

**ÀYÀNMỌ́ IN YORUBA ONTOLOGY: NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE DEBATE
OF FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM.**

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SEPTEMBER, 2025.

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was originally carried out by **ODUSOLA VICTOR ADEBAYO**, with matriculation number **ART2101120**, and it meets the requirement for an award of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy.

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Date

DEDICATION

“He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.” Friedrich Nietzsche

This research work is dedicated to the loving memory of my late father, my grandfather, and my mother. Each of them, in their own time, nurtured, guided, and sacrificed for me in ways that words cannot fully capture. Their prayers, encouragement, and unwavering love became the foundation of my journey.

Though they are no longer physically present to witness this academic milestone, their legacy lives on in me. Their lives continue to inspire resilience, perseverance, and faith, reminding me that even in the face of loss, hope endures.

This work is also dedicated to my family, who have remained steadfast in their love and encouragement, and to the friends, colleagues, and communities who have shown me that in times of hardship, one is never truly alone.

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“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped.” Psalm 28:7

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To my supervisor, Dr. Asia Emmanuel, I am indebted for your patience, guidance, and scholarly input, which have been invaluable in shaping this work. Your mentorship has not only refined my academic growth but also enriched my intellectual journey. To the Head of Department, Dr. W. T. Osemwegie, who has imparted positive ideas to me, and to all my lecturers, Prof. Peter Omonzejele, Prof. George U. Ukagba, Prof. Anthony Asekhauno, Prof. Sylvester Odia, Prof. Felix Airoboman, Dr. Valentine Obiyan, Dr. Christopher Osawaru, Dr. Paul Michael, Dr. S. Apologun, Dr. V. Jeko, and Mr. J. Odigie, Mr. Ibrahim Abdullahi, I am sincerely grateful for the wealth of knowledge you have imparted throughout my stay in the Department of Philosophy

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my late grandfather and mother, whose sacrifices and prayers shaped my path, and to my late father, whose memory remains a quiet source of strength. Though they departed during the course of this journey, their love continues to inspire me.

I extend my sincere gratitude to my family members for their unwavering support, and to my classmates and friends from secondary school, my colleagues in the university,

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Yorùbá concept of *àyànmó* (destiny) as a possible solution to the enduring Western philosophical debate between free willist and determinist. The research aims to: conduct systematic assessment of Western metaphysical discourse on free will and determinism with Yorùbá ontological understanding of human agency and destiny; demonstrate how the traditional Western problem may be less inflexible when approached through the *àyànmó* framework; explore opportunities for combining Western analytical rigor with Yorùbá practical wisdom; and contribute to comparative philosophy by showing how engagement with non-Western traditions mirrors hidden traditions in Western approaches. The research employs hermeneutical and critical analysis methodology, drawing upon Gadamerian concepts of "fusion of horizons" to conduct cross-cultural philosophical investigation. The approach combines interpretive understanding with rigorous evaluation, investigating the historical development and cultural embeddedness of concepts within both Western and Yorùbá frameworks while sustaining standards of logical coherence and practical relevance. The study reveals that *àyànmó*, etymological meaning "that which one chooses and becomes fixed," presents a cultured understanding of agency through progressive pluralism that recognizes multiple levels of agency operating at the same time. The *ori's* prenatal choice creates parameters within which incarnate freedom functions through character development (*ìwá*), creating nested orders of agency that preserve both cosmic order and moral responsibility. The Yorùbá hierarchical ontology, extending from *Olódùmarè* (Supreme Being) through the *òrìṣà* (deities) to human beings, situates personal destiny within broader cosmic relationships. This framework addresses deterministic concerns about constraining circumstances while maintaining space for genuine moral achievement, demonstrating that Yorùbá philosophy offers valuable resources for contemporary philosophical discourse on human agency and moral responsibility.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The question as to whether humans are really free or determined has occupied a central position in philosophical discourse since ancient times, representing one of the most enduring and consequential problems in Western metaphysics. At its base, this philosophical investigation concerns whether humans possess genuine agency, the capacity to make choices that are authentically their own rather than the inevitable products of antecedent causes. The tension between our immediate experience of deliberation and choice, on one hand, and the scientific understanding of the universe as governed by causal laws, on the other, has generated what philosophers commonly refer to as the problem of free will and determinism.

Western philosophical tradition has approached this problem through increasingly sophisticated conceptual analysis, beginning with early formulations by Augustine and Aquinas, who grounded freedom in the rational soul's capacity to deliberate between alternatives¹. The Enlightenment brought new complexity through philosophers like Kant, who distinguished between empirical and transcendental freedom, arguing that while our actions in the phenomenal realm are subject to causal determination, we must presuppose

¹ Augustine. (1993). *Confessions*. (F. J. Sheed, Trans.). Hackett Publishing, p. 12

transcendental freedom as a condition for moral responsibility². Contemporary analytical philosophy has further refined these concepts through the work of philosophers like Frankfurt³, Kane⁴, and Pereboom⁵, who have developed increasingly nuanced accounts of the relationship between causation, agency, and moral responsibility.

This rich tradition of Western philosophical inquiry, however, represents only one approach to understanding human agency and its relationship to cosmic order. African philosophical traditions, particularly the sophisticated metaphysical framework of Yorùbá ontology, offer alternative perspectives that both parallel and transcend traditional Western formulations. The Yorùbá concept of *àyànmọ́*; often inadequately translated as "destiny" or "fate", presents a unique understanding of human agency that locates ultimate choice in a pre-incarnate state while preserving incarnate agency for character development and moral responsibility⁶.

The comparative relevance of Yorùbá ontological perspectives becomes apparent when we recognize that the Western free will debate has arguably reached certain theoretical limitations. Despite centuries of sophisticated analysis, the fundamental tension between freedom and determinism persists, with contemporary philosophers divided among hard

² Kant, I. (1997). *Critique of practical reason*. (M. Gregor, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. P. 97

³ Frankfurt, H. G. (1971). Freedom of the will and the concept of a person. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68(1), 5-20.

⁴ Kane, R. (1996). *The significance of free will*. Oxford University Press. p. 34

⁵ Pereboom, D. (2001). *Living without free will*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 23

⁶ Abimbola, W. (1976). *Ifá: An exposition of Ifá literary corpus*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria. p. 113-128

determinist, libertarian, and compatibilist positions that seem incapable of definitive resolution. The Yorùbá framework offers resources that may transcend these limitations by providing a temporal and relational understanding of agency that preserves both cosmic order and human responsibility without generating the logical paradoxes that plague Western approaches.

The significance of this comparative inquiry extends beyond purely academic concerns to touch fundamental questions about moral responsibility, legal culpability, and spiritual meaning that affect all human societies. As globalization brings diverse philosophical traditions into increasing contact, opportunities arise for mutual enrichment and synthetic development that could advance philosophical understanding beyond what any single tradition can achieve in isolation⁷.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The fundamental problem addressed in this study concerns the apparent incompatibility between human freedom and deterministic causation, and the implications of this tension for moral responsibility, ethical practice, and spiritual understanding. Traditional Western formulations of this problem can be articulated as follows: if determinism is true, if every event, including human actions, is the inevitable result of prior causes operating according to natural laws, then human actions appear to be no different from any other natural events. They become products of an uninterrupted causal chain stretching back to

⁷ Gbadegehin, S. (1991). *African philosophy: Traditional Yoruba philosophy and contemporary African realities*. New York: Peter Lang.. pp. 29-45

the beginning of time. Under such conditions, genuine moral responsibility appears impossible, since individuals cannot be held accountable for actions that were determined by factors beyond their control.

This formulation reveals the high stakes involved in the debate. Our entire moral and legal framework seems to presuppose human freedom and responsibility. We praise people for virtuous actions and blame them for vicious ones, we hold criminals accountable for their crimes, and we base our social institutions on the assumption that people can choose to follow or violate rules and norms. If determinism undermines freedom, it appears to undermine these fundamental practices as well⁸.

The problem has been intensified by advances in neuroscience and psychology that seem to support deterministic explanations of human behavior. Studies like those conducted by Libet have suggested that brain activity indicating a decision to act precedes conscious awareness of that decision by several hundred milliseconds. Such findings appear to challenge the intuitive notion that conscious deliberation drives action, suggesting instead that consciousness merely ratifies decisions already made by unconscious neural processes.

However, the traditional Western formulation of this problem may itself be limited by cultural assumptions about the nature of agency, temporality, and responsibility that are not shared by other philosophical traditions. The Yorùbá concept of *àyànmọ́* suggests that

⁸van Inwagen, P. (1983). *An essay on free will*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Pp. 3-8

the apparent opposition between freedom and determinism may arise from overly simplistic conceptions of choice and constraint. If destiny can be understood as simultaneously chosen and constraining, chosen by the *ori* in a pre-incarnate state of expanded consciousness, yet constraining for the incarnate person who must work within destiny's parameters; then the problem may be resolvable through more sophisticated understanding of temporal and spiritual dimensions of agency.

The theoretical limitation of Western approaches becomes evident in their tendency to generate increasingly technical distinctions that lose connection to lived human experience. The debate has arguably become so abstract and specialized that it fails to address the practical concerns about meaning, responsibility, and spiritual development that originally motivated philosophical inquiry into human freedom. The Yorùbá framework's integration of metaphysical insight with practical wisdom for human flourishing suggests alternative approaches that might transcend these limitations while preserving the essential insights that motivate both sides of the traditional debate.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study serves several interconnected purposes in advancing philosophical understanding through cross-cultural comparative analysis:

- i. To conduct systematic comparison of Western metaphysical discourse on free will and determinism with Yorùbá ontological understanding of human agency

and destiny, examining how each tradition approaches fundamental questions about moral responsibility and cosmic order.

- ii. To demonstrate that the traditional Western problem of free will versus determinism may be less intractable when approached through alternative frameworks like *àyànmó*, which integrates temporal complexity and relational understanding of agency without generating typical logical paradoxes.
- iii. To explore possibilities for combining Western analytical rigor with Yorùbá practical wisdom, developing frameworks that preserve essential insights from both traditions while transcending their individual limitations through systematic integration.
- iv. To contribute to comparative philosophy by showing how engagement with non-Western traditions illuminates hidden assumptions in Western approaches while opening new avenues for philosophical development in contemporary global contexts.
- v. To advance understanding of Yorùbá philosophical concepts within international scholarly discourse, contributing to preservation and systematic presentation of African philosophical wisdom traditions for broader engagement.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This comparative investigation holds significant implications for multiple areas of scholarly inquiry and practical application. In the realm of philosophical scholarship, the study contributes to the expanding field of comparative philosophy by demonstrating how systematic engagement with non-Western philosophical traditions can advance understanding beyond what any single tradition can achieve in isolation. The comparison reveals that fundamental philosophical problems may be approachable from multiple perspectives, each offering unique insights and resources for resolution.

