135

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# A RE-VISIT TO THE CONCEPT OF FREEWILL AND IDEAS OF CAUSALITY IN YORUBA RELIGION

Gbadamosi Oluwatoyin Adebola

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## Abstract

*The issue of human will has been a subject of much debate in the history of philosophy and within religious circles over the Centuries. This paper examines the subject of freewill and ideas of causality in the indigenous religion of the Yoruba. Ideas of causality feature prominently in the belief systems of Yoruba religion expressed in the concepts of Ori, Iràwò, Ìpín, Ógo, Kádàrá, Àkúnlègbà, Àkúnlèyàn and Àyànmọ and other similar ideas revolving around determinism. These ideas of causality lead to a hasty conclusion in most cases that freewill does not exist among the Yoruba. Insisting that there is no freewill has serious implications within a practical milieu especially because of individual responsibility for actions. This paper is a departure from the notion that there is no freewill among the Yoruba. This is done by discussing the meaning of freewill with a view to finding a definition suitable in the Yoruba religious contexts which is clearly different from the western idea of freewill. This paper also discusses how the concept of freewill and issues related to determinism feature in Yoruba beliefs. This paper employs the Compatibilism theory, the current name for William James' "soft" determinism, which is the logically contradictory notion that free will is compatible with determinism. This is done with a view to drawing the conclusion that freewill exists among the Yoruba in spite of the established ideas of causality.*

**Key Words:** Freewill, Determinism, Compatibilism, Yoruba Religion

## Introduction

The issue of freewill has been a subject of intense debate among philosophers and religious scholars from time immemorial. The freewill debate is a subject discussed for many centuries. The fundamental question, which is at the centre of the debate, is the extent to which human agents are in control of their own lives and destinies. For many centuries, the central preoccupation of philosophers concerns the difficulties involved in explaining how human freedom and responsibility could be rendered consistent with established assumptions about divine foreknowledge and predestination.<sup>1</sup> The problem of freewill revolves

around the difficulty in reconciling our thoughts about man as a free agent with the idea of his actions being beyond his control. Thoughts about freedom and determinism have engaged philosophers since the days of ancient Greece. On the one hand, we generally regard ourselves as free autonomous beings responsible for the actions that we perform<sup>2</sup> and, on the other hand, there are obvious elements of determinism in our world which show that some of our actions are beyond our control. This situation is very apt as far as the Yoruba are concerned. The Yorùbá people are one of the largest tribes in Africa, with about thirty million individuals throughout the region of Africa.<sup>3</sup> The Yoruba occupy the South-Western region of Nigeria. The descendants of the Yorùbá are also found in some parts of the West Indies and South America-- Brazil and Cuba.<sup>4</sup> There are many established beliefs in the Yoruba religion that emphasize determinism as seen in ideas related to the concept of *Orí*,<sup>5</sup> *Ìràwò*-Star, *Ògo*-Glory, *Kádàrá*-Destiny, *Ìpín*-Portion, *Àkúnlẹ̀gbà*,<sup>6</sup> *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*<sup>7</sup> and *Àyànmọ́*.<sup>8</sup> These established beliefs make it easy for a casual observer to make a hasty conclusion that there is no freewill among the Yoruba. The purpose of this paper is to revisit the concept of freewill and ideas of causality in Yoruba religion with a view to arguing that freewill does exist among the Yoruba.

### **Issues Related to Determinism in Yoruba Beliefs**

There are various philosophies guiding the way of life of the Yorùbá, and the concept of pre-destination or causality which is another argument, for determinism is one of them. According to Beir, the Yorùbá see their lives as partly dominated by fate and pre-destination, and partly controlled by their own actions. He further believes that although a man is born with a fate and a career in life, what he makes out of his fate depends on his actions. A man picks the type of life he is going to lead, even his death, before he enters into this world. The unchangeable part of a man's fortune is symbolized by his *Orí*, literally, 'head', but in this context, meaning his 'inner head' or soul.<sup>9</sup> According to Awolalu, *Orí* is a complex concept. It is a physical head as well as that force that is responsible for controlling one's being. However, when the Yorùbá speak of *Orí*, they mean something more than the physical head but a personality soul that which is believed to be capable of ruling, controlling and guiding the life and activities of man. Also, success and failure in life depend on *Orí* and its quality.<sup>10</sup>

