

## **Free will and Ise (Action) in Yoruba Philo-Religio-Cultural Thought: An Ethical Appraisal**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the traditional free will discussion with little attention paid to the influence of neuroscience on human free will within the Yoruba Religio-cultural contexts. This study aims to logically examine the implications of the findings of neuroscience on free will in the context of the Yoruba religion, a religion closely related to the culture of the people. Revelations from neuroscience have led to claims that free will is an illusion, a position that threatens human responsibility. There are obvious religious implications for sustaining this claim. This paper seeks to reconcile the position of neuroscience with its implications in the Yoruba religious contexts. The discovery in the field of neuroscience indicate that human decisions for actions are initiated before we are aware of them, thereby suggesting that free will is an illusion and also reconstructing the traditional free will debate. This reconstruction seeks to reaffirm beliefs centred on responsibility which itself is an important element in most world religions and cultures. Serious implications arise for the sustenance of this belief in relation to neuroscience and free will. If indeed we are not free, then our actions are beyond our control. However, we cannot discard the discovery of neuroscience because it is based on empirical proofs and on the other hand, we cannot deny the obvious implications its sustenance would generate especially within the Yoruba religio-cultural contexts. This paper employed the historical and analytical method to elucidate the key insights in this work.

**Keywords:** Neuroscience, Yoruba Religio-cultural believe, Ise (Action), Free will, Ethical analysis

### **Introduction**

Philosophical discussion about free will is of great importance throughout the history of philosophy and human science. It is often said that while philosophers may be good at asking questions, their success in answering them is less impressive (Deery, 2013). This no doubt may seem particularly apt in the case of the free will problem, an issue that has been debated in one form or another for many centuries. Recently, neuroscientists have joined the quest for an answer to this most fundamental question. Within the past few decades, advances in neuroscience have led to claims that unconscious precursors of action commence before the decision to move is consciously

experienced (McKeenna, 1998). In other word, the free voluntary acts are preceded by a specific electrical change in the brain (the "readiness potential" RP) that begins 550ms (milliseconds) before the act. Human subjects are aware of intention to act 340-400ms after RP starts. The volitional process is therefore initiated unconsciously. The discovery in neuroscience shows that, decision making is a biological process which occurs less than one second (550 milliseconds) before human beings are conscious of the urge, intention or will to perform such an act.

This paper deals with the position of neuroscience which suggests that the processes involved in decision making are initiated unconsciously without our awareness. Before we are conscious of the urge or intention to make a decision, the brain "decides" for us. This discovery in the field of neuroscience therefore challenges the traditional belief about free will and our belief that humans are in full control of their will (Russell, 2013). The central preoccupation of philosophers and science concern the difficulties involved in explaining how human freedom and responsibility could be rendered constituent with established assumptions about divine fore-knowledge and predestinations (Enden, 2015). The free will debate within the ambits of the position of neuroscience in the Yoruba religio-cultural contexts forms the area of this work. There are three major religions among the Yoruba's: Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion. Do we have free will? This is an age-old question which has attracted the attention of philosophers, religious scholars, lawyers and political theorists. Now it is attracting the attention of neuroscientists (Greizzaniga, 2011)

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework employed for this work was the Hylomorphic theory of Bolaji Idowu. According to this theory, *man* (referring generally to humans) comprises *Ara* (body) plus *Emi* (spirit) and *Ori* (head). The *Ara* is the concrete, the tangible thing of flesh and bones, which we know through the sense. The symbolic representation of *Ori* by the physical head is indeed indicative of how its importance is construed. As the location of *opolo* (brain), the physical *Ori* is the seat of intelligence. *Ori* represents the inner-head and it is the bearer of destiny. *Emi* is the active force in a person; it is invisible and intangible. *Emi* gives life to the whole *Ara* and it is the *Olodumare* alone that puts *Emi* into man (Idowu, 1982). Hylomorphism is an approach to solving the body - soul problem which has its roots in the works of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Hylomorphic (matter-form') – a theory of the relationship between the mind and the body (or the soul and the body), discusses the unique relationship of the soul with the physical functions of the body.