The study's significance for ethics and moral philosophy is particularly pronounced. Questions about free will and determinism are not merely abstract theoretical concerns but have direct implications for how we understand moral responsibility, praise and blame, punishment and reward. Legal systems throughout the world grapple with questions about criminal responsibility, mitigating circumstances, and the foundations of accountability that depend upon philosophical assumptions about human agency. This study's exploration of alternative frameworks for understanding agency and responsibility could provide resources for more nuanced and culturally sensitive approaches to these practical ethical questions.

For African philosophy and the broader project of decolonizing philosophical discourse, this study represents a significant contribution to the systematic presentation and development of indigenous African philosophical concepts. The detailed analysis of

Yorùbá ontological understanding demonstrates the sophistication and contemporary relevance of traditional African wisdom systems, challenging misconceptions that African cultures lack systematic philosophical reflection. By presenting Yorùbá concepts in dialogue with Western philosophical traditions, the study helps establish the legitimacy and value of African philosophical contributions to global intellectual discourse.

The study also has implications for religious and spiritual understanding across cultural boundaries. Both Western theological discussions and Yorùbá spiritual traditions grapple with questions about divine sovereignty, human freedom, and moral responsibility. The comparative framework developed here could provide resources for interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding between different religious and spiritual traditions.

In the context of contemporary globalization and cultural interaction, this study's significance extends to practical questions about cultural translation, mutual understanding, and the development of frameworks for cross-cultural communication. As societies become increasingly multicultural, the need grows for philosophical frameworks that can accommodate diverse cultural perspectives while maintaining intellectual rigor and practical relevance.

The study's methodological contributions are also significant for the future development of philosophical practice. By demonstrating how comparative analysis can reveal hidden assumptions and limitations in traditional approaches, the study provides a model for philosophical work that is both culturally informed and conceptually sophisticated. This

methodological approach could be applied to other philosophical problems and cultural traditions, advancing the broader project of developing truly global philosophical discourse.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this investigation is carefully delineated to focus on specific aspects of the free will debate:

1. Examination of major Western positions from Augustine and Aquinas through contemporary analytical philosophers including Kant, Hume, Frankfurt, Kane, Wolf, and Pereboom, encompassing hard determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism.
2. Analysis of core metaphysical concepts including *àyànmó* (destiny), *ori* (personal head/spiritual guide), *ìwá'* (character), *àṣẹ* (divine force), and the hierarchical framework from *Olódùmarè* through *òrìṣà* to human beings.
3. Concentration on ontological questions about agency, causation, and moral responsibility rather than political, social, or legal dimensions of freedom.
4. The study does not address political conceptions of freedom, focusing exclusively on metaphysical questions about agency rather than social liberty or collective action.

5. Engagement with Yorùbá philosophy relies primarily on scholarly interpretations rather than direct access to traditional practitioners or indigenous linguistic analysis.
6. Analysis focuses on concepts most relevant to comparative questions rather than attempting exhaustive treatment of all philosophical positions or cultural aspects.
7. The study operates within inherent limitations of philosophical comparison across cultural traditions, acknowledging potential conceptual distortion despite careful attention to cultural context.

1.6 Methodology

This study employs a hermeneutical and critical analysis approach that recognizes the interpretive nature of cross-cultural philosophical investigation while maintaining rigorous standards of conceptual evaluation. The hermeneutical dimension draws upon Gadamerian concepts of "fusion of horizons," acknowledging that understanding across traditions requires interpretive engagement where the researcher's conceptual framework encounters and is potentially transformed by different intellectual traditions. This approach involves careful attention to the historical development and cultural embeddedness of concepts within both Western and Yorùbá frameworks, recognizing that translation between philosophical traditions is itself an interpretive act requiring negotiation between cultural specificity and meaningful comparison. The critical analysis component involves systematic evaluation of arguments and theoretical frameworks

according to standards of logical coherence, empirical adequacy, and practical relevance, operating at multiple levels from individual argument structure to comprehensive theoretical adequacy. The methodology incorporates "critical hermeneutics" that combines interpretive sensitivity with rigorous evaluation, seeking to understand philosophical positions in their own terms while assessing their adequacy according to universal standards of rationality.

1.7 Definition of Terms

The philosophical investigation undertaken in this study requires precise definition of key terms that operate within both Western and Yorùbá philosophical frameworks. These definitions are intended to facilitate clear analysis while remaining sensitive to the cultural contexts within which these concepts have developed.

Free Will refers to the capacity for self-determined action, the ability to make choices that are genuinely one's own rather than the inevitable result of prior causes. Within Western philosophical discourse, this concept encompasses both negative freedom (absence of external constraints) and positive freedom (presence of genuine alternatives and the power to realize one's will). The concept involves what philosophers call "agent causation"; the idea that agents can initiate new causal chains without themselves being fully determined by prior events⁹.

⁹ Kane, R. (2005). *A contemporary introduction to free will*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 5

Determinism encompasses several related doctrines asserting that events, including human actions, are the inevitable results of antecedent causes. **Causal determinism** represents the classical formulation, suggesting that every event follows necessarily from previous states according to natural laws. **Logical determinism** argues that propositions about future events have determinate truth values that make those events inevitable. **Theological determinism** emerges from contexts where divine omniscience and omnipotence appear to preclude human freedom. **Biological determinism** focuses on genetic and evolutionary constraints, while **psychological determinism** emphasizes unconscious drives and conditioning. **Social determinism** highlights how cultural and economic structures constrain individual choice¹⁰.

Àyànmọ́ represents the Yorùbá concept of destiny, derived from "*a-yàn-mọ́*" meaning "that which one chooses and becomes fixed." This term encompasses the notion that destiny is simultaneously chosen (by the *ori* in a pre-incarnate state) and constraining (for the incarnate person). Related terms include *àkúnlẹ̀yàn* ("that which is knelt down to choose") and *àkúnlẹ̀gbà* ("that which is knelt down to receive"), highlighting the complex relationship between agency and receptivity involved in destiny formation¹¹.

Ori refers to the personal spiritual guide and locus of individual destiny within Yorùbá anthropology. *Ori* functions as both an aspect of the person and a semi-independent

¹⁰ Laplace, P.-S. (1951). *A philosophical essay on probabilities*. (F. W. Truscott & F. L. Emory, Trans.). New York: Dover Publications. p. 4

¹¹ Abimbola *Op. Cit.*, pp.113-128

spiritual entity that guides and protects the individual throughout life. Before incarnation, the *ori* chooses its destiny in the presence of *Olódùmarè*, selecting life circumstances and opportunities that will characterize earthly existence. The *ori* serves as custodian of this chosen destiny and works to guide the person toward its fulfillment¹².

Ìwá' denotes character in Yorùbá philosophy, representing the dynamic element of personality that develops through conscious choice and moral effort. *Ìwá' rere* (good character) is understood as essential for destiny fulfillment and represents the highest form of human achievement. Character development provides the primary domain where human freedom operates within the constraints established by *àyànmó'*, preserving moral responsibility while acknowledging structural limitations.

Àṣẹ represents the fundamental divine force or power that animates all existence within Yorùbá ontology. Often translated as "divine force" or "authority," *àṣẹ* is simultaneously the source of being and the principle of becoming, making possible all transformation and change. Understanding *àṣẹ* is crucial for grasping how Yorùbá ontology conceives the relationship between divine creativity and human agency¹³.

Compatibilism refers to positions within Western philosophy that attempt to reconcile free will with determinism by redefining one or both concepts. Compatibilists like Hume argue that freedom should be understood as the ability to do what one wants, even if what

¹² Ibid., pp. 73-89

¹³ Drewal, H. J. (1992). Performing the other: Mami Wata worship in Africa. *The Drama Review*, 36(2), 23-40.

one wants is itself determined. Contemporary compatibilists have developed sophisticated accounts of how freedom might be compatible with deterministic causation while preserving moral responsibility (Hume 1748/2000).

Hard Determinism represents positions that determinism is true and incompatible with free will and moral responsibility. Hard determinists argue that the truth of determinism requires abandoning traditional notions of praise, blame, and punishment, though forward-looking practices aimed at behavior modification might be retained¹⁴.

Libertarianism (in the philosophical rather than political sense) refers to positions that affirm both the existence of free will and its incompatibility with determinism, concluding that determinism must be false.¹⁵

1.8 Literature Review

The philosophical literature addressing questions of free will and determinism represents one of the most extensive and sophisticated areas of inquiry within Western philosophy, spanning from ancient Greek discussions through contemporary analytical treatments. This literature review examines key contributions from both Western and Yorùbá philosophical traditions, identifying major positions, arguments, and areas where comparative analysis might prove fruitful.

¹⁴ Pereboom *Op. Cit.*, pp. 144-167

¹⁵ Kane, R. (1996). *The significance of free will*. New York: Oxford University Press, p.34

Within Western philosophy, hard deterministic positions have been articulated by figures like Paul Holbach, who argued in his book, *The System of Nature*, that free will is simply incoherent, and more recently in the work of Derk Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will* who developed "hard incompatibilism"; the position that free will is incompatible with both determinism and indeterminism. Holbach contended that if our actions flow from our character, and our character is shaped by factors beyond our control, then we cannot be ultimately responsible for our actions.¹⁶ Pereboom extends this argument by claiming that random events cannot ground moral responsibility any more than determined events can, making free will impossible regardless of whether the universe is deterministic¹⁷.

Libertarian responses to deterministic challenges have been developed by philosophers like William James in his article *The Dilemma of Determinism*, emphasized the immediate certainty of our experience of effort and deliberation as evidence for genuine agency, and contemporary philosopher Robert Kane, who has developed sophisticated defenses based on quantum indeterminacy and "self-forming actions."¹⁸ Kane in *The Significance of Free Will* argues that quantum indeterminacy in the brain, particularly

¹⁶ Holbach, P.-H. T. (1999). *The system of nature*. (H. D. Robinson, Trans.). Manchester: Clinamen Press. Pp.98-102.