A casual study of the concept of *Orí*, causality or issues related to determinism among the Yorùbá may lead to a hasty conclusion that

freewill does not exist among the Yorùba. A close study of the race and the religion of the people reveal that there is what is understood as freewill among the Yorùbá. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this understanding varies from the western view because of the deep and unique religious understanding of the concept of man among the Yorùbá. The Yorùbá like many other races in the world believe that man's nature is partly material and partly immaterial. They believe that man has a material body by means of which he acts and reacts to his physical environment. They also believe that he has an immaterial entity.<sup>1</sup> The Yoruba pay a lot of attention to the immaterial entity of man. If a westerner is talking about a person, he/she does this without the cognizance of concepts like *Orí*, *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*, *Àyànmọ́*, *Ìpín* or even the possibility of being under a spell-*Èèdì*. The Yorùbá understand a person from a purely metaphysical approach which a non-Yorùbá may not acknowledge. *Kádàrà*- Destiny, *Ogo*- glory and *Ìràwọ̀*- star are terminologies that are also related to the concept of destiny in Yorùbá belief. According to Olaleye, *Kádàrà* is what is attached to every human being before leaving heaven for the earth. This is the reason why the Yorùbá say *Àyànmọ́ ni Kádàrà* - what is attached to a person is his or her destiny.<sup>11</sup> Olaleye says also that in Yorùbá religion, *Ogo* and *Ìràwọ̀* are materials used to measure how a newly born child would be successful in this world. *Ogo* depicts how glorious and special the destiny of a child is while *Ìràwọ̀* showcases how bright a destiny is. Olaleye quoting from the information received from some *babalawo*- Ifa priests, posits that these two, *Ogo* and *Ìràwọ̀*, are what people of the underworld—*Ayé* or *Àjé*-witches usually work on when they want to tamper with a person's destiny.<sup>12</sup> These ideas of causality feature prominently in the Yoruba understanding of a person. Thus, influencing what is understood as freewill among the Yorùbá and also the reason for the hasty conclusion that there is no freewill among the Yoruba.

### **The Meaning of Freewill**

There is no general consensus among philosophers on the meaning and application of freewill. The reason for this is that the concept freedom, freewill, liberty or freedom of the will like any other philosophical concept is problematic. The basis for this problem is as a result of the fact that this concept, regardless of the choice of expression, means different ideas to different people. A rough meaning of freewill is that there are no

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<sup>1</sup> J. Lucas, 1948. *The Religion of the Yorubas*. Lagos: C.M.S Bookshop. 245

conditions that are prior to an action that determines that action. In other words, the actions of a person are self-generated. According to David Hume, “by the will”, I mean nothing but the internal impression that we feel and are conscious of when we knowingly give rise to any new notion of our body or new perception of our mind. Hume avoided the use of the word “freedom” and in its place, used “liberty” in his other ideas of freewill. He further states that our way of thinking about liberty in humans is absolutely inconsistent, which is a natural upshot of the confused ideas and undefined terms that we so often use in our reasoning, especially on this topic (freewill).<sup>13</sup>

The position of Robert Kane on the subject of freewill takes a different and interesting turn. Kane did not only define the will, but he also distinguished between freewill and liberty or freedom of action. These are terms that have been used interchangeably, but Kane believes that they have different meanings. According to Kane, freewill is the power in human beings and in persons or rational agents of any kind to originate or bring into existence the purpose or ends that guide their actions. This is a kind of self-determination, the ability to determine the purpose of its actions. This is different from liberty or freedom of action, which is the ability of the self to determine its actions in accordance with its purposes.<sup>14</sup> There is a thin line between this difference of Kane and the difference he made between both freewill and liberty or freedom of action. We cannot discuss freewill without discussing freedom; freedom is as result of the “will” being free. This is what John Bramhall calls *Autonomy*,<sup>15</sup> and autonomy ultimately leads to freedom of action. Edwards believes that the plain and obvious meaning of the words freedom and liberty in common speech is the power, opportunity and advantage that any one has to do as he pleases. In other words, a person’s being free from hindrances or impediments in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect as he wills.<sup>16</sup>

J. Campell asserts succinctly that it is very obvious that the term freedom is ambiguous, and that the kind of freedom required for moral responsibility is freewill. Freewill requires that persons have alternatives to at least some of their actions. It is a person’s ability to do otherwise.<sup>17</sup> J. Edwards also holds this view in his position that the notion of liberty consists in it a self-determining power in the will, or a certain sovereignty which the will has over itself and its own acts, whereby it determines its own volitions so as not to be dependent on any cause without itself nor determined by anything prior to its own acts. A moral agent is a being that is capable of those actions that have a moral quality, and which can be

properly denominated as good or evil.<sup>18</sup> It is very obvious that the term freewill is quite ambiguous because it means different things to different people.