Further, Hylomorphism proffers a solution to the submission of neuroscience on the will of man by bringing to the fore the insufficiency of empiricism (Castevan, 2012). Hylomorphism has much strength, not the least of which is that it offers an intrinsic explanation for the interaction between mind and brain and it is entirely consistent with the correlation between mental states and brain states that is evident in neuroscience. Thomas Aquinas could have influenced the hylomorphic theory of Bolaji Idowu that man can be explained in both corporeal and incorporeal terms. Thus, the analysis of man is beyond the materialistic theory suggested by neuroscience, especially within the Yoruba religio-cultural contexts where man is explained in purely metaphysical terms. Hylomorphic theory as it was applied to this study was not to negate the submission of neuroscience that free will is an illusion but to illuminate the insufficiency of empirical experiments to the Yoruba metaphysical understanding of man. Thereby making an appeal to the position that humans are not free in order to reconcile the empirical findings of neuroscience with

the obvious religious implications its sustenance would generate especially among the Yoruba people.

### **Biblio-Philosophical and Neuroscience Concept of Free will**

St Augustine's anti-Manichaeism posture was as a result of his disagreement with Manichaeism which had taught that free will or freedom of the will is an original constituent of nature. The theory also argued that there is nothing God himself can do about it. For St. Augustine, freedom was an ineradicable element of undefiled human nature by the fall (Baginni, 2015). However, the state of human nature had changed in such a way that now, in spite of its freedom, human nature is no longer able to liberate itself from its bondage to sin. The problem that St. Augustine had to tackle was how to define grace in such a way that freedom can be ignored, and on the other hand, to define the freedom of the will in such a way that the all-embracing effect of grace was neither reduced nor limited. St. Augustine also refuted the Neo-Platonic position which saw evil as, being purely metaphysical in origin. As regards moral evil, Plotinus' answer was that evil sprang from the individual soul's involvement with the body. Moral evil is a deficiency of this graded hierarchy (Armstrong, 1993). St. Augustine considered Plotinus answer as inadequate and unsatisfactory. Evil, as St. Augustine opines, is still a negative quantity, even though this nothingness expresses itself as a result manifest power in perversion and confusion of nature and the will.

In the Pelagian controversy over the issue of free will, St. Augustine argues that if good is at man's free will, why do not more men attain good? Thus St. Augustine quoted with approval St. Paul's statement that "I do not do what I wish to do, I do what I hate. The will to do good thing is present in me but I do not find the power to achieve it" (Rome 7:15. 18). According to St. Augustine, free will is the cause of our doing evil and so God's punishment is entirely just. Thus he wrote, Free will is the cause of our doing evil. The most prevalent theme in theodicies in general is the emphasis on human free will. "Free will is often defined as capacity for self-determination. Man by nature is a free being, a rational being. If free will could be substituted for freedom, it could then be argued that it is inseparable from rationality. Consequently, to lose one's rationality is to lose one's freedom" (Henry, 1997).

St. Augustine used the account of the creation narrative in the Book of Genesis as his basis of free will argument. God chose to create being endowed with free will. It is the view that man cannot be truly free unless man is free to do evil. Thus, the possibility of evil is inherent in man's free will. St. Augustine stressed that God created our progenitors, Adam and Eve, in a state of perfection and also placed them in an ideal Utopian condition. They were endowed with free will. They rebelled against God and as a consequence they fell from their original idyllic situation in which every comfort was provided. Adam and Eve were then not compelled to eat the forbidden tree, but they exercised their free will.

As regard moral evil, Free will is an innate quality in man. It is to choose any of the options before him. At any given time, there is always the option of doing good or evil. If one is guided by the basic notion of good or bad in the society, then man's free will is exercised in the choice between good and evil. St. Augustine saw free will as the cause of man's doing evil, man freely chooses evil or good. Whatever action a man performs, it is performed freely. Evil should not be ascribed to God at all, but rather to the independent actions of human beings supposed to have been endowed by God with freedom of the will. According to St. Augustine, God cannot be held responsible for the misuse of free will to do evil (Beritold, 1981). The decisive thing to be

recognised and which mattered a great deal to St. Augustine, is that we are helpless when we are entirely dependent upon ourselves and that God's grace must do no less than everything in order to save us. This of course does not mean that man does not possess any freedom of will at all, but only that will of itself is always inclined to sin and is never in a position to change its inclination. God's grace, therefore, cannot be moved by our good violation, but rather exactly the opposite. Thus, St. Augustine opines that the human's will do not achieve grace through freedom but rather freedom through grace" (Von, 1992).