¹⁷ Pereboom, D. (2001). *Living without free will*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Pp.187-214

¹⁸ James, W. (1884). The dilemma of determinism. *Unitarian Review*, 22, 1-26.

during moments of moral conflict, provides space for genuine agency without making actions random¹⁹.

The compatibilist tradition represents perhaps the most influential approach within contemporary Western philosophy. David Hume in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* argued that the free will problem arises from misunderstanding what freedom requires, contending that an action is free if it flows from the agent's own desires regardless of whether those desires are themselves determined²⁰. Harry Frankfurt's influential work, *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person*, shifted focus from alternative possibilities to the structure of the will itself, arguing through famous thought experiments that freedom does not require the ability to do otherwise but rather the ability to act according to one's deeper values and commitments²¹.

Susan Wolf's *Freedom Within Reason* attempts to preserve moral responsibility by focusing on rational reflection rather than alternative possibilities, arguing that agents are responsible when they act for good reasons and could have done otherwise if they had good reason to do so.²² These compatibilist developments represent increasingly sophisticated attempts to preserve moral responsibility within naturalistic worldviews while acknowledging various forms of constraint on human choice.

¹⁹ Kane, R. (2005). *A contemporary introduction to free will*. New York: Oxford University Press. P.45

²⁰ Hume, D. (2000). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1748). P.12

²¹ Frankfurt, *Op. Cit.*,

²² Wolf, S. (1990). *Freedom within reason*. New York: Oxford University Press..

Recent empirical work in neuroscience and experimental philosophy has introduced new dimensions to these traditional debates. Benjamin Libet's *Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action* suggested that brain activity precedes conscious awareness of decisions have been interpreted as challenging traditional notions of conscious agency,²³ while experimental philosophers like Joshua Knobe in *Intentional Action and Side Effects in Ordinary Language*, have revealed that people's judgments about free will and moral responsibility are influenced by factors like moral valence and scenario presentation²⁴.

Wande Abimbola's foundational work *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus* provides essential background for understanding *àyànmó* and related concepts²⁵. His analysis demonstrates that Yorùbá understanding of destiny involves complex relationships between prenatal choice, earthly constraint, and moral responsibility that cannot be easily categorized within traditional Western frameworks.

Segun Gbadegesin's *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities* explores a systematic presentation of Yorùbá philosophy for international audiences provides crucial analysis of how concepts like *ori*, *ìwá*, and

²³ Libet, B. (1985). Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(4), 529-539.

²⁴ Knobe, J. (2003). Intentional action and side effects in ordinary language. *Analysis*, 63(3), 190-194.

²⁵ Abimbola, W. (1976). *Ifá: An exposition of Ifá literary corpus*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria.. p.35

àyànmọ́ function within broader Yorùbá ontological understanding²⁶. His work demonstrates that Yorùbá philosophy possesses sophisticated frameworks for addressing questions about human agency and moral responsibility that both parallel and transcend Western approaches.

Olatunji Oyeshile's work *On the Yoruba Concept of a Person* illuminates the multidimensional understanding of human nature that underlies Yorùbá approaches to questions of freedom and responsibility²⁷. His analysis shows how the various components of Yorùbá anthropology—including *ara* (body), *ẹmí* (soul), *ori* (personal destiny), and *ẹlẹ́dá* (spiritual double)—create frameworks for understanding agency that recognize both constraint and freedom without generating the paradoxes characteristic of Western debate.

Barry Hallen's philosophical analysis of Yorùbá concepts reveals the sophistication of traditional African approaches to fundamental philosophical questions in his book *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*, demonstrating that African philosophical traditions possess resources that could contribute significantly to global philosophical discourse²⁸. His work on concepts of

²⁶ Gbadegesin, S. (1991). *African philosophy: Traditional Yoruba philosophy and contemporary African realities*. New York: Peter Lang. p.43

²⁷ Oyeshile, O. A. (2008). On the Yoruba concept of a person. In K. Gyekye & K. Wiredu (Eds.), *A companion to African philosophy* (pp. 101-118). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. p.23

²⁸ Hallen, B. (2000). *The good, the bad, and the beautiful: Discourse about values in Yoruba culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.12

moral luck and responsibility within Yorùbá thought provides important resources for comparative analysis.

The comparative literature examining Western and African philosophical approaches to these questions remains limited but is growing. Kwame Wiredu's work *Philosophy and an African Culture* has provided important methodological frameworks for cross-cultural philosophical comparison, while maintaining that African philosophical traditions possess distinctive insights that cannot be reduced to Western categories²⁹. His approach influences this study's methodology by emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural specificity while enabling meaningful philosophical dialogue.

John Ayoade Bewaji's *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge: A Pluricultural Approach* includes substantial analysis of Yorùbá epistemological and metaphysical concepts, with particular attention to how knowledge and destiny intersect within Yorùbá worldview. Bewaji argues that Yorùbá thought offers valuable resources for contemporary philosophical problems while maintaining its cultural integrity.³⁰

Sophie Olúwoḷé's *Philosophy and Orality* provides crucial insights into the relationship between oral tradition and philosophical thinking within Yorùbá culture. Her work demonstrates how concepts like *ayanmò* must be understood within the context of oral

²⁹ Wiredu, K. (1980). *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.p.40

³⁰ Bewaji, J. A. (2016). *An introduction to the theory of knowledge: A pluricultural approach*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. p.23

philosophical traditions that may operate according to different logical and expressive principles than written Western philosophy.³¹

Kwame Gyekye's *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* offers comparative insights that illuminate distinctive features of Yorùbá thought. While focusing on Akan philosophy, Gyekye's analysis of African concepts of personhood, destiny, and moral responsibility provides valuable comparative context.³²

Kwame Wiredu's *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* develops methodological approaches for cross-cultural philosophical dialogue that prove essential for this study. Wiredu's emphasis on conceptual decolonization and philosophical translation provides frameworks for avoiding both cultural imperialism and relativistic isolation.³³

D.A. Masolo's "*Self and Community in a Changing World*" examines how African philosophical concepts relate to contemporary globalized contexts. His analysis of destiny, agency, and community within African thought provides important perspectives on how traditional concepts remain relevant for contemporary philosophical discourse.³⁴

³¹ Olúwólé, S. B. (2017). Ifá as a body of knowledge and as an academic discipline. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 47(1), 34-59.

³² Gyekye, K. (2013). *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p.23

³³ Wiredu, K. (2004). A Companion to African Philosophy. In K. Wiredu (Ed.), *Cultural universals and particulars: An African perspective* (pp. 1–15). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

³⁴ Masolo, D. A. (2010). *Self and community in a changing world*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Robert Kane's *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* provides comprehensive analysis of major positions and arguments. Kane's work on libertarian free will and ultimate responsibility offers important comparative perspectives on human agency and moral responsibility.³⁵

Michael McKenna and Derk Pereboom's *Free Will: A Contemporary Introduction* surveys current debates while highlighting persistent philosophical problems. Their analysis of compatibilist and incompatibilist positions provides context for evaluating how Yorùbá conceptions might contribute to or transcend traditional Western dichotomies.³⁶

Recent scholarship by philosophers like John Bewaji's *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil* has begun systematically comparing Western and Yorùbá approaches to questions of moral responsibility and human agency, identifying both convergences and divergences that could inform synthetic philosophical development³⁷. This emerging comparative literature suggests that systematic dialogue between these traditions could advance philosophical understanding beyond what either tradition can achieve in isolation.

³⁵ Kane, R. (2005). *A contemporary introduction to free will*. New York: Oxford University Press

³⁶ McKenna, M., & Pereboom, D. (2016). *Free will: A contemporary introduction*. New York: Routledge. p.24

³⁷ Bewaji, J. A. I. (2004). Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief and the theistic problem of evil. *African Studies Quarterly*, 7(4), 145-162..

CHAPTER TWO

**CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE ON FREEWILL AND DETERMINISM IN
WESTERN METAPHYSICS**

2.1 The Meaning of Freedom

The concept of freedom has been central to philosophical inquiry since time immemorial, representing one of the most essential questions about moral responsibility and human nature. In Western metaphysical discourse, freedom is commonly understood as the capacity for self-determination, the ability to make choices that are genuinely one's own rather than the inevitable result of prior causes¹. This understanding encompasses both negative freedom (the absence of external constraints) and positive freedom (the presence of genuine substitutes and the power to realize one's will).

The philosophical conception of freedom differs significantly from political or social freedom, though these concepts are often interconnected. Metaphysical freedom concerns the fundamental nature of human agency itself: whether human beings possess the capacity to act in ways that are not entirely determined by antecedent conditions. This involves what philosophers call "agent causation"; the idea that agents can initiate new causal chains without themselves being fully determined by prior events².

Kane, R. (2005). *A contemporary introduction to free will*. New York: Oxford University Press. P.15

² O'Connor, T. (2000). *Persons and causes: The metaphysics of free will*. New York: Oxford University Press p.42

Traditional philosophers like Augustine and Aquinas grounded freedom in the rational soul's capacity to deliberate and choose between substitutes. Augustine's conception of liberum arbitrium emphasized the will's capacity to choose between good and evil, while his notion of libertas described the freedom to choose the good specifically³. This distinction became foundational for medieval and subsequent discussions of freedom, establishing a framework where genuine freedom involves not merely choice, but morally informed choice guided by reason.

The Enlightenment brought new complexities to the concept of freedom, particularly through the work of philosophers like Kant, who distinguished between empirical and transcendental freedom. Kant argued that while our actions in the phenomenal realm are subject to causal determination, we must presuppose transcendental freedom as a condition for moral responsibility⁴. This Kantian framework has profoundly influenced contemporary debates, establishing the notion that freedom requires the ability to act according to self-legislated moral principles rather than mere causal efficacy.

Contemporary analytical philosophy has further refined these concepts, with philosophers like Harry Frankfurt arguing that freedom should be understood in terms of higher-order desires and the harmony between different levels of volition⁵. This graded approach

³ Augustine. (1993). *Confessions*. (F. J. Sheed, Trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing. Book XII, 1993.

⁴ Kant, I. (1997). *Critique of practical reason*. (M. Gregor, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Frankfurt, H. G. (1971). Freedom of the will and the concept of a person. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68(1), 5-20 12-15.

suggests that freedom involves not just the capacity to do what one wants, but to want what one wants; to have one's actions flow from desires that one categorizes with at a vital level.