### **What is Freewill in Yoruba?**

It is easy to wonder, what is freewill in Yorùbá? There is no straightforward answer to this question. This is because what is understood as freewill in western thought is quite different from what freewill entails among the Yorùbá. The second problem in attempting a direct answer to the question above is that the term freewill is laden with ambiguity even within western thoughts. For the purpose of this research, a functional definition can be adapted from the works of the famous translator of the English Bible to Yorùbá language Samuel Ajayi Crowther. In his attempt to provide a Yorùbá word for freewill, he uses the word “*Ìfẹ̀*” and the synonyms for freewill in this context include: love, wish, will, desire, volition and compliance.<sup>19</sup> *Ìfẹ̀* in this term may not necessarily include love which is the most common usage of *Ife*, but may apply easily to the other synonyms. This is why people say: “*Mo fẹ́ j’ẹun* – I want to eat, *Mo fẹ́ j’ade*- I want to go out; or *Mo fẹ́ gb’ẹ’yàwó*- I want to marry”. These are examples of expressions of a person’s will, desire or wish. Of all these usages of “*fẹ̀*”, the one that conveys its meaning most clearly is its usage when a man proposes to a woman. In Yorùbá, the man is likely to express his feelings thus: “*Mo fẹ́ fẹ́ ọ*- I want to marry you”. The words *fẹ́* and *fẹ̀*, though spelt the same way, mean different things. The latter means marry while the first one, which connotes freewill, is our concern here. *Fẹ̀* as used in this example shows the man’s will, desire, wish, choice or selection. It means that of all the options available, he has chosen or selected the lady. This is an expression of freewill. It means also that the person in question has both options of either doing any of these things given as examples or not doing them. When actions are done without “*Ìfẹ̀*” or “*fẹ̀*” we can say such actions are not freely done or that freewill is absent. On a very similar note, according to a respondent, Mrs Adepoju, she defines freewill in Yorùbá as “*̀nkan tí ọ wù mí, t’ó tẹ mí l’òrùn tí mofẹ́ se*”<sup>20</sup> - what I desire, what I find satisfaction in doing. Another Yorùbá definition of freewill is provided by Pastor Festus Oyeniyi, who defines freewill in Yorùbá as “*Ìfẹ́ inú ara ẹni*.”<sup>21</sup> This means personal will, choice or desire. These definitions show that when such actions are done with the person’s “*ifẹ̀*”, then freewill is in place. Freewill, then, in the Yorùbá religious or cultural contexts, may also be defined as the ability to say yes or no, in circumstances, which is present in some

cases and also absent in some cases. This definition sounds confusing and it is indeed paradoxical: this is so because of the abstruseness of the concept, especially in its usage in Yorùbá philosophy. The Yorùbá believe that certain things are destined to happen in a person's life and they also believe that people are responsible for their own lives.

Robert Kane offers a very good definition of freewill which is very practical and applicable in Yoruba contexts. He says freewill is the power in human beings and in persons or rational agents of any kind to originate or bring into existence the purpose or ends that guide their actions. This is a kind of self-determination, the ability to determine the purpose of its actions. This is different from liberty or freedom of action, which is the ability of the self to determine its actions in accordance with its purposes.<sup>22</sup> As it's understood, the term freewill is ambiguous; regardless of this ambiguity, however, the kind of freedom required for moral responsibility is freewill. Kane says further that freewill requires that persons have alternatives to at least some of their actions. It is a person's ability to do otherwise.<sup>23</sup> A very straightforward definition of freewill, which is readily applicable within the Yorùbá religious or cultural contexts, is "the ability to do otherwise". This is obvious and fits into everyday reality. The Yorùbá believe that we have the ability to do otherwise, when an act is done. Such an act could also not have been done because the actor has within him/her the "ability to do otherwise". This is where the concept of praise and blame come in. The Yorùbá believe that a person should be praised because he/she has "ability to do otherwise" and has chosen the "other path" which warrants praise. This is why the people say: *Yi'ni y'ini k'á le sè'mì*- Praise is necessary for the person to repeat an act.

According to Pereboom, who shares the thoughts of Kane, moral responsibility for an action requires that the agent could have done otherwise. For if an agent is to be blame worthy for an action, it seems crucial that the person could have done something to avoid being blame-worthy. If he/she is to be praise-worthy for an action, it seems important that the person could have done something not admirable. Freewill rests on the principle of Alternative Possibilities—An action is free in the sense required for moral responsibility only if the agent could have done otherwise than he/she actually did. The second principle is a similar principle of choice—an action is free in the sense required for moral responsibility only if the agent could have chosen otherwise than he/she actually did.<sup>24</sup> Adetunji also dwells on the issue of moral responsibility while discussing the concept of *Orí*. According to her, a person's *Ori* can

be altered by intrinsic values such as good character, offering of sacrifices, hard work and the ability to struggle. These are free actions of an individual that can affect a person's life. She further posits that the Yorùbá strongly believe in human destiny because success or failure of any man largely depends on the type of choice he has made in heaven, though human efforts cannot be ruled out for success or failure, though the greater part of it can be ascribed to destiny.<sup>25</sup> It is the presence of destiny that is acknowledged among the Yorùbá that offers a departure from the western view of freewill. The Yorùbá believe in what is called destiny expressed in concepts like *Ori*, *Ayànmó*, *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn* among other such related issues, but they also acknowledge the role of the person in his/her life. It is this role of man that freewill is all about. The Yorùbá can call a person *òlẹ̀-lazy* because it is believed he/she could choose not to be so. Even if such a fellow is destined to be great, he/she may forfeit this glorious destiny simply by acts of freewill termed as laziness.