Moreover, St. Augustine claims that man has free will in the sense that the will is not subject to coercive force. To say that man has free will is to say that man has free will in so far as his act is an expression of his character - what he is. That is, man's free will is determined by his character. Free will, to St. Augustine, is not just the question of the will one's will (Castellan, 2012). It is not just a question of simple choice as the Pelagians were inclined to think it is. As such, issue between St. Augustine and the Pelagian is also the question of self-determination. For St. Augustine, man will is still his will, even though it has become corrupted and depraved. However, St. Augustine did not teach the total depravity of man, the image of God in man though defaced is not obliterated (Anglicary, 1990).

However, if human freedom can be reconciled with God's grace, the question still remains as to whether God's sovereignty can be reconciled with Adam's sin. Why did Adam sin if God's grace was sovereign? St. Augustine answered this by suggesting that God knows that Adam would sin. In this sense, Adam was predestined to sin and therefore to condemnation. In one sense, this seems absurd unless we remember a point made earlier on that for St. Augustine, evil and sin have no ontological reality. It is a deprivation of the good. Adam's sin, therefore, and his infection of mankind can have no ontological effect on God's purpose and His sovereignty. For God has predestined some to condemnation. According to St. Augustine, no man has the right to salvation, all men deserve condemnation. To St. Augustine, that some are saved at will is merely another aspect of God's gracious love. (Dommeyer, 2006).

### **The Concept of Man among the Yoruba**

The free will problem premised on the position of neuroscience revolves around the issue of self-awareness of causes of actions'. It is therefore necessary to have a clear understanding of human personality among the Yoruba in order to understand the implications of a scientific finding on human will. This is important because the Yoruba understanding of man is quite different from the western position. This difference is necessary in order to situate the concept of free will rightly in the Yoruba religious contexts. The Yoruba traced their ancestry to a common progenitor called Oduduwa. The Yoruba people predominate in south western Nigeria and are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Aderibigbe, 2009). The Yoruba people are one of the largest tribes in Africa, with about thirty million individuals throughout the region of Africa. Their physical environment, history, mythology, language, artistic traditions, thought systems, social and political institutions, religion, moral and aesthetic values, economic and medical systems in Africa and the Diaspora have been and are still of great attention to scholars and researchers (Odusanya, 1993).

Meanwhile, several myths credit the holy city, Ile-Ife as the cradle of Yoruba. According to a local tradition, Ile-Ife was the place - where God created man. Their history is traced to Oduduwa, who was the son of Lamurudu, sometimes described as an oiler from the East or a prince from Mecca (Ifeika, 1982). The Yoruba occupy the whole of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Lagos and Ekiti states,

a substantial part of Kwara state and some parts of Kogi states including a local government in Edo state (Awolalu, 1976). The Yoruba are not found in Nigeria alone, they are found in other parts of Africa. Due to the European colonial policy, the homeland of the Yoruba now spans the four West African countries of Nigeria, Republic of Benin, Togo and Ghana. The space occupied by the Yoruba lies roughly between the latitude 6 degrees 30 east and with an estimated area of about 181,300 sqKm. The descendants of the Yoruba are also found in some parts of the West Indies and South America - Brazil and Cuba (Atanda, 1980).

Moreover, Yoruba people find themselves in a diversified physical environment which offers their race a unique opportunity for diversified manifestations expressed in diverse occupations. The Yoruba people are also involved actively in arts and crafts which include wood carving, stone carving, metal carving, bronze casting, ivory casting, pottery making and bead making. The Yoruba race at home and abroad has succeeded in producing several illustrious sons and daughters who have excelled in various professions ranging from Sports, Music or Entertainment, Engineering, Economics, Defence, Information Technology, Trading among several others (Odusanya, 1983). Yoruba like many other races in the world believe that man's nature is partly material and partly immaterial. Hence, every part of the human body is important to the Yoruba both in the material and spiritual sense. To the Yoruba, a man is seen as having both physical and non-physical nature.

As a result of the spiritual understanding of man to have a non-physical nature, the Yoruba believe that the existence of a human being does not start on this earth. It is held that a man's existence starts in heaven with a series of events which involves a preparation for his sojourn on earth. Akintola (1999) discusses how human beings prepare themselves for their respective earth-lives. It is quite clear that, to the Yoruba, a person's activities in this world are determined by a lot of factors beyond the materialistic activities in his brain. The Yoruba believe that a man having completed the first phase of his journey to the world by series of activities, in which he prepares himself for the first journey, begins the second phase. The second phase is the real journey to the earth which is directly premised on the choice made kneeling before *Olodumare* as seen in the works of Idowu and Awolalu.