The phenomenological tradition, particularly through the work of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, has emphasized the embodied and situated nature of freedom. Sartre's famous declaration that humans are "condemned to be free" highlights the unavoidable responsibility that comes with awareness and the capacity for choice⁶. This existentialist viewpoint views freedom not as a property to be proven or disproven, but as the fundamental structure of human existence itself.

2.2 The Meaning of Determinism

Determinism, as a philosophical thesis, asserts that every event is the inevitable result of antecedent causes operating according to natural laws, leaving no room for genuine alternatives or ultimate origination. Understanding determinism requires careful analysis of its various formulations, logical implications, and relationship to scientific understanding of natural processes⁷.

The implications of determinism for human agency and moral responsibility depend significantly on how deterministic theses are formulated and what they are understood to exclude. Hard determinists argue that any form of determinism eliminates genuine free

⁶ Sartre, J.-P. (2007). *Existentialism is a humanism*. (C. Macomber, Trans.). New Haven: Yale University Press. p.29

⁷ Hofer, C. (2016). Causal determinism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University.

will and ultimate moral responsibility, while compatibilists maintain that properly understood determinism is compatible with meaningful agency and accountability⁸.

2.3 The Problem of Freedom and Determinism

The tension between freedom and determinism constitutes one of philosophy's most enduring problems, touching on fundamental questions about moral responsibility, human dignity, and the nature of causation itself. The problem arises from an apparent incompatibility between our experience of making free choices and the scientific understanding of the universe as governed by causal laws⁹.

At its core, the problem can be formulated as follows: If determinism is true, if every event is the inevitable result of prior causes; then human actions are no different from any other natural events. They are the products of an uninterrupted causal chain stretching back to the foundation of time. But if our actions are thus determined, how can we be said to act freely? And if we do not act freely, how can we be held morally responsible for our actions?

This design reveals the risks involved in the debate. Our entire moral and legal framework seems to take for granted human freedom and responsibility. We praise people for worthy actions and blame them for malicious ones, we hold offenders answerable for their crimes, and we base our social institutions on the hypothesis that people can decide

⁸ Fischer, J. M., & Ravizza, M. (2000). *Responsibility and control: A theory of moral responsibility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Van Inwagen, P. (1983). *An essay on free will*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp.3-8

to follow or violate rules and norms. If determinism undermines freedom, it appears to undermine these practices as well.

The problem has been difficult by advances in neuroscience and psychology that seem to support deterministic clarifications of human behavior. Studies like those carried out by Benjamin Libet have proposed that brain activity indicating a decision to act precedes conscious awareness of that decision by several hundred milliseconds¹⁰. Such findings appear to challenge the rational notion that conscious deliberation drives action, suggesting instead that consciousness merely ratifies decisions already made by unconscious neural processes.

Quantum mechanics has presented additional complexity to the conversation by challenging the classical deterministic picture of the universe. Some physicists and philosophers have argued that quantum indeterminateness might provide space for genuine freedom¹¹. However, critics point out that random events are no more "free" than determined ones; if our actions are the result of quantum randomness, they are not under our control any more than if they were the result of classical deterministic processes.

The problem is further complicated by questions about moral luck and circumstance. Even if we possess some form of freedom, the conditions under which we exercise that freedom are largely beyond our control. We do not choose our genes, our early

¹⁰ Libet, B. (1985). Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(4), 529-539.

¹¹ Penrose, R. (1994). *Shadows of the mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.347-348

environment, our culture, or many of the formative experiences that shape our character and capacities. This recognition has led some philosophers to question whether true moral responsibility is possible even if some form of freedom exists¹².

Contemporary thoughts have also engaged with the connection between predictability and freedom. If human behavior is genuinely free, some argue, it should be basically unpredictable. Yet social sciences have established notable consistencies in human behavior at collective levels, and individual behavior often follows foreseeable patterns. This stiffness between predictability and freedom adds another dimension to the classical problem.

2.4 Types of Determinism

Determinism is not a monolithic doctrine but encompasses several distinct varieties, each with diverse inferences for moral responsibility and human freedom. Understanding these diverse forms is central for piloting the complex landscape of the free will debate and increase in value the nuanced positions that philosophers have developed in response to deterministic challenges.

Causal Determinism represents the classical formulation of the doctrine, asserting that every event is the inevitable result of antecedent causes operating according to natural laws. This view, strongly influenced by Newtonian physics, suggests that the universe is

¹² Nagel, T. (1979). Moral luck. In *Mortal questions* (pp. 24-38). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., pp. 24-38

like a vast machine where each state follows necessarily from the previous state according to deterministic laws¹³. Under causal determinism, human actions are simply links in an unbroken causal chain stretching back to the initial conditions of the universe.

Logical Determinism poses a different but related challenge to freedom, arguing that propositions about future events have determinate truth values that make those events inevitable. This position, which can be traced back to Aristotle's discussion of the sea battle tomorrow¹⁴, suggests that if it is true today that you will have coffee tomorrow morning, then you cannot fail to have coffee tomorrow morning. The logical structure of truth itself seems to eliminate genuine alternatives.

Theological Determinism emerges from religious contexts where divine omniscience and omnipotence appear to preclude human freedom. If God knows everything that will happen and has the power to prevent anything God disapproves of, then it seems that everything that occurs must be in accordance with divine will. Calvin's doctrine of predestination represents perhaps the most systematic development of this position, arguing that human salvation or damnation is predetermined by divine decree rather than human choice¹⁵.

¹³ Laplace, P.-S. (1951). *A philosophical essay on probabilities*. (F. W. Truscott & F. L. Emory, Trans.). New York: Dover Publications. p. 4

¹⁴ Aristotle. (1963). *Categories and De Interpretatione*. (J. L. Ackrill, Trans.). Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.9

¹⁵ Calvin, J. (1960). *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. (F. L. Battles, Trans.). Philadelphia: Westminster Press.. Book III, Chapter 21 1960.

Biological Determinism focuses on genetic and evolutionary factors that constrain human behavior. This perspective emphasizes how our biological inheritance shapes our capacities, dispositions, and behavioral tendencies in ways that limit genuine choice. Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists have argued that many supposedly free human behaviors are actually the products of genetic programming shaped by natural selection¹⁶.

Psychological Determinism encompasses various theories that explain human behavior in terms of unconscious drives, conditioning, or psychological mechanisms that operate below the threshold of conscious awareness. Freudian psychoanalysis exemplifies this approach, suggesting that conscious decisions are often rationalizations of unconscious desires and conflicts rather than genuine expressions of free choice¹⁷. Behavioral psychology similarly emphasizes how environmental conditioning shapes responses in ways that bypass conscious deliberation.

Social Determinism highlights how cultural, economic, and social structures constrain individual choice and action. Marxist analysis exemplifies this approach, arguing that consciousness itself is shaped by material conditions and class relations in ways that limit genuine freedom¹⁸. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus represents a more contemporary

¹⁶ Wilson, E. O. (1975). *Sociobiology: The new synthesis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. pp. 547-575

¹⁷ Freud, S. (1963). *Introductory lectures on psychoanalysis*. (J. Strachey, Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton, pp. 284-285

¹⁸ Marx, K. (1998). *The German ideology*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, p. 15

version of this perspective, describing how social structures become internalized as dispositions that unconsciously guide behavior¹⁹.

Hard Determinism represents the position that determinism (in one or more of its forms) is true and incompatible with freedom and moral responsibility. Hard determinists like Paul Holbach and more recently Derk Pereboom argue that the truth of determinism requires us to abandon traditional notions of praise, blame, and punishment, though we might retain forward-looking practices aimed at behavior modification and social protection²⁰.

Soft Determinism or Compatibilism attempts to reconcile determinism with freedom by redefining one or both concepts. Compatibilists like David Hume argued that freedom should be understood as the ability to do what one wants to do, even if what one wants is itself determined²¹. Contemporary compatibilists have developed increasingly sophisticated accounts of how freedom might be compatible with deterministic causation.

2.5 Arguments and Exponents of Freewill and Determinism

The philosophical debate between free will and determinism has generated numerous sophisticated arguments and attracted some of the most prominent thinkers in the Western

¹⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). pp. 72-95

²⁰ Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 144-167

²¹ Hume, D. (2000). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Section 8

tradition. Understanding the major positions and their proponents is essential for grasping the complexity and ongoing relevance of this fundamental metaphysical question.

Arguments for Free Will

The traditional argument for free will begins with the phenomenological observation that we experience ourselves as free agents capable of genuine choice. William James emphasized the immediate certainty of this experience, arguing that the feeling of effort and deliberation provides prima facie evidence for genuine agency²². This experiential argument suggests that the burden of proof lies with those who would deny freedom, since such denial conflicts with our most basic self-understanding.

The moral argument for free will, developed by philosophers like Kant, contends that moral responsibility presupposes freedom, and since moral responsibility is undeniable, freedom must exist. Kant argued that "ought implies can" we cannot have genuine moral obligations unless we have the freedom to fulfill or violate them. This argument has been influential because it connects metaphysical questions about freedom to practical ethical concerns that seem inescapable.

Robert Kane has developed a sophisticated contemporary defense of libertarian free will based on quantum indeterminacy and what he calls "self-forming actions." Kane argues that quantum indeterminacy in the brain, particularly during moments of moral conflict

²² James, W. (1884). The dilemma of determinism. *Unitarian Review*, 22, 1-26

and uncertainty, provides space for genuine agency without making actions random²³. His theory attempts to show how free will could be compatible with natural science while preserving genuine responsibility.

Agent-causal theories, defended by philosophers like Timothy O'Connor and Robert Clarke, argue that persons are substances capable of causing events without themselves being causally determined to do so. These theories attempt to preserve genuine agency by locating the source of free action in the agent as a continuing substance rather than in particular events or states²⁴.

The argument from self-determination emphasizes our capacity for rational reflection and value-based choice. Philosophers like Susan Wolf argue that freedom involves the ability to act in accordance with reason and to shape our actions according to our deep values and commitments²⁵. This approach suggests that freedom is not about escaping causation entirely but about being caused by the right kinds of factors—namely, our own rational deliberation and authentic values.

