

**Social Order and the Metaphysical interpretations of *Ori*
and human destiny in Yoruba traditional thought**

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Abstract

Scholars have given some metaphysical concepts like fatalism, predestination, hard-determinism, and soft-determinism, of *Ori* and human destiny various interpretations in Yoruba traditional thought. This paper employs a critical and analytical method to show that none of these interpretations is free of absurdities. It aims also to show, that these interpretations undermine ethical issue(s) that may arise in the cause of applying punishment and reward against human actions in society. While the concept of punishment and reward underpin the idea of human freedom in taking decisions, the concept of *Ori* and human destiny presupposes that a person's action(s) is or could be pre-determined. If humans are thus not free, what then is the justification of punishment and reward on human beings for their bad or good actions? It is contended in this paper that since the various interpretations have not resolved the problem of the possibility of human freedom in taking decisions of their own, such that they become liable for punishment or reward, the Yoruba metaphysical interpretation(s) of *Ori* and human destiny holds a serious implication for the idea of punishment and reward and makes the society vulnerable to social disorder.

Keywords: *Ori*, destiny, punishment and reward, social order and Yoruba

Introduction

The Yoruba traditional thought refers to the belief system, the philosophical thoughts, or the worldview of the Yoruba people. Although the Yoruba people are spread across the world and are commonly found in the western part of Nigeria, the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria which is the focus of this paper, occupies Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, Oyo, and some parts of Kwara states (Gbadegesin; 1983; 174). Among their various traditional beliefs is the belief in *Ori* and human destiny, which borders on human existence.

The basis for this belief is situated in the Yoruba myth of creation, which holds the tripartite composition of man. That is, man is composed of *Ara* (body) *Emi* (soul), and *Ori* (head). The *Ara* (body), houses all other material parts that make a man a complete being. For instance, the *Okan* (heart), *Kindirin* (the kidney), *Edoforo* (Liver), and *Egungun* (bone), are the skeleton and frame that sustain the standing nature of every other part. Other parts like *awo* (skin), *eran-ara* (flesh), *eti* (ears), *imu* (nose), *oju* (eyes), *ese* (legs), and *owo* (hands) play vital roles as organs of the human body.

All these identified parts of man that make the composition and the structure of a person, culminate in what the Yoruba call *eniyan* (person). However, the concept of *eniyan* is beyond the physical structure or composition. There is the metaphysical element in man, which to the Yoruba, is more fundamental and serves as the real essence of a person. This is the *ori*, (not the physical head). The Yoruba conception of *ori* has a metaphysical dimension and composition, more importantly; it is linked with the idea of human destiny.

Over the years, discussions on the concept of *ori* and human destiny have aroused philosophical interest with a series of

rationalizations among philosophers beyond the meaning and relevance of the knowledge of the concept, to show that there is no controversy on the conceptual meaning and importance of the concepts (Balogun 2007;117). Most of the available philosophical literature on the concept does not deny the reality of the Yoruba belief in *Ori* and human destiny. While some of the philosophical discussions focus on the nature and the metaphysical interpretations of the concepts, this paper focuses on the problems that are inherent in some of the metaphysical interpretations and the implications these metaphysical interpretations hold for punishment and rewards, for the individual, as instruments of social control and means of maintaining peace and order in human society.

Understanding the concepts

In this paper, the concepts, of *Ori*, human destiny, fatalism, determinism or predestination, and punishment form the body of discussion. It is, therefore, necessary from the outset to make these concepts explicit, to enhance adequate understanding of the paper.

As earlier affirmed in the introductory part, the various elements, that make up a human person, can be structured into two parts; material and immaterial elements. The material consists of all the already identified elements except the *emi* (soul, or life force of a person) and the *Ori* (spirit head). Perhaps, it should be stressed here that this division of the constituting elements of a human person as conceived by the Yoruba into material and immaterial, corresponds to the biblical account of the creation of man. The biblical account states that God molded man with the dust of the earth. The dust is a tangible and material substance, representing the physical body and other physical and material elements in man. The life force, which interpretatively is the *emi* in Yoruba and of course the immaterial elements is given by God (Gen 2:7).