### **Ori and Human Destiny**

*Ori* (head) is an important composite element of man which the Yoruba believe determines the course of a man's existence in this world. *Ori* literally means head, but to the Yoruba, it is not just a physical head. Incidentally, *Opolo* (brain) of a person and *lye* (consciousness) are directly associated with *Ori*. The concept of *Ori* is necessary for any Yoruba understanding of what Neuroscience holds as regards the free will debate. The concept of *Ori* among the Yoruba is closely related to what is understood as destiny. There are different types of interpretations used interchangeably to express destiny. Different definitions of *kadara* (destiny) among the Yoruba were discussed in the works of scholars such as: Dasylva, Awolalu, Ola Rotimi among others. They situate the Yoruba view of destiny erroneously in the western context. The western conception of destiny is synonymous with fate, which is not so among the Yoruba. Adetunji explains the clear distinction between *Ayanmo* and *Ori* (Adetunji 2001). Another terminology related to the concept of destiny is the word *kadara* as seen in the works of Olaleye. *Ogo* (glory) and *Irawo* (star) are two close terminologies that are also related to the concept of destiny in Yoruba belief system.



The Yoruba belief about destiny is something given and unalterable and something which in certain conditions and under certain condition can be altered. This two sided conception of the Yoruba on human destiny suggests a problem and indicates determinism or fatalism, some myths showing the relationship between Ori and a person's destiny. The Yoruba see the end of life here on earth as an element of serious importance. Death is a fact that is disturbing yet inevitable. Awolalu and Dopamu discussion showed that the Yoruba believe that a man does not die, since what guides and controls a man's personality is not mortal and he will go back to his creator at death. The concept of immortality is very crucial to the free will debate especially from the religious perspective. And its presence or absence has serious implications. If there is no free will, then other religious notions resting on this belief will crumble, especially the ones premised on reward and punishment in the after - life.

### **Implications of the Discovery of Neuroscience on the Free will Discussion within The Contexts of the Yoruba Religio-Philosophical View**

History reveals to us that religion often gives credence to scientific positions eventually even in spite of the initial resistance to new findings which are at odds with its positions. The submission of neuroscience which is used as the premise to suggest that free will does not exist has serious implications in any civilised society. 'Not having free will' is indeed a severe threat to the established notion of responsibility firmly established in *Yoruba* religious and cultural beliefs. Among contemporary Yoruba societies in Nigeria, three main religions are practiced: Christianity, Islam and the Traditional religion of the people known as their indigenous religion. Religion permeates every aspect of the lives of the Yoruba people.

The Yoruba believe clearly that *Olodumare* (God) exists and His non-existence does not occur to the Yoruba. Several other beliefs in the religion and culture of the people revolve around this belief. Apart from the belief in God, another important belief in Yoruba religion is the belief in Divinities. Yoruba religion is very rich in these divine beings. Some of these divine beings are worshipped widely, while others are worshipped locally (Awolalu, 1979). The Yoruba believe strongly in forces that are neither experienced nor empirically most times. These forces are spirits, although they cannot be seen with the physical eyes. In most cases, their existence is real among the Yoruba.

The Yoruba like other African societies believe that death does not mean the end of a person's existence. In fact, several other beliefs of the Yoruba revolve around this concept of immortality. According to Mbiti, in order to emphasize the nature of the existence of the ancestors, he calls them 'living dead'. This belief has an influence on the actions of the Yoruba. Yoruba people belief in magic and medicine, although the existence of these powers cannot be proven empirically, their manifestations are a reality to the Yoruba as well as other African societies. There is the belief that a person's will can be suspended for a period of time through magic and such a person will not be conscious of what he/she does for that period of time, this is called *Eedi*. James (1983) discussed these mysterious powers, in order not to create a wrong impression of the practice of magic in Yoruba religion; the positive roles of these powers were exempted.