Arguments for Determinism

The scientific argument for determinism draws on the remarkable success of natural science in explaining natural phenomena through causal laws. Pierre-Simon Laplace famously articulated this view, arguing that if we knew the exact location and momentum

²³ Kane, R. (1996). *The significance of free will*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 125-180

²⁴ O'Connor *Op. Cit.*, pp. 110-135

²⁵ Wolf, S. (1990). *Freedom within reason*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.54-85

of every atom in the universe, we could predict the entire future and retrodict the entire past²⁶. While quantum mechanics has complicated this picture, many scientists and philosophers continue to believe that human behavior will ultimately be explicable in terms of natural causal processes.

The argument from neuroscience has gained prominence in recent decades as brain imaging and other technologies have revealed the neural correlates of decision-making. Studies showing that brain activity precedes conscious awareness of decisions seem to challenge the idea that consciousness drives action. Philosophers like Eddy Nahmias have argued that these findings are compatible with free will properly understood, while others see them as undermining traditional notions of agency²⁷.

Hard determinists like Paul Holbach argue that the concept of free will is simply incoherent. If our actions flow from our character, and our character is shaped by factors beyond our control, then we cannot be ultimately responsible for our actions. Holbach concluded that free will is an illusion that arises from our ignorance of the causes that determine our behavior²⁸.

Derk Pereboom has developed a contemporary version of hard determinism that he calls "hard incompatibilism," arguing that free will is incompatible with both determinism and

²⁶ Laplace *Op. Cit.*, p.4

²⁷ Nahmias, E. (2007). Autonomous agency and social environment. In M. Marraffa, M. De Caro, & F. Ferretti (Eds.), *Cartographies of the mind*. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 214-240

²⁸ Holbach, P.-H. T. (1999). *The system of nature*. (H. D. Robinson, Trans.). Manchester: Clinamen Press. pp. 98-102

indeterminism. Pereboom contends that random events cannot ground moral responsibility any more than determined events can, so free will is impossible regardless of whether the universe is deterministic²⁹.

Compatibilist Responses

Compatibilists have developed increasingly sophisticated responses to deterministic challenges. David Hume argued that the problem arises from a misunderstanding of what freedom requires. According to Hume, an action is free if it flows from the agent's own desires and is not constrained by external force, regardless of whether those desires are themselves determined³⁰.

Harry Frankfurt's influential work on the will has shifted focus from alternative possibilities to the structure of the will itself. Frankfurt argues that freedom does not require the ability to do otherwise but rather the ability to act according to one's deeper values and commitments. His famous thought experiments involving manipulation and control suggest that freedom is compatible with determinism as long as actions flow from the agent's authentic will³¹.

Susan Wolf's "Reason View" attempts to preserve moral responsibility by focusing on the capacity for rational reflection rather than alternative possibilities. According to Wolf, an agent is responsible for an action if she performed it because she had good reason to do

²⁹ Pereboom 187-214

³⁰ Hume *Op. Cit.*,

³¹ Frankfurt *Op. Cit.*, 5-20

so and could have done otherwise if she had good reason to do otherwise³². This approach tries to preserve the connection between responsibility and rationality while acknowledging the constraints of circumstance and character.

Contemporary Developments

Recent work in experimental philosophy has introduced empirical methods to the traditional philosophical debate. Studies by Joshua Knobe and others have revealed that people's judgments about free will and moral responsibility are influenced by factors like the moral valence of actions and the specific way scenarios are described³³. These findings have raised questions about whether philosophical intuitions about freedom reflect deep metaphysical truths or merely psychological biases.

The emergence of neurophilosophy has created new dialogue between philosophical and scientific approaches to the mind. Philosophers like Patricia Churchland have argued that neuroscientific findings will ultimately dissolve traditional philosophical problems about free will by revealing them to be based on misunderstandings about the nature of mind and agency³⁴.

Meanwhile, new technologies like brain-computer interfaces and advanced artificial intelligence are creating practical contexts where questions about agency and control take

³² Wolf *Op. Cit.*, pp.79-96

³³ Knobe, J. (2003). Intentional action and side effects in ordinary language. *Analysis*, 63(3), 190-194.

³⁴ Churchland, P. S. (2002). *Brain-wise: Studies in neurophilosophy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 45-68

on immediate practical significance. These developments are forcing philosophers to refine their theories to address questions about enhanced agency, distributed control, and the boundaries of moral responsibility in technologically mediated environments.

CHAPTER THREE

YORÙBÁ ONTOLOGY: A REFLECTION ON THE HUMAN PERSON AND DESTINY

3.1 Who are the Yorùbás?

The Yorùbás constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa, with populations primarily concentrated in south-eastern Benin, south-western Nigeria, and some parts of Togo. With an estimated population surpassing forty million people, the Yorùbás represent an important cultural and linguistic community whose impact extends far beyond geographical borders through diaspora societies in the Europe, Americas, and other parts of Africa. Understanding Yorùbá conceptions of destiny requires appreciating the historical and cultural contexts that have shaped Yorùbá philosophical thought over centuries of development¹.

Historically, the Yorùbá people organized themselves into city-states centered around major urban centers such as Ifè, Òyó, Ìbàdàn, and Abéòkúta. These political entities were connected through complex networks of trade, kinship, and cultural exchange, creating a shared civilization characterized by common linguistic, religious, and philosophical traditions. The city of Ilé-Ifè holds particular significance as the spiritual and cultural center of Yorùbáland, considered the birthplace of humanity according to Yorùbá creation

¹ Peel, J. D. Y. (2000). *Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.7

mythology². Historical evidence suggests continuous occupation and cultural development in Yorùbá territories for over a millennium, creating the temporal depth necessary for sophisticated philosophical development³.

The Yorùbá language belongs to the Niger-Congo family and is categorized by a complex tonal system that carries both philosophical and linguistic significance. The tonal nature of Yorùbá is not merely well-formed but often rooted with metaphysical meaning, as the same sequence of vowels and consonants can convey different concepts depending on tonal patterns. This oral tradition includes various genres such as *Ifá* divination texts (*odù*), praise poems (*oriki*), proverbs (*òwe*), and folktales (*àlò*) that contain classic philosophical reflections on human nature, destiny, and moral responsibility.⁴

Yorùbá traditional religion, often called the *Ifá* tradition, provides the metaphysical and philosophical framework that underlies Yorùbá ontology. This religious system centers around the worship of *Olódùmarè* (the Supreme Being) and numerous *òrìṣà* (deities or spiritual forces) who oversee different aspects of existence. The *Ifá* corpus, a vast collection of oral literature preserved by trained priests called *babaláwo*, contains the

² Olupona, J. K. (2011). *City of Gods: Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in time, space, and the imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.23-27

³ Ogundiran, A. (2020). *The Yoruba: A new history*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press pp.7-12

⁴ Barber, K. (2007). *The anthropology of texts, persons and publics: Oral and written culture in Africa and beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

metaphysical teachings and philosophical wisdom that form the foundation of Yorùbá thought⁵.

The colonial period significantly impacted Yorùbá society, introducing Christianity and Islam alongside European educational and political systems. However, despite these external influences, the Yorùbás have sustained remarkable continuousness in essential worldview assumptions despite momentous historical changes including the British colonialism, introduction of Christianity and Islam, the Atlantic slave trade and contemporary globalization. This continuousness, combined with creative adaptation to changing circumstances, has preserved core philosophical concepts while allowing for ongoing development and reinterpretation⁶.

In the modern period, Yorùbá culture has experienced a rebirth as scholars and cultural activists work to preserve, document, and revitalize traditional knowledge systems. This cultural renewal has been accompanied by increased academic interest in Yorùbá philosophy, with scholars like Wande Abimbola, Kola Abimbola, and John Ayoade developing systematic presentations of Yorùbá metaphysical concepts for international scholarly audiences.

The diaspora dimension of Yorùbá culture has created additional contexts for philosophical development, particularly in Trinidad, Brazil, Cuba, and other South

⁵ Abimbola, W. (1976). *Ifá: An exposition of Ifá literary corpus*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria, pp.1-20

⁶ Falola, T. (2001). *Culture and customs of Nigeria*. Westport: Greenwood Press. pp.3-4

American and Caribbean societies where Yorùbá religious and philosophical traditions have been well-maintained and transformed through contact with other cultural systems. These diaspora growths have contributed to modern understanding of Yorùbá concepts while demonstrating their adaptability across different historical and social contexts⁷.

3.2 What is Yorùbá Ontology?

Yorùbá ontology represents a cultured metaphysical system that provides a wide-ranging background for understanding the nature of reality, existence, and being. Unlike Western philosophical traditions that often highlight systematic theoretical structure, Yorùbá ontology is rooted within lived religious rituals, oral traditions and cultural practices that integrate practical wisdom with metaphysical insights for human flourishing. This ontological framework provides the conceptual foundation for understanding human nature, destiny, and moral responsibility within Yorùbá thought⁸.

At its basis, Yorùbá ontology theorizes a hierarchical understanding of reality organized around diverse levels or modes of being. This graded structure does not suggest inequality in value but rather mirrors different degrees of cosmic responsibility, spiritual development, and ontological complexity. The Yorùbá worldview recognizes reality as fundamentally unified while acknowledging distinctions between different levels or dimensions of existence. The invisible spiritual realm (*òrun*) and the visible material

⁷ Johnson, P. C. (2002). *Secrets, gossip, and gods: The transformation of Brazilian Candomblé*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.44

⁸ Gbadegesin, S. (2004). *African philosophy: Traditional Yoruba philosophy and contemporary African realities*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. p.23

world (*ayé*) represent different parts of a single reality rather than distinct or autonomous domains. This monistic understanding means that material and spiritual processes are continuously interconnected, with events in one realm affecting conditions in the other⁹.

Central to Yorùbá ontology is the concept of *àṣẹ*, which functions as both the vital force that makes things happen and the divine sanction that legitimizes particular actions or circumstances. *Àṣẹ* operates at multiple levels, from the cosmic *àṣẹ* of *Olódùmarè* (the Supreme Being) through the particular *àṣẹ* of various *orìṣà* (deities) to the special *àṣẹ* that individuals can develop and utilize. Understanding *àṣẹ* is crucial for comprehending how human agency operates within cosmic order¹⁰.

Yorùbá ontology operates with an essentially relational understanding of existence. Beings are not regarded as isolated matters but as nodes in complex networks of relationships that extend vertically through the hierarchy of being and horizontally through kinship, community, and environmental connections. This relational emphasis means that individual identity and agency are always understood within broader contexts of cosmic, social, and spiritual relationship¹¹.