The concept of morality is the thrust of the argument of most philosophers who are advocates of freewill. Kane calls this ability "up-to-us-ness". He says, we feel it is "up to us" what we choose and how we act; and this means that we could have chosen or acted otherwise. He quoted Aristotle who had put it succinctly "when acting is up to us, so is not acting". This "up-to-us-ness" also suggests that the origins of our actions lie in us and not something else over which we have no control.<sup>26</sup> This "up-to-us-ness" is very apt within Yorùbá ideology because it is believed that we have within us the ability to do certain things and the ability not to do certain things. This is why Idowu opines that every human being who is not clearly an imbecile has the knowledge of right and wrong... everyone knows that right is not the same thing as wrong.<sup>27</sup> Our actions are "up-to-us" because it is believed that we have the ability to make choices regarding how we act. This is also seen as the Yorùbá society has expectations from people and this is why what people do is appraised. Ayantayo also, says that "Society formulates rules and norms to guide man's actions, one of such norms geared towards promoting a morally healthy society."<sup>28</sup> When a person falls below societal norms the person's *Ìwà*-character is labelled as bad and appalling. A person with a bad character among the Yorùbá is frowned at by all. This is the reason why such people are called *Àrigidi èniyàn*, the etymology of this name is *Igi* which means wood, or tree, showing that a person with bad *Ìwà* is likened to a mere tree.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, Robert Kane quotes Aristotle to argue that it is possible to identify the origin or source of our choices and actions not to

ultimately be “in us” but in conditions, such as decrees of fate, the fore-ordaining acts of God or antecedent causes and laws, over which we have no control.<sup>30</sup> This notion fits in readily within the context of the Yorùbá religion because this is the basis of the concept of causality held in the religion. This is the reason for the argument for the inalterability of human destiny believed to be held in the Yorùbá religion. As Aristotle believes in decrees of fate, the fore-ordaining acts of God or antecedent causes and laws, over which we have no control, semblance of this is found also in the Yorùbá religion. This is expressed in religious ideas like *Ori*, *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*, *Àyànmó*, *Ìpín*, *Kádàrà*, *Ògo* or *Ìràwò*.

### **A Compatibilist Approach to Freewill and Determinism in Yoruba Beliefs**

Compatibilism is the current name for William James’ “soft” determinism, which is the logically contradictory notion that free will is compatible with determinism. “Soft” determinism became “compatibilism” in the early 20th Century. It was, and still is, the most popular view of philosophers.<sup>31</sup> Compatibilism is the belief that our freewill is consistent with determinism. The other approaches to the freewill/determinism problem are: Hard Determinism, which endorses determinism but denies the freewill thesis; Libertarianism, which holds that we do not have a determinist freewill; Eliminativism, an idea that freewill does not exist and that the best version is hard determinism; Soft Determinism, a view that accepts both determinism and the freewill thesis.

All these lines of thought are clearly important and valid. However, the most pragmatic approach is compatibilism because it serves a practical purpose in Yoruba Philosophy. At any rate, the Yorùbá believe that what a person becomes in this world is inextricably bound up with his destiny. This inextricability is often used to argue erroneously for fatalism. According to Idowu, a person obtains his destiny in one of three ways; he kneels down and chooses his destiny - *À-kún-lẹ̀-yàn* (That-which-is-chosen-kneeling), he kneels down and receives it- *À-kún-lẹ̀-gbà* (that-which-is-received-kneeling) and his destiny is affixed to him- *À-yàn-mó* (That-which-is-affixed-to-one). The person then kneels before Olódùmarè for the conferment of destiny and whatever is conferred is unalterable and becomes one’s portion through life. The destiny is unalterable, especially as it has been doubly sealed in the act of its conferment and finally at the ‘gates’ between heaven and earth.<sup>32</sup> Sayings used to support this argument for fatalism of a person’s lot on earth include the following:

*À-kúnlẹ̀-yànni 'àd' -áiyé-bá*  
*A-kúnlẹ̀-ayàn pín*  
*A'd' áiyé tán ojú nrọ̀ ni*

That which is chosen kneeling is that which is found on getting to the world

We knelt down and chose a portion  
We get to the world and are not pleased<sup>33</sup>