### **Yoruba Religious Implications of the Discovery of Neuroscience in the Free will Debate**

The position of neuroscience suggests that the processes involved in decision making are initiated unconsciously. This means that before we are conscious of the urge or intention to make a decision, the brain "decides" for us. The discovery in the field of neuroscience therefore challenges the traditional belief about free will and our beliefs that humans are in full control of their will. How

will this position of neuroscience affect the established Yoruba religious beliefs? This session focuses on the implications of the findings of neuroscience on Yoruba religious belief systems. If the findings of neuroscience are acceptable as valid since they are empirical, it is necessary to examine the areas of Yoruba religion that will be affected. The following are some of the implications of the positions of neuroscience on free will in the Yoruba religion

### **Iwa (Character)**

As opines by Abogunrin (1989), when the Yoruba talk about the *Iwa* (character) of a person, they are talking about his/her essential nature. The Yoruba lay a lot of emphasis on *Iwa* and its usage is very common in human relationships as seen in the works of Labeodan (2006). The concept of *Iwa* will be rendered meaningless, if the findings of neuroscience on free will are sustained. This is because most times when the Yoruba talk about a person's *iwa*, they are referring to an ethical evaluation of a his/her conducts. Several sayings of the Yoruba emphasize the importance of *Iwa*. The assessment of a person's *Iwa* is only possible if there is free will. If there is no free will, then it is valid to assert that there is no *Iwa*. The existence of *iwa* is premised directly on the existence of free will. Free will is a necessary prerequisite in any context of *Iwa*.

### **Omoluabi (Good Personality)**

Among the Yoruba, *Omoluabi* (Good Personality) is a philosophical quintessential description of a person with a good character. *Omoluabi* is not just a person with *Iwa* - rere (good character), but he/she is a person with good personality par excellence. If everybody is an *Omoluabi*, then it will not be necessary to classify some as *Omoluabi*. This is because their extremely good character will be an everyday occurrence and it will not be essential to identify them and their actions. According to Bibire - Oyedele (2015), *Omoluabi* is more or less a rare title reserved only for those perceived to be totally above board in almost all ramifications. Adeoye (2010) discusses the importance attached to the *Omoluabi*. *Omoluabi* is a highly placed name or title in Yoruba philosophical, cultural and religious contexts. *Omoluabi* can only be used logically if all what the person does are freely done. If there is no free will as posited from the findings of neuroscience, then we cannot call a person *Omoluabi*. In fact, the title will be rendered meaningless. *Omoluabi* is only meaningful when humans have free will. If the argument for the absence of free will is sustained, it means the demise of the concept of *Omoluabi*. To say that free will is an illusion equally amounts to saying *Omoluabi* is an illusion.

### **Praise and Blame Involvement**

The belief in Yoruba religious- cultural contexts that will be affected by sustaining the position of neuroscience suggesting that free will does not exist is notion of Praise and Blame. Praise and blame are directly premised on responsibility. When a person is blamed for something, he/she could be praised if he/she had acted otherwise. The Yoruba race has a very rich culture and there are cultural ways of expressing praise and blame. *Oriki* can also be described as a kind of Yoruba literary genre used to inspire people. In Yoruba, the brave - heroes and the warriors in a community have *Oriki* with which they are identified. The traitors - the compromises in the community also have their *Oriki* (Keyinsola 2015). Satire is an astonished mechanism for controlling deviant behaviours in the Yoruba society. According to Adejumo (2007), the Yoruba society condemns shame and people are expected to avoid doing things that will bring shame to them. There are so many sayings of the Yoruba that show their ways of blaming or praising people for their actions.

### **Reward and Punishment**

Closely related to praise and blame are reward and Punishment mechanism for controlling social behaviour in the Yoruba society. Awolalu (1979) mentions anti-wickedness divinities such as *Ayelala or Sango* who can identify and single out wicked persons for punishment which may result in "bad" death. Kote - Abimbola (2014) describes *Esu* as the one who occupies the apex of the Yoruba pantheon because he serves the policing function. Awolalu (1979) calls him the 'inspector - general'. There is a strong belief in retributive judgment on earth which is instantaneous in most cases in the Yoruba religion. This is seen in the activities of Sango and Ogun whom are called the chief guardians of human morality, and who will deal ruthlessly with anyone who swears falsely in their names.