The temporal dimension of Yorùbá ontology recognizes repeated as well as linear aspects of time, with past, present, and future understood as interpenetrating rather than simply

⁹ Idowu, E. B. (2002). *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*. Brooklyn: A&B Publishers Group.

¹⁰ Murphy, J. M., & Sanford, M. S. (Eds.). (2001). *Òṣun across the waters: A Yoruba goddess in Africa and the Americas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.23

¹¹ Oyeshile, O. A. (2008). On the Yoruba concept of a person. In K. Gyekye & K. Wiredu (Eds.), *A companion to African philosophy* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. pp.101-118

sequential. Ancestors (*egúngún*) continue to effect present circumstances, while future possibilities are shaped by spiritual forces and present actions. This temporal understanding provides context for concepts of destiny that extend beyond single lifetimes¹².

Yorùbá metaphysical structures also identify different types of beings and entities, each with distinguishing forms of agency and existence. Humans occupy an exclusive position within this hierarchy, having both spiritual dimensions and material bodies that enable them to participate in both *ayé* and *òrun* while bearing special responsibilities for maintaining cosmic harmony¹³.

The epistemic dimension of Yorùbá ontology highlights numerous ways of knowing that include divination, intuitive insight, experiential participation and rational reflection in spiritual processes. This epistemological pluralism means that understanding concepts like destiny requires integration of different forms of knowledge rather than relying solely on abstract reasoning¹⁴.

3.3 The Hierarchy of Beings in Yorùbá Ontology

The Yorùbá ontological system envisages reality as systematized in a complex hierarchy of beings, each occupying different levels of cosmic responsibility and spiritual

¹² Pemberton, J. (2000). The dreadful god and the divine king. In H. J. Drewal (Ed.), *Yoruba: Nine centuries of African art and thought* New York: Center for African Art. pp. 105-146

¹³ Olúwólé, S. B. (2014). *Philosophy and orality: An African perspective*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

¹⁴ Hallen and Sodipo. Op. Cit.,

development. This hierarchical understanding provides the context within which human freedom and destiny are understood, establishing the metaphysical context for questions about choice, moral responsibility and agency. This hierarchy should not be understood as rigid stratification but as a dynamic system of relationships and responsibilities that maintains cosmic order while allowing for agency and development at different levels¹⁵.

Olódùmarè occupies the top of this hierarchy as the Supreme Being, the ultimate source and ground of all being. Often referred to as *Olórun* (Owner of Heaven) or Elédùmarè (Creator of Good Things), this divine principle surpasses direct human understanding while remaining intimately involved in the ongoing creation and sustenance of reality. *Olódùmarè* is understood as the source of *àṣẹ*, the divine force that stirs all existence, and the ultimate judge of moral action¹⁶.

Unlike the detached deity of some Western theological systems, *Olódùmarè* remains dynamically involved with creation through various midway spiritual forces. This engagement occurs not through random intervention but through the reliable operation of spiritual laws and principles that govern the cosmic order. The Supreme Being's affiliation to human freedom is thus mediated through these principles rather than expressed through direct determination of human choices.

¹⁵ Lawal, B. (2016). *The Gèlédé spectacle: Art, gender, and social harmony in an African culture*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. pp.7-29

¹⁶ Idowu *Op. Cit.*, 38-47

The Òrìṣà represent the next level in the ontological hierarchy, functioning as specialized spiritual forces or deities who govern particular domains of existence. Major òrìṣà include *Obàtálá* (deity of creation and wisdom), *Ògún* (deity of iron and technology), *Ṣàngó* (deity of thunder and justice), *Yemoja* (deity of rivers and motherhood), and *Ọṣun* (deity of love and prosperity). Each òrìṣà embodies specific aspects of divine *àṣẹ* and serves as an intermediary between *Olódùmarè* and human beings¹⁷.

The òrìṣà are not merely mythological figures but active spiritual forces that continue to influence human affairs. They represent archetypal patterns of existence that humans can align themselves with through worship, ritual, and ethical living. The relationship between humans and òrìṣà provides a framework for understanding how divine influence operates in human life without eliminating human agency.

The Ancestors (*Egungun*) occupy a vital position in the order, representing deceased humans who have achieved spiritual advancement and continue to partake in the cosmic order. The ancestors serve as mediators between the living and the divine realm, protection, providing guidance, and wisdom to their descendants. Their continued presence in the world of the living demonstrates the Yorùbá understanding that death is a transition rather than a termination of existence¹⁸.

¹⁷ Thompson, R. F. (2005). *Flash of the spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy*. New York: Vintage Books. 18-45

¹⁸ Drewal, M. T., & Drewal, H. J. (1983). *Gelede: Art and female power among the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press pp.7-29

The ancestral realm is not automatically achieved at death but represents a spiritual achievement that reflects moral charisma and spiritual development during earthly life. Ancestors maintain personal identity while surpassing the boundaries of physical existence, enabling them to perceive and influence events in ways unavailable to incarnate beings. This understanding provides significant context for understanding how Yorùbá ontology perceives the relationship between human agency and spiritual influence.

Living Human Beings holds an exclusive position as conscious agents capable of partaking in both *ayé* and *òrun* while bearing responsibility for preserving harmony between these realms. Humans possess the capacity for spiritual development, moral choice, and creative participation in cosmic processes. This elevated status creates both opportunities and obligations that distinguish human existence from other forms of life¹⁹.

Human beings possess numerous spiritual machineries that connect them to different levels of the cosmic hierarchy. The interaction between these mechanisms creates the complex dynamics of human agency, personality, and spiritual development. Understanding this multidimensional anthropology is crucial for grasping how Yorùbá ontology approaches questions of freedom and determinism.

Animals, Plants, and Natural Forces occupy the inferior levels of the hierarchy but remain participants in the cosmic order through their possession of *àṣẹ*. The Yorùbá worldview knows that all beings possess some degree of spiritual significance and agency,

¹⁹ Bewaji, J. A. (2016). *An introduction to the theory of knowledge: A pluricultural approach*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. pp.7-29

though they differ in their capacity for conscious choice and moral development. This comprehensive understanding of spiritual reality generates a context where human freedom is situated within broader networks of spiritual relationship and cosmic responsibility.

The hierarchical structure is not rigid but dynamic, allowing for movement between levels through moral action, spiritual development, and ritual practice. This fluidity means that the hierarchy describes potentials and relationships rather than static categories, providing a background for understanding spiritual development and moral progress.

3.4 The Human Person in Yorùbá Culture

The Yorùbá understanding of the human person reflects a cultured anthropology that recognizes numerous dimensions of human life and their complex interrelatedness. This multidimensional view of personhood has profound implications for understanding human agency, moral responsibility, and spiritual development within the Yorùbá worldview.

Ara (Body) represents the material dimension of human existence, encompassing not merely physical substance but the embodied basis for experience and action in the material world. The body is not understood as a prison or impediment to spiritual development but as the necessary vehicle through which consciousness operates and

through which destiny is fulfilled. The health and proper care of the body therefore have both practical and spiritual significance²⁰.

Emi (Life Force) constitutes the animating principle that distinguishes living beings from inanimate objects. *Emi* connects individual existence to the cosmic life force that flows throughout creation, suggesting that human life participates in broader patterns of cosmic energy. This life force can be strengthened or weakened through various practices and choices, influencing both personal vitality and spiritual development. The concept of *emi* indicates that human existence involves dynamic participation in cosmic processes rather than static individual isolation²¹.

Ori (Spiritual Head/Destiny) represents perhaps the most complex and philosophically significant aspect of Yorùbá anthropology. *Ori* functions simultaneously as personal consciousness, individual spiritual essence, and the bearer of personal destiny. This tripartite function means that understanding *ori* is crucial for comprehending how individual agency relates to cosmic order and predetermined life patterns²².

The *ori* is believed to choose destiny before birth in the presence of *Olódùmarè*, selecting the fundamental constraints that will structure the individual's life experience. However, this pre-birth choice should not be interpreted as external obligation but as the deepest

²⁰ Sowunmi, M. A. (1999). Yoruba concept of predestination: A philosophical analysis. *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 31(2), 156-172.

²¹ Vidal, T. (2020). Orality and the preservation of Yoruba philosophical thought. *African Philosophy Today*, 12(3), 78-95.

²² Gbadegesin Op. Cit.,

expression of individual identity and aspiration. The *orí* chooses what it fundamentally is and wishes to become, creating continuity between pre-birth choice and ongoing life experience²³.

Throughout life, the *orí* continues to act as the seat of spiritual connection, decision-making, and consciousness. Failure and success in life depends significantly on the bond between the individual and their *orí*, with various practices accessible for solidifying this relationship and aligning conscious choices with deeper destiny patterns. This ongoing relationship means that destiny involves continuous participation rather than passive acceptance of predetermined fate²⁴.

3.5 The Notion of "Ayanmo" in Yorùbá Ontology

The concept of *àyànmó* embodies one of the most philosophically significant aspects of Yorùbá thought, presenting a cultured understanding of human destiny that cannot be easily characterized within traditional Western frameworks of freedom versus determinism. The term *àyànmó* is often interpreted as "fate" or "destiny," but these interpretations fail to capture the full complexity of the concept as understood within Yorùbá ontology²⁵.

²³Sogolo, G. S. (2003). The concept of cause in African thought. In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *The African philosophy reader* New York: Routledge. pp. 192-205.

²⁴ Olúwólé, S. B. (2017). Ifá as a body of knowledge and as an academic discipline. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 47(1), 34-59.

²⁵ Abimbola, K. (1975). The concept of Ori and human destiny in Yoruba traditional thought. *Journal of African Religion*, 3(2), 73-89.

The word *àyànmó* came from the Yorùbá phrase "*a-yàn-mó*," which figuratively means "that which one chooses and becomes fixed." This etymology is philosophically important because it proposes that destiny is not imposed outwardly but signifies the consequence of choice, notwithstanding choice made in a pre-incarnate state. The linguistic structure of the term thus translates the fundamental Yorùbá insight that destiny involves both agency and constraint, choice and fixity²⁶.