*À-yàn-mọ̀'ò gbó'ògùn*- That which is affixed to one cannot be rectified by medicine.<sup>34</sup>

This is not a totally accurate picture, for the Yorùbá, although recognizing the fore-ordaining acts of Olódùmarè or antecedent causes, also recognize the conditions that can change what we believe we have no control over. Idowu makes a case for these kinds of conditions that can alter a person's destiny:

- (1) By the aid of *Òrúnmilá*- a 'happy' destiny can be preserved an 'unhappy' one rectified through rituals.
- (2) A person's destiny can be altered for the worse by *omọ a'ráiyé*- 'children of the world'- these are persons in whom the evil powers of the world are vested.
- (3) A person's destiny can be affected for the worse by his character while a good destiny unsupported by character is worthless.
- (4) An 'unhappy' destiny can be rectified if it can be ascertained what it is. This rite is called *Àkọsẹ̀jayé* and the main purpose is to find out what sort of child it is and what things are to be done to preserve its good destiny or rectify an unhappy one. This is done in the case of a new born child.
- (5) A person's destiny can be affected for the worse by the machinations of the person's *Enikeji*- "double or counterpart" which has a strong influence on his destiny.<sup>35</sup>

These conditions show that a person's destiny is not inalterable. Since the emphasis here is the subject of freewill, some of the conditions stated above show the influence of the actions or inactions of a person on his destiny. Whether to perform a ritual or not, lies with the individual in question, and this is freewill. Even when performing ritual acts, there are certain conditions and requirements that are important. They are neither queried nor circumvented; they are simply obeyed because the

consequences of disobedience are often very grave. Thus, a person may obey and enjoy the benefits or flout the instructions and suffer the consequences. This also is an expression of freewill because a person may choose not to obey the conditions and requirements. The presence of these prerequisites for rituals shows the presence of freewill.

A person's destiny is bound up in his character because a good destiny unsupported by good character is worthless. The Yorùbá believe so much in individual characters of people which show their belief in freewill. This is because what is understood as character only makes sense within the purview of freewill. According to Lábéodán, *Ìwà*-character is regarded as the most important of all moral values and the greatest attribute of any man. This is because good character is essential for a person to live in harmony with the forces that govern a person's universe; both human and supernatural.<sup>36</sup> This shows evidently that a person's destiny is tied up to his/her character. This is determinism and not fatalism, because what a person becomes in life is determined by his/her character regardless of what has been destined to the person by supernatural forces.

Fatalism indicates an inalterability in what a person becomes in life, which is not a belief held in Yorùbá religion. This is because a person's outcome in life is not fatalistic but closely linked to his/her character. The emphasis on human character in the religion of the Yorùbá shows their belief in freewill. *Ìwà*-character shows that a person has what Robert Kane calls "ability to do otherwise" or "up-to-us-ness."<sup>37</sup> If we do not have this "up-to-us-ness", then we do not have freewill, and it will be in order to conclude that there is nothing that can be identified as character-*Ìwà*. Since the Yorùbá have a clear understanding of the concept of *Ìwà* and it is emphasized in the religion, it will be illogical therefore to conclude that freewill does not exist in the religion. On the other hand, the Yorùbá believe strongly in determinism, because there are acts of *Olódùmarè* that determine what a person becomes in life expressed in concepts like *Ori*, *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*, *Àkúnlẹ̀gbà*, *Àyànmọ*, *Ìpín* and other similar concepts. They also express a belief in freewill in their insistence on the importance of human character. This shows the unique nature of the notion of freewill and a compatibilist approach to the freewill/determinism problem. A compatibilist's freedom maintains that there can be conditions prior to an action sufficient to determine that action, and yet that action can be free.<sup>38</sup> As it is evident in the works of Idowu, one would see that he makes appeals to the concept of inalterability of destiny. He can be classed then as a compatibilist because he makes claims on how the concept of *Ori* can be compatible with that of freewill. Adetunji can also be categorized

as a compatibilist, because she argues that our freewill is consistent with determinism. A few other philosophers that follow this inclination are Mele, A.,<sup>39</sup> Ayer A.J.,<sup>40</sup> Graig W.<sup>41</sup> In clearer terms, the compatibilists notion of freedom is such that a person's actions can be determined and at the same time free and that freedom is compatible with determinism.