The second notion of reward and punishment is the one that occurs after death. Free will is very crucial to reward and punishment because it will be unjust to punish someone or reward another if the actions were not free. Reward and punishment are premised on free will. This is because a person is punished based on the belief that he/she deserves to be punished. This emphasizes the relationship between freedom and punishment. The whole notion of the concept of reward and punishment in the Yoruba belief system shows the belief of the people in free will. Reward and punishment are premised on the existence of free will. It will not be valid to accept reward and punishment and deny free will for this will amount to a contradiction.

### **Eewo (Taboo)**

There are norms firmly established in the ways of life of the people. Among the Yoruba, taboos represent social and religious rules that control and guide the ways of life of the people. The word Taboo is expressed as *Eewo* among the Yoruba. *Eewo* is an encompassing word which covers virtually every area of life. This ranges from personal conducts within the home, etiquette, eating habits, how to relate with elders and among peers, words that should not be mentioned in their proper names. *Eewo* also involves the requirements of the deities and the ancestors. There are so many things Yoruba will not do. Some of these may be superstitious while others may have religious significance. The seriousness of *Eewo* implies a strong will not to do such things which is what free will is all about. Taboo shows clearly the Yoruba believe in free will (Odejobi, 2013).

### **Ethical Duties and Obligations**

Ethical Duties and Obligations is another important concept that will be affected if free will is an illusion. In attempting a definition of ethics, scholars identify a strong link between ethics and morality. This definition is very adequate as far as the Yoruba are concerned; this is because, it is not easy to remove morality from Yoruba religion because there are religious sanctions for moral breaches. According to Oyeshile (2004) religion plays considerable role in determining the moral norms of the Yoruba, it is definitely not the sole origin as there are other sources of Yoruba moral norms such as custom and habit, human rationality and even human experience. There are certain behaviours which are acceptable as far as the Yoruba are concerned at least in most Yoruba community's moral acts such as: chastity, hospitality, kindness, generosity, loyalty, patience, and etiquette among several others are acceptable. The Yoruba value ethical obligations and duties and anyone found wanting in this regard is simply seen as a person lacking in upbringing. Ethical obligations and duties are derivative of free will. Saying there is no free will while insisting that there we are obliged to abide by certain duties and obligations will amount to a contradiction. Free will is necessary if the Yoruba understanding of ethical duties and obligations would be upheld.



### **Imule (Covenant Making)**

Covenant plays a significant role in the religion of the Yoruba people. It is employed in different relationships in order to protect the interests of the individual parties involved. Yoruba words for covenant include: *fieri, majemu, ipimi*. In an attempt to explain the purpose of covenant, devotees could enter into covenant relationship with their tutelary divinities. Ogunleye (2013) also states other different roles of covenant among the Yoruba. The guidelines for Yoruba self-development as handed down from the ancestor's echoes the seriousness of issues relating to covenant. Covenant rests ultimately on free will. One cannot say a person has breached the agreement of a covenant if free will is an illusion.

### **Otito (Truth)**

Most cultures detest falsehood and truth is expected from people at all times. The Yoruba expect the truth from people, in conversations, in business transactions and even in marital relationships. Akintola (1999) sees *Otito* as the spiritual essence of God. Truth is seen as one of the most important virtues. *Otito*, together with love and harmony are seen as the very essence of Olodumare. Truth is expressed by honesty and it also shows the quality of human heart and expresses perfection. Truth is a basic virtue and finds itself expressed in other secondary virtues like purity and wisdom. The Yoruba believe that the truthful will enjoy the blessings of the divinities. According to Akintola (1999), Odu Ejiogbe portrays truth as a positive directive for living:

*S' Otito*

*Enito s' otito*

*Ni "male gbe*

*Speak the truth*

*Be truthful always*

*For the divinities*

*Favor Only those who speak the truth.*

Ogunda Meji directs women to be truthful to their husbands, warning that in order to be Successful, untruthfulness must be eschewed.

*Kodara K'obinrin*

*Purofoko re*

*Eso'l'afisase-yori*

*It is bad for a woman*

*To be untruthful to her husband*

*There is much care it takes to be successful in life.*

*Otito* is seen as very powerful, a force, that will eventually catch up with one. This is the reason for the saying in Yoruba which goes thus: *bi Iroba lo logunodun, ijokan l'otito yio baa*, meaning *if a lie goes undetected for twenty years, one day truth will catch up with it*. The significant position of *Otito* among the Yoruba shows its importance to the people. For any idea to be recognised as "truth" means the option of falsehood exists. When a person says the truth, it means the person could have lied but he chose the truth. The notion of option and choice which are necessary conditions for truth to be in place is the basis for free will. If free will is seen as an illusion, then we can as well say truth is an illusion. This is because the presence of free will is a necessary pre-

requisite for truth to make sense. *Otito* as important as it is in the religion and culture of the Yoruba, can only make sense if free will is in place.