The term covers several related concepts that mirrors different aspects of the destiny complex. *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn* refers to "that which is knelt down to choose," emphasizing the deliberate and reverent nature of the destiny selection process. *Àkúnlẹ̀gbà* suggests "that which is knelt down to receive," stressing the element of divine gift or grace involved in destiny formation. These variations reveal the multifaceted nature of destiny as simultaneously chosen and received, earned and granted.

According to Yorùbá cosmology, the selection of destiny occurs in the divine realm before incarnation. The *ori* (personal head/destiny) of the prospective person appears before *Olódùmarè* to choose the basic parameters of the coming earthly existence. This choice includes essential life conditions such as general life trajectory, family background,

²⁶ Olademo, O. (2012). Yoruba philosophy of existence: Eniyan laso mi. *Philosophia Africana*, 15(1), 78-85.

major opportunities and challenges, and the ultimate purpose or mission of the incarnation²⁷.

The destiny selection process is understood as genuinely free choice made by the *ori* in its pre-incarnate state of expanded consciousness and spiritual clarity. Unlike earthly choices that are controlled by limited information and opposing desires, the prenatal choice of destiny is made with full awareness of cosmic determinations and spiritual development needs. This understanding preserves genuine agency while explaining why certain life circumstances appear to be beyond individual control.

The content of chosen destiny is not exhaustively detailed but establishes general patterns and parameters within which earthly life unfolds. Yorùbá understanding distinguishes between *àyànmọ́ rere* (good destiny) and *àyànmọ́ burúkú* (bad destiny), not in terms of ease or difficulty but in terms of spiritual opportunity and moral potential. A challenging life may represent good destiny if it provides optimal conditions for spiritual growth and cosmic service.

The Relationship Between Destiny and Character

Yorùbá thought recognizes a multifaceted relationship between *àyànmọ́* (destiny) and *ìwá* (character), understanding these as harmonizing rather than conflicting aspects of human existence. Character represents the dynamic element of personality that develops through

²⁷ Salami, Y. K. (2006). The democratic structure of Yoruba political-cultural heritage. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 1(6), 134-150.

conscious choice and moral effort, while destiny provides the structural framework within which character formation occurs²⁸.

Good character (*ìwá rere*) is essential for destiny fulfillment, regardless of whether one's chosen destiny is outwardly challenging or easy. The advancement of character through moral choice and spiritual practice can improve or reduce the fulfillment of one's chosen destiny. This creates an energetic relationship where destiny provides chances and restrictions, while character determines how effectively those chances are utilized and restrictions transcended.

The Yorùbá saying "*ìwá l'ẹwà*" (character is beauty) reflects the conviction that moral and spiritual development represents the uppermost form of human achievement. Character development is understood as partly free; individuals can choose to cultivate vice or virtue within the parameters set by their destiny. This choice is real and consequential, affecting not only the current incarnation but future spiritual development and destiny selections.

***Àyànmọ́* and Cosmic Justice**

The concept of *àyànmọ́* is closely related to Yorùbá understandings of cosmic justice and moral accountability. The prenatal choice of destiny is understood to reflect the spiritual

²⁸ Oyeshile, O. A. (2008). On the Yoruba concept of a person. In K. Gyekye & K. Wiredu (Eds.), *A companion to African philosophy* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. pp. 101-118.

needs and karmic requirements of the choosing entity, ensuring that each incarnation provides appropriate opportunities for spiritual development and moral rectification²⁹.

This framework addresses questions of apparent injustice and inequality by locating them within broader contexts of spiritual development that extend across multiple incarnations. Challenging life circumstances are not understood as arbitrary suffering but as chosen opportunities for spiritual growth and cosmic service. This understanding provides comfort and meaning without eradicating the reality of suffering or the importance of working to improve it.

The concept also highlights personal responsibility for spiritual development within chosen restrictions. While individuals cannot change the basic parameters of their destiny, they remain responsible for how they respond to destiny's trials and chances. This responsibility extends to helping others fulfill their destinies and contributing to collective spiritual advancement.

3.5 "Ayanmo" as the Problem of Freewill and Determinism

The Yorùbá concept of *àyànmó* presents unique philosophical challenges that both parallel and differ from the traditional Western problem of free will and determinism. Understanding how *àyànmó* generates philosophical problems requires careful analysis of

²⁹ Sowunmi, M. A. (1999). Yoruba concept of predestination: A philosophical analysis. *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 31(2), 156-172.

the apparent tensions between prenatal choice, earthly agency, and spiritual constraint within Yorùbá metaphysical framework.

The Paradox of Chosen Constraint

The most obvious philosophical difficulty arises from the notion that destiny is simultaneously chosen and constraining. If the *ori* freely chooses its destiny before incarnation, in what sense can the incarnate person be said to be free when that destiny establishes parameters that limit earthly choices? This creates a temporal paradox where past choice (by the *ori*) constrains present choice (by the incarnate person), even though both past and present choosers are understood as aspects of the same identity³⁰.

This paradox becomes more compound when we consider that the incarnate individual typically has no conscious memory of the prenatal choice, meaning that restrictions appear to be externally imposed even though they were originally self-imposed. The Yorùbá framework must explain how genuine agency can be preserved when the agent is unconscious of their previous choices and thus unable to understand the rationale for current restrictions.

Furthermore, the framework asks questions about the relationship between the *ori's* prenatal knowledge and the incarnate person's earthly ignorance. If the *ori* chooses destiny with full knowledge of cosmic purposes and spiritual needs, while the incarnate

³⁰ Hallen, B. (2000). *The good, the bad, and the beautiful: Discourse about values in Yoruba culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 89-105

person operates with restricted knowledge and inconsistent desires, which perspective should be considered authoritative? This creates potential conflicts between prenatal wisdom and earthly agency.

The Problem of Moral Responsibility

Àyànmó also generates complex questions about moral responsibility that parallel but differ from Western discussions. If major life situations and even personality tendencies are established through prenatal choice, to what extent can individuals be held responsible for their actions and character? The framework must explain how moral accountability can be preserved when significant aspects of moral behavior appear to be predetermined.

The Yorùbá response involves distinguishing between different levels of choice and obligation. While basic life parameters may be established prenatally, individuals retain responsibility for how they respond to those parameters and develop their character within them. This creates a layered understanding of responsibility where individuals are accountable for conscious choices while being supported or constrained by unconsciously chosen circumstances³¹.

The concept of *ìwá'* (character) becomes crucial in this context, representing the domain where genuine moral agency operates. Character development through conscious choice

³¹ Bewaji, J. A. I. (2004). Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief and the theistic problem of evil. *African Studies Quarterly*, 7(4), 145-162.

and spiritual practice remains possible regardless of destiny's constraints, preserving moral responsibility while acknowledging structural limitations. This understanding suggests that freedom operates primarily in the domain of character formation rather than circumstantial control.

The Question of Change and Development

Another philosophical challenge concerns the possibility of changing or transcending one's chosen destiny. If *àyànmọ́* is truly fixed, does this eliminate the possibility of genuine transformation and spiritual development? Conversely, if destiny can be changed, what preserves its character as destiny rather than mere preference or inclination?

Yorùbá thought addresses this tension by distinguishing between the essential structure of destiny and its specific manifestation. While the basic pattern of destiny remains constant, the quality of its fulfillment can vary dramatically based on character development, spiritual practice, and moral choice. Additionally, spiritual advancement in one incarnation can influence the destiny selection for future incarnations, preserving long-term agency and development³².

The concept of *àtúnwá* (reincarnation) adds another dimension to this discussion by suggesting that ultimate spiritual freedom may require multiple incarnations to achieve.

³² Lawuyi, O. B. (1988). The Yoruba historian and the concept of time. *History in Africa*, 15, 91-108.

This long-term perspective allows for genuine development and choice while maintaining the integrity of particular destiny patterns within individual lifetimes.

3.7 "Ayanmo" as a Reconciliation of the Debate between Freewill and Determinism

The Yorùbá concept of *àyànmọ́* offers a distinctive approach to resolving the apparent conflict between freedom and determinism, providing insights that transcend the limitations of traditional Western formulations while preserving the essential concerns that motivate both sides of the debate.

Temporal Pluralism and Multi-Level Agency

The Yorùbá framework resolves the freedom-determinism problem by recognizing multiple temporal perspectives and levels of agency operating simultaneously. From the perspective of prenatal choice, human destiny represents genuine freedom exercised by the *ori* in a state of expanded consciousness and cosmic awareness. From the perspective of earthly existence, destiny appears as constraint that provides structure for incarnate choice and moral development³³.

This temporal pluralism avoids the either-or logic that characterizes much Western debate by recognizing that freedom and constraint can coexist at different levels of analysis. The *ori*'s prenatal freedom establishes the context within which incarnate freedom operates, creating a nested hierarchy of agency that preserves both divine sovereignty and human

³³ Gbadegesin Op. Cit., 67-89

responsibility. This approach acknowledges that freedom itself has prerequisites, it requires appropriate contexts and spiritual development to be exercised effectively.

The framework also recognizes that different types of choice operate according to different principles. Prenatal choice by the *ori* involves comprehensive awareness and cosmic perspective, while incarnate choice involves partial knowledge and developmental learning. Both are genuine forms of agency, but they operate within different constraints and serve different purposes within the overall pattern of spiritual development.

Character as the Domain of Freedom

The Yorùbá emphasis on *ìwá'* (character) as the primary domain of human freedom provides a middle path between hard determinism and libertarian free will. While major life circumstances may be constrained by prenatal choice, the development of moral character remains genuinely open to human effort and choice. This preserves the essential insight of free will defenders, that humans are genuine moral agents, while acknowledging the constraining influence of factors beyond immediate control³⁴.

Character formation operates through accumulated choices and spiritual practices that gradually shape personality and spiritual development. These choices are constrained by destiny's parameters but not determined by them, creating space for genuine moral

³⁴ Makinde, M. A. (1988). *African philosophy, culture, and traditional medicine*. Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies.. 125-140

achievement and spiritual progress. The quality of character development influences not only current well-being but future destiny selections, preserving long-term agency and moral accountability.

This approach addresses deterministic concerns by acknowledging the powerful influence of circumstances, heredity, and unconscious factors while maintaining that conscious moral effort can work within and eventually transcend these constraints. The framework recognizes that freedom is not about escaping all constraint but about working skillfully within constraints to achieve spiritual development and moral excellence.