### *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*

The concept of *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*- that which is received kneeling, associated with how a person gets his/her destiny is also linked to the existence of freewill in the Yorùbá religion. Ayo Salami, who quotes from Yorùbá theology and makes a very clear assertion, shows that the act of *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn* is an expression of freewill. He says, the point is very clear. Firstly, choosing of destiny itself is freely done in heaven. If anyone is coming to the earth, he chooses what he thinks is best for himself. Secondly, like being insulated from any incursion, his entry to the city of the earth is also of his own volition, while his behaviour justifying his failure or success on earth is under his own prerogative. In other words, he is the architect of his own fortune or misfortune.<sup>42</sup> *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn* means kneeling and choosing, it also shows freedom of choice. Although, a person choosing does not know the contents of his choice, this does not negate the fact that he has chosen what he chose. Choosing means there is an availability of choices or options and the person has chosen what he thinks is best. This is expressing the presence of freewill. In contemporary situations like sports, there are expressions of this act of choice though it can be termed "blind". This is seen in cases when people choose "head or tail" and choices are made at the flip of a coin. These choices though "blind" are valid all the same and they are expressions of freewill. In the same vein, even though a person is not privy to the details of his choice in heaven, the sheer act of "choosing" shows the presence of freewill. It is important to note also that the concept of *Ori* itself has its origin in the expression of freewill. According to Abogunrin, it is the belief of the Yorùbá that, before coming down to earth (*Ayé*) from heaven (*Ọ̀run*), everyone must go and choose an *Ori* from a well-stocked store in Ajala's house. Ajala is the one appointed by Olódùmarè to build or mould *Ori*. The quality of *Ori* cannot be determined by its physical appearance (whether size, shape, colour, etc.) alone. The choice of *Ori* made by an individual determines what sort of life he/she would lead and it is believed that the ultimate meaning of important events in the individual's life are to be understood in terms of *Ori*'s choice.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, according to Akintola, who quotes the minor *Oḍù-Ìwòribògbé* in revealing that the notion of freewill starts before coming to the earth. His account corroborates the position of Salami, he presents the sequence of events that herald the departure of a person from heaven. The account is as follows:

The earth coming of each man starts with an act of individual free will or choice of will to go to the world from heaven...

Now, finding himself before *Olódùmarè*, he is led still by his *Èlédàá* to kneel before the divine altar, the sacred place for communing with *Olódùmarè*.

Kneeling, the departing human being makes his own choice of length of stay in the world. Some may choose a brief stay; others may prefer to leave at the middle of their age, while some may choose to stay till old age.

While such personal wishes are made at the divine altar, the only divinity present, who hears the wishes, is *Elénìní*- the misfortune divinity, who is also the keeper of the divine palace. *Olódùmarè* endorses the wish or wishes with *Àsẹ*- His divine scepter of authority.<sup>44</sup>

This means that even deciding to come to the world is an act of freewill. It is imperative to note that a person chooses his destiny by making certain wishes in the courts of *Olódùmarè*. Wishes connote availability of choices which is what freewill entails. The Free Dictionary definition of a wish is a feeling that one would like to have or do something or to see something happen; a desire, longing, or strong inclination for a specific thing.<sup>45</sup> The Cambridge Dictionary also defines a wish as “to want to do something”; a simple example is given in the Cambridge dictionary to express this definition. “Passengers wishing to take the Kings Cross train should board now.”<sup>46</sup> This is a classic summation of what freewill entails. This example shows the existence of several options: whether to board this particular train going to Kings Cross or not, whether to go to another destination apart from Kings Court, whether to continue sightseeing at the train station or even to go back home (if Kings Cross is not home). We are confronted with several choices like this on a daily basis and we exercise our freewill and make decisions we consider best due to our prevailing present circumstances.

Apart from what takes place in heaven, the entire journey of a person on earth is woven around the choices he makes. Just as the passenger at the train station confronted with different options of destination, the journey of a person in this world is laden with the need to express his

personal will at different points in his life time. These are choices like friendship, occupation, where to live, who to marry, dressing, food and several others.

It is not strange to hear people posit that there is no freewill among the Yorùbá. This is because the concept of *Ori* is seen as an inalterable seal on a human's destiny. This is hard determinism and suggests fatalism. Contemporary scholars are finding a departure from this position and appealing to soft determinism in order to make freewill compatible with the concept of *Ori* or causality in Yorùbá religion. According to Oladele Balogun, concepts of *Ori* and Human Destiny are often used as bases of arguments that the Yorùbá are hard deterministic and fatalistic in their belief system. He identifies two fundamental problems with this kind of submission. He says:

First, virtually all Yorùbá African philosophers...who have commented on *ori vis-à-vis* the freewill-determinism problem have overlooked a point that is quite clear in the exposition of the two important religious scholars on this issue (i.e. Bolaji Idowu and Wande Abimbola)... *Ori* is limited to issues of material success (i.e things like wealth, riches and success in one's profession). *Ori* has nothing to do with moral character, and as such it does not affect all of human actions and/or inactions...