### **The Position of Neuroscience on Free will and Its Implications in Yoruba Religion**

Different kinds of models have been used to solve the free will/determinism problem. Historically, there are many kinds of determinisms - "Hard" determinism and "soft" determinism. The two are terms invented by James (1956) who lamented the fact that some determinists were co-opting the term freedom for themselves. It must be stated that Hard determinists deny the existence of free will. The concept of *Ori* held among the Yoruba is a variant of determinism. Soft Determinists are identified in contemporary circles as compatibilists who accept both determinism and the free will.

Compatibilism does not reject determinism as Libertarianism does, but accommodates it within the notion of man as a free agent. Although, Laplace (2001) suggested that the future was a necessary consequence of the past plus the laws of nature, and inferred from this deterministic view that we do not have free will. One way to respond to these challenges is to find a way to block these various arguments for the view that the future is beyond our control. Another way is to try to defend a view of free will which makes it compatible with the future being, in some senses, beyond control. The view that free will is compatible with determinism is called compatibilism (Jeff, 2006). The Yoruba believe that there are certain things beyond our control as humans but at the same time believe that human should take responsibility for their actions, making free will compatible with notions on determinism. Though, determinism is true as in the case of *Ori*, a man has more than one possible future determinable by other factors subject to his personal will. These are factors like: strength of character, education, association, exposure, life style among several others.

The focus of this research, no doubt, is reconciling the position of neuroscience with the Yoruba view of man as a free agent. It is then imperative to answer a fundamental question derivable from this view. How can the position of neuroscience be made compatible with the Yoruba concept of man as established in the Yoruba religion? The answer to this question lies in the theoretical model adopted for this work which is hylomorphism. Hylomorphism as a theory provides answers to reconciling the position of neuroscience with the Yoruba concept of man. It also provides means for reconciling the sustenance of the findings of neuroscience on human will with its implications within the contexts of the Yoruba religion. Hylomorphism offers a logical way out of the dilemma of the positions of neuroscience with the common and practical view of human beings.

### **Hylomorphism in Yoruba Religious Contexts**

Hylomorphism is a philosophical theory used to solve the metaphysical problem of the nature of the existence of human beings. It is from Greek words *hyle*, "matter"; *morphe*, "form". This theory is often traced to Aristotle because he left a lasting legacy in the ontology of man which is still relevant in contemporary discourses. Hylomorphism as a theory reveals that a human being has two distinct features. It shows that there is the body and that there is the soul and that there is a special kind of relationship between the two. Yoruba philosophy holds that *Olodumare* provides the linkage between matter and form. It is through the divinities in the service of *olodumare* that we understand the relationship between the body and the soul. To the Yoruba, the physical part of man is recognized and acknowledged, but this is just a part of the whole package. The Yoruba understanding of man tilts more towards the metaphysical part than the physical. The Yoruba believe that a person is not just what we see.

In Yoruba philosophy, holding on to the theory of Idowu, who was greatly influenced by the Aristotlean school of thought, shows the dual nature of man. According to Idowu (1999), who says succinctly that to the question 'what is man?' the Yoruba will answer off-handedly that man is body plus spirit (*Emi*). The body is the concrete tangible thing of flesh and bones which we know through the sense, which can be described in a general way or analytically by anatomy. *Emi*, on the other hand, is invisible and intangible. It is that which gives life to the whole body. While the body can be created and is created by a divinity, it is *Olodumare* alone who puts *Emi* into man, thus giving him life and being.

The Yoruba understanding of man shows that there is another part of man which may not be subjectable to scientific experiments. This other part of man is the non-physical part of man, which incidentally is not a belief restricted to only Yoruba religion, but also exists in other world religions such as Christianity. A hylomorphic understanding of man makes room for the threatened notion of responsibility. It allows the belief systems of the Yoruba religion such as: *Iwa* (Character), Omoluabi, Praise and blame, Reward and punishment, *Ese* (Sin) and Offence, Ethical duties and obligations, *Eewo* (Taboo), *Majeemu* (Covenant), Moral Sanctions, *Ika* (Wickedness), *Agabegebe* (Duplicity), *Ole* (laziness), Dutifulness, *Otito* (Truth) and *Hedida* (Perfidy). These notions are upheld in a hylomorphic thinking of human beings.