Relational and Community Dimensions

The Yorùbá understanding of *àyànmó* emphasizes that individual destiny is always situated within broader community and cosmic contexts. Personal destiny cannot be understood in isolation but must be comprehended as part of collective destinies involving family, community, and cosmic purposes. This relational emphasis provides another dimension for resolving freedom-determinism tensions³⁵.

Individual freedom is exercised not in isolation but through relationships that provide both support and constraint. The community serves as a context for moral development and spiritual practice, creating collective agency that transcends individual limitations. This understanding suggests that the opposition between freedom and determinism may

³⁵ Wiredu, K. (1980). *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 104-118

itself reflect an overly individualistic perspective that fails to recognize the relational nature of genuine agency.

The ancestral presence in Yorùbá ontology adds another dimension to this relational understanding. Ancestors provide guidance and protection that constrains certain possibilities while opening others, creating a form of spiritual mentorship that enhances rather than diminishes human agency. This ancestral involvement represents a form of loving constraint that supports rather than undermines genuine freedom.

Practical Implications

The Yorùbá approach to destiny has practical implications for moral education, spiritual development, and community organization. Rather than debating whether freedom or determinism is metaphysically correct, the framework focuses on how human beings can work skillfully within the constraints and opportunities provided by their chosen destiny to achieve spiritual fulfillment and moral excellence.

This practical orientation involves developing spiritual practices that enhance awareness of destiny's requirements while cultivating character traits that enable effective response to life's challenges. Divination practices like *Ifá* consultation serve not to predict inevitable futures but to provide guidance about how to work harmoniously with destiny's patterns and opportunities³⁶.

³⁶ Bascom, W. (1969). *Ifá divination: Communication between gods and men in West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp.1-18

The framework also emphasizes the importance of community support and wisdom traditions in helping individuals understand and fulfill their destinies. Elders, spiritual teachers, and community members serve as resources for navigating the complex relationship between personal choice and cosmic purpose, providing practical wisdom for ethical living within destiny's constraints.

Metaphysical Innovation

The *àyànmọ́* concept represents a significant metaphysical innovation that transcends traditional Western categories. By locating ultimate choice in a prenatal state while preserving incarnate agency for character development, the framework avoids both the arbitrariness of completely undetermined choice and the fatalism of complete predetermination.

This approach suggests that the Western problem of free will versus determinism may arise from overly simplistic conceptions of agency, choice, and temporal relationship. The Yorùbá framework indicates that sophisticated understanding of these concepts can dissolve apparent contradictions and create space for both cosmic order and genuine human responsibility.

The framework also provides resources for understanding how individual development contributes to cosmic evolution. Personal spiritual advancement serves broader cosmic purposes while fulfilling individual spiritual needs, creating harmony between self-

interest and cosmic responsibility that transcends the narrow individualism of much Western thought.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Evaluation

Strengths and Contributions

The Yorùbá philosophical framework demonstrates several notable strengths that contribute significantly to global philosophical discourse. First, the concept of *àyànmọ́* provides a sophisticated resolution to the perennial problem of freedom-determinism that avoids the limitations of both hard determinism and libertarian free will. By recognizing that "freedom itself has prerequisites" and operates within appropriate contexts, the framework offers a more nuanced understanding of human agency¹.

Second, the emphasis on character (*ìwá*) as the principal domain of human freedom provides practical direction for moral development while recognizing structural limitations. The Yorùbá saying "*ìwá l'ẹwà*" (character is beauty) mirrors a value system that prioritizes moral and spiritual development as the highest form of human achievement². This approach addresses both deterministic concerns about constraining circumstances and free will concerns about moral responsibility.

¹ Oyeshile, O. A. (2008). On indigenous philosophical concepts as foundations for African development. *Philosophia Africana*, 11(1), 45-58.

² Bewaji, J. A. I. (2004). Ethics and morality in Yoruba culture. In K. Wiredu (Ed.), *A companion to African philosophy* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. pp. 396-403.

Third, the relational and community-oriented nature of Yorùbá ontology offers valuable alternatives to the individualistic assumptions of much Western philosophy. The understanding that individual destiny operates within broader collective contexts provides resources for addressing contemporary problems of isolation and meaninglessness that affect many modern societies.

Fourth, the integration of practical wisdom with metaphysical insights demonstrates the viability of philosophical systems that maintain connections to lived religious and cultural practices. The use of divination practices like *Ifá* consultation to provide guidance about working harmoniously with destiny's patterns illustrates how abstract philosophical concepts can translate into practical life guidance³.

Limitations and Areas for Development

Despite its significant contributions, the Yorùbá framework faces several philosophical and practical challenges that warrant further consideration. The temporal paradox inherent in prenatal choice constraining present choice remains conceptually difficult, particularly given that "the incarnate person typically has no conscious memory of the prenatal choice"⁴. This creates potential conflicts between prenatal wisdom and earthly agency that require more detailed philosophical analysis.

³ Bascom, W. (1991). *Ifa divination: Communication between gods and men in West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.35

⁴ Idowu, E. B. (1994). *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba belief* (Rev. ed.). Ikeja: Longman Nigeria. p.13

The relationship between individual development and cosmic justice through *àyànmó* raises questions about the framework's capacity to address systemic injustices and structural oppression. While the concept provides consolation by locating challenging circumstances within broader contexts of spiritual development, it risks minimizing the importance of social and political action to address immediate suffering and inequality.

The framework's reliance on oral tradition and cultural practice, while preserving practical wisdom, creates challenges for systematic philosophical development and cross-cultural dialogue. The complex tonal nature of Yorùbá language means that crucial philosophical distinctions may be difficult to communicate accurately in non-tonal languages, potentially limiting the framework's accessibility to global philosophical audiences.

Additionally, the hierarchical structure of Yorùbá ontology, while providing cosmic order, may require careful interpretation to avoid reinforcing social hierarchies or limiting human potential for spiritual development. The dynamic nature of the hierarchy needs emphasis to prevent misunderstanding of the framework as supporting rigid stratification.

Contemporary Relevance and Future Directions

The Yorùbá philosophical framework offers valuable resources for addressing contemporary philosophical and practical challenges. The concept of *àyànmó* provides alternatives to both the despair of hard determinism and the anxiety of unlimited freedom, offering a middle path that acknowledges both cosmic order and human responsibility.

This approach may be particularly relevant for addressing mental health challenges related to meaning and purpose in contemporary society.

The framework's emphasis on community and relationships offers important insights for addressing the social fragmentation and individualism that characterize much of modern life. The understanding that genuine agency operates through relationships rather than in isolation provides resources for developing more sustainable and fulfilling approaches to personal development and social organization.

The integration of practical wisdom with metaphysical insight demonstrated in Yorùbá philosophy suggests possibilities for developing philosophical approaches that maintain relevance to lived experience while addressing fundamental questions about existence and purpose. This integration may be particularly valuable as contemporary philosophy seeks to address the gap between academic discourse and practical life guidance.

Future philosophical development of Yorùbá concepts would benefit from continued dialogue between traditional knowledge holders and academic philosophers, ensuring that systematic presentations preserve the integrity and complexity of indigenous concepts while making them accessible to broader audiences. Such dialogue could contribute to the development of genuinely global philosophical discourse that draws on the wisdom of diverse cultural traditions.

The diaspora dimensions of Yorùbá culture, particularly in the Americas and Caribbean, provide additional contexts for philosophical development that demonstrate the

adaptability and continued relevance of these concepts across different historical and social contexts⁵. These developments offer opportunities for understanding how traditional philosophical concepts can evolve and remain vital in contemporary multicultural societies.

In conclusion, the Yorùbá understanding of àyànmó and its broader ontological framework represents a significant philosophical achievement that deserves continued study and development. While facing certain limitations and challenges, this framework offers valuable insights for addressing fundamental questions about human nature, destiny, and moral responsibility that remain relevant across cultural boundaries. The continued preservation, study, and creative development of Yorùbá philosophical concepts contributes to the richness of global philosophical discourse while providing practical wisdom for navigating the complexities of human existence.

4.2 Conclusion

The exploration of Yorùbá ontology and the concept of àyànmó reveals a sophisticated philosophical framework that offers unique insights into fundamental questions about human nature, destiny, and the relationship between freedom and determinism. This indigenous African philosophical system demonstrates remarkable depth and complexity, challenging Western philosophical assumptions while providing practical wisdom for understanding human existence within cosmic order.

⁵ Thompson, R. F. (1984). *Flash of the spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy*. New York: Random House. p.21

The Yorùbá understanding of *àyànmọ́* as "that which one chooses and becomes fixed" represents a significant contribution to philosophical discourse on agency and constraint⁶. By locating ultimate choice in a prenatal state while preserving incarnate agency for character development, this framework transcends the traditional Western dichotomy between free will and determinism. The temporal pluralism inherent in *àyànmọ́* recognizes multiple levels of agency operating simultaneously, the *ori's* prenatal freedom establishing contexts within which incarnate freedom operates through character formation⁷.

The hierarchical ontological structure presented in Yorùbá thought, extending from *Olódùmarè* through the *òrìṣà* to ancestors and living humans, provides a comprehensive metaphysical framework that situates human agency within broader cosmic relationships⁸. This relational emphasis suggests that individual destiny cannot be understood in isolation but must be comprehended as part of collective destinies involving family, community, and cosmic purposes. The concept of *àṣẹ* as both vital force and divine sanction operates at multiple levels, connecting individual human agency to cosmic order while preserving genuine choice and moral responsibility⁹.

⁶ Abimbola, W. (2006). *Ifá divination poetry*. New York: NOK Publishers.

⁷ Ayoade, J. A. A. (1988). Time in Yoruba thought. In R. A. Wright (Ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction* (3rd ed.), Washington: University Press of America. pp. 93-111.

⁸ Gbadegesin, S. (1991). *African philosophy: Traditional Yoruba philosophy and contemporary African realities*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. pp.12-14

⁹ Hallen, B., & Sodipo, J. O. (1997). *Knowledge, belief, and witchcraft: Analytic experiments in African philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. p.14

The multidimensional anthropology of Yorùbá culture, encompassing *ara* (body), *emi* (life force), and *orí* (spiritual head/destiny), offers a holistic understanding of human personhood that integrates material and spiritual dimensions¹⁰. This comprehensive view of human nature provides crucial context for understanding how destiny operates through embodied existence while maintaining connections to spiritual realities.

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¹⁰ Makinde, M. A. (1988). *African philosophy, culture, and traditional medicine*. Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies. p.12

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