The third element, *Ori* may not have a place in the biblical account, however, the belief in its existence, in Yoruba traditional thought

cannot be undermined. To the Yoruba, *Ori* is the element that makes a person who he is, it is the determinant of a person's personality. It represents a person's destiny. Like *emi*, *ori* is an immaterial entity often referred to as *ori-inu* (inner-head) fused with human destiny. It is the "umbilical cord" connecting man with his God. This connection makes the Yoruba to sometimes call *ori eleda* or *iseda*. Thus, when the Yoruba says *Eleda mi ma gba ibode*" (meaning, my creator does not attract negative things), they mostly hold their physical head. The referent to *Eleda* here is not to the physical head, but the symbolic spiritual head. In the opinion of Bolaji Idowu, (1962:170), *Ori* for the Yoruba is believed to be the essence of human personality which rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of the person. *Ori* stands as the ancestral guardian soul. To Awolalu and Dopamu (1991:158) *Ori*, or *Ori-Inu* serves as guidance to *emi* (life) at birth. It also sees a man through life and into death. It leads man back to the *Eleda* creator and gives an account of man's conduct while on Earth.

This vital value or responsibility informs their belief that every man has the moral responsibility to protect and be on good terms with his *Ori*, for his destiny to be easily fulfilled (Balogun 2007: 119). Apart from this, there is a connection between *Ori* and *Eledumare* (God in Yoruba belief). *Ori* is conceived as an individual personal god, responsible for and concerned with individual interests. As a person's god, whatever it is that *Ori* does not support or grant cannot be possessed by the individual. In Yoruba thought, *Ori* connects the individuals with the lesser gods. The support or otherwise received by the individual from the lesser god is dependent on the individual's *Ori* and this also determines the person's destiny (Abimbola 1971: 76-81).

Destiny or predestination is the mysterious element and force in man that directs human activities. It means, what, in the course of events will become, or has become of a person, country, or thing (Balogun opcit.). It is the belief that there is a master plan for every occurrence. In other words, whatever happens now or in the future

has been preordained. Such occurrences that have been preordained cannot be prevented from happening. Human destiny, therefore, implies that whatever a person becomes or will become has been preordained. Such a thing about man must happen according to the preordained or master plan. It is believed that every occurrence in human life has some time in the past, been written before birth and whatever one does has already been determined beforehand. Therefore, man is only acting in fulfillment of what has been determined or written about him. The implication of this is that man is not acting as a free agent. Also, anything one does is not done out of the free will, but it is done under and fulfillment of the preordained history (Oladipo 1992:19) This sort of belief is often accredited with a divine mind or a supreme being, who is believed to have pre-existentially determined all the events that could and would take place in a man's earthly existence (Balogun opcit: 119).

The above conception of destiny or predestination represents the fatalist's principle in philosophy. Fatalism as a philosophical doctrine stresses the subjugation of all activities or events to destiny. It is a view that human beings are powerless to do anything other than what they actually will do or have done. They have no power to alter or influence the future or their actions. In the case of an event, fatalism expresses that certain events are such that they cannot but occur no matter what happens, human efforts self-criticism, and self-involvement cannot alter the preordained action of man (Onigbinde 2009:53). Thus, man remains unperturbed and is always without any sense of moral responsibility. This is because they do not see anything to be in their control. Hence the Slogan "Whatever will be, will be". The connotation is different to determinism.

Determinism holds that all events, either of man, state, or nature are ultimately determined by external causes to the effect or the beneficiary of the effect. It is the belief that events, and moral choices

inclusive are determined by previously existing causes. Thus, every event or state of affairs, every human decision and action are nothing but necessary outcomes of an antecedent state of affairs. The determinist thus reflects that every universal occurrence must be the effect of a cause (Onigbinde: 2009:54). The occurrence