Conclusively, when a person is praised or blamed for an act, it is not just the body that is addressed, this is why the Yoruba say of a person that is praised-Ori re wu. This means the person's head has become swollen literally but the real meaning has nothing at all to do with the head that is seen. This means also that there is another head that is not seen, which is the real essence of the person. An *Ika* (a wicked person) cannot be identified by his/her looks. It is also possible for a person to be of small stature but possessing great strength and courage. A person that is an Omoluabi person with a very good character cannot be determined by what we see of the person physically. In fact, it is possible for a person to be very good looking but with a very deplorable character. These assertions show that a human being is both corporeal and in-corporeal and that there is more emphasis on the non-material part of man than the material among the Yoruba.

### **The Existence of Free will among the Yoruba**

The concept of Ori, may lead to a hasty conclusion that free will does not exist among the Yoruba. A close study of the race and the religion of the people reveal that there is what is understood as free will among the Yoruba (Idowu 1996). It is important to note that this understanding varies from the western view because of the deep and unique religious understanding of the concept of man among the Yoruba. The Yoruba understand a person from a purely metaphysical approach which a non-Yoruba may not acknowledge. Thus, influencing what is understood as free will among the Yoruba, one may wonder, what is free will in Yoruba? There is no straightforward answer to this question. This is because what is understood as free will in western thought is quite different from what free will entails among the Yoruba. The second problem in attempting a direct answer to the question above is that the term free will is laden with ambiguity even within western thoughts.

The functional translation of free will can also be adapted as "Ife inu ara eni." The Yoruba believe that certain things are destined to happen in a person's life and they also believe that people are responsible for their own lives. Saying there is no free will means that one is endorsing fatalism. Fatalism leads to serious complications that a fatalistic conclusion will always be associated with.

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

Another idea related to human will used as an argument for free will among the Yoruba is the idea of *Afowofa*. *Afowofa* can be described as self-inflicted problems.

The concept of free will is clearly embedded in the philosophy of the Yoruba as it is seen in different areas where it features. The problem in the hasty conclusion that it does not exist among the Yoruba may be valid in certain circumstances as discussed earlier. If it is understood within the purview of western thoughts, it is because of the ideological and ontological differences between the two cultures have. However, it is clear from the foregoing that there is free will in Yoruba philosophy and it is the kind of free will that accommodates both the decrees of fate or the fore-ordaining antecedent causes and the notion of individual human responsibility.

### **Impact of Neuroscience on the issue of Free will and its relevance to the Contemporary Yoruba Society**

The traditional free will discourse is gradually occupied by science by reconstructing the free will debate. Also, the submission of the position of neuroscience is creating further problems because of its implications which heighten the need for the study. The Yoruba society does not exist in isolation as there are advances in different fields of study, it is not out of place to discuss a contemporary trend of discussion within its religion, the contemporary attention of the free will debates as shifted from different mode of determinism to a new one. The free will debate has now been reconstructed to one that is now science driven one may ask, who is in charge, free will or the science of the brain? The Yoruba believe that it is good to be aware of developments or changes around one and that is why they say "*Omotiaiye bi L'ayenpon*" meaning that the society accommodates developments or modernity. However, this should be done cautiously as seen from the position of this research. This is because the Yoruba believe also that "*Odo tio ba gbagbe orisun re yio gbe*" meaning a river that fails to acknowledge its source will dry. This is the reason why this study adopts a compatibilist view of the findings of neuroscience with the Yoruba view of causality. The reason for this approach is not to create a sudden change of established thoughts even in the bid for progressive or modern ideas. On the same note, it is worthy to applaud the neuroscientific understanding of man because it has made us aware of the processes involved in our decision making.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of neuroscience literally as some philosophers do and maintaining that free will is an illusion that will create a lot of problems because of this controversial conclusion. This is because neuroscience offers only a materialistic understanding of man as it discusses the neurons and the cerebral processes. People reacted to the issue of the relevance of the findings of neuroscience to a contemporary Yoruba belief. They offered different and, in some cases, related views on the issue.

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