The second problem has to with the fatalistic conclusion of some of these scholars, which if carried to its logical conclusion; it will be unjustified to hold a person responsible for his actions since the causes of his actions are external to him and beyond his control...as Oduwole argues, it indeed nullifies the efficacy of reason, stifles creativity and spirit of hard-work.<sup>47</sup>

The two major problems identified above are very important and therefore warranting some levels of seriousness. The first one is the fact that the basis of previous arguments to show the inalterability of human destiny- *Ori*, is not the determinant factor of a person's character. As Balogun argues, *Ori* has nothing to do with human character and as such does not determine what he does or does not do. A person may decide to be kind, or he may decide to be a thief, or he may decide to be wicked. He may also decide to be courageous, or he may decide to be lazy or persevering, hardworking, mean or a traitor or even an alcoholic. All these traits are manifestations of different characters which are expressions of individual wills. These traits have nothing to do with *Ori*. However, they can affect a person's *Ori* positively or negatively. The second problem is the complications that a fatalistic conclusion is associated with. It is

believed that once a destiny has been chosen, it becomes doubly sealed and totally impossible to change. This kind of thinking is at odds with practical reality and also has serious social and personal consequences. The major consequence is the notion of human responsibility and morality which will be rendered unnecessary and illogical. Legal responsibility and liability are necessary factors that should be considered in issues related to human will.

### *Àṣòwófà*

Another idea related to human will used as an argument for freewill among the Yorùbá is the idea of *Àṣòwófà*. *Àṣòwófà* can be described as self-inflicted problems. The word *Àṣòwófà* is translated as self-caused by Olanrewaju Abdul Shitta Bey. He says further that it is descriptive in the sense that it is employed in Yorùbá estimation to convey the negative consequences of choices arising from an individual's human will. He says also that *Àṣòwófà* simply indicates that the Yorùbá thought systems favour the position that human will is absolutely free.<sup>48</sup> *Àṣòwófà* shows that the Yorùbá believe strongly that human beings have the ability to 'say no or act otherwise' in certain situations. Wherever a person does not exercise this ability, it is said the person used 'his own hands to bring trouble upon himself'. This is *Àṣòwófà* because it is believed that the person should have used his freewill to prevent such self-inflicted problems. Sayings like: *A kii pé k'òmòdé mád'ètè t'ó bát i lẹ dáìgbó gbé-* No one will stop a child from incurring leprosy, as long as he can live in the forests by himself. Shitta Bey believes that a proverb like this clearly enjoins one's freewill with the readiness to take responsibility for one's actions or decisions.<sup>49</sup>

### **Ideas that would lose their Meanings If Freewill does not Exist in Yoruba Religion**

Reward and punishment are important mechanisms for controlling social behaviour in the Yorùbá society. They are closely related to praise and blame. A person that does a noble act who is praised for his/her actions is rewarded by certain gifts or benefits to show a form of appreciation for the actions done. Another who does ignoble acts is punished for what he/she is blamed for, to serve as a deterrent to others. The Yorùbá society has been a developed society long before European colonisation and there are established institutions to issue reward and punishment. There are two basic types of rewards and punishments; the one that will take place while on earth and the one that will take place after death. According to Awolalu, who believes in these two judgements among the Yorùbá, he

says judgement goes on all the time, even here on earth. He mentions anti-wickedness divinities such as *Ayélála* or *Sàngó* who can and do single out wicked persons for punishment which may result in “bad” death.<sup>50</sup> There is a strong belief in retributive judgement on earth which is instantaneous in most cases. *Èṣù* is understood in Yoruba religion as the one who occupies the apex of the Yorùbá pantheon because he serves the policing function.<sup>51</sup>

The second notion of reward and punishment is the one that occurs after death this type of judgement is what Awolalu calls post-mortem judgement. Awolalu<sup>52</sup> shares the same view with Idowu<sup>53</sup> because they both maintain that the reward for good behaviour is to go into *òrun rere*—good heaven, while the punishment for bad behaviour is to go into *òrun burúkú* (bad heaven or *òrun àpáàdì*). This judgement is based on the deeds of the individual while on earth. This belief in post mortem judgement is emphasised by the belief that each person will account for what he/she did on earth without holding back anything. These two types of judgement: reward and punishment on earth and post-mortem judgement guide the way of living of the Yorùbá. Everything a Yorùbá does is influenced with this consciousness and it is because of this the Yorùbá are very cautious of what they do. Freewill is very crucial to reward and punishment because it will be unjust to punish someone or reward another if the actions were not free. Reward and punishment are premised on freewill. This is because a person is punished based on the belief that he/she deserves to be punished. This is right and it is what is practiced by most civil societies. However, majority of our societies if not all condemns punishing of the innocent or punishment known as unjust. This means when a person commits a crime and he/she is punished accordingly, it is just. This is only meaningful when freewill is present. Most societies have taken the belief in freewill for granted and they simply believe it exists which guides the systems of justice. This is why Lábéodán says punishment should be for voluntary human actions; actions that have been deliberated upon before one decides to carry them out, and that it is only in that case that one could be said to be morally responsible for their consequences. She says further emphatically that, man is believed to have control over his actions, for he is not just thrown into the world. He has freedom of choice and he is a free moral agent.<sup>54</sup> The Yorùbá believe also that in order to be prosperous and happy, one is obliged to do the right things because there are rewards for doing right and punishment for doing wrong.<sup>55</sup> The whole notion of the concept of reward and punishment in the Yorùbá belief system show the belief of the people in freewill. Reward and punishment are premised on the existence of freewill.

## Conclusion

The concept of freewill is clearly embedded in the philosophy of the Yorùbá as it is seen in the different areas where it features. Even though determinism is true as in the case of *Ori* and other similar notions, a man has more than one possible future determinable by different other factors subject to his personal will. These are factors like strength of character, education, association, exposure, life style among several others. The problem in the hasty conclusion that it does not exist among the Yorùbá may be valid in certain circumstances if the western idea is wrongly situated within the framework of the Yoruba religion. This is because of the ideological and ontological differences between the two schools of thoughts, and also, if the ideas of causality in Yoruba religion such as *Ori*, *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*, *Àyànmọ́*, *Ìpín*, *Kádàrà*, *Ògo* and *Ìràwọ́*, among others, are examined hastily, at a surface value. However, it is clear from the foregoing discussion that there is freewill in Yorùbá philosophy. This idea of freewill is the kind that accommodates both the decrees of fate or the fore-ordaining antecedent causes and the notion of individual human responsibility.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> P. Russel, & O. Deery (Eds). 2013. *The philosophy of Freewill: Essential Readings From the Contemporary Debates*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.2.

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<sup>3</sup> N.A Retrieved July 11, 2014. from [www.awonifa.com/yoruba-folklore/76Yoruba-medicine](http://www.awonifa.com/yoruba-folklore/76Yoruba-medicine).

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<sup>5</sup> The literal meaning of Ori is head but it has deep metaphysical meaning among the Yoruba.

<sup>6</sup> *Àkúnlẹ̀gbà* means that which (referring to destiny) is received kneeling.

<sup>7</sup> *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn* means that which (referring to destiny) is chosen kneeling.

<sup>8</sup> *Àyànmọ́* means that which (referring to destiny) is affixed to one.

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<sup>11</sup> S. Olaleye. 2014. *Akosejaye: Trend and Status in Yoruba Communities of South Western Nigeria*. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURELS)* 4:1.89.

<sup>12</sup> S. Olaleye. 2014. *Akosejaye: Trend and Status in Yoruba Communities of South Western Nigeria*. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURELS)* 4:1.89-90.

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- <sup>16</sup> J. Edwards. 2001. *Freedom of the Will*. U.S.A Jay p. Green, Sr. 18.
- <sup>17</sup> J. Campbell et al. 2004. *Freedom and Determinism*. Massachusetts: MIT Press. 3.
- <sup>18</sup> J. Edwards. 2001. *Freedom of the Will*. U.S.A Jay p. Green, Sr. 19.
- <sup>19</sup> S. Crowther. 1843. *Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language*. Np: Church Missionary Society. 111.
- <sup>20</sup> Mrs. Adepoju, Iwo Road Area, Ibadan Interviewed 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2017.
- <sup>21</sup> Pastor Festus Oyeniya, Ajetumobi area, Ibadan. Interviewed 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2017.
- <sup>22</sup> Kane, R. 1985. *Freewill and Values; Adaptive Mechanisms and Strategies of Prey and Predators*. New York: State University of New York Press. 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Campbell, J. et al. 2004. *Freedom and Determinism*. Massachusetts: MIT Press. 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Pereboom, D. 2001. *Living without Freewill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- <sup>25</sup> Adetunji, H. 2001. Ori and Moral Responsibility in Yoruba Belief. PhD. Thesis. Dept. of Religious Studies. University of Ibadan Xiv+215pp.
- <sup>26</sup> Kane, R. Ed. 2011. *The Oxford Handbook of Freewill* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Oxford: oxford University Press. 5.
- <sup>27</sup> E. Idowu. 1996. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (Revised and Enlarged Ed.) Lagos: Longman. 149-154.
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- <sup>29</sup> G. Olaosepin. personal interview on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2015 at Ijo, Okeho, Oyo State.
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- <sup>34</sup> Idowu, B. 1982. *Olodumare; God in Yoruba Belief*. 3<sup>rd</sup> imp. Lagos: Longman Nigeria Ltd. 175.
- <sup>35</sup> Idowu, B. 1982. *Olodumare; God in Yoruba Belief*. 3<sup>rd</sup> imp. Lagos: Longman Nigeria Ltd. 175-182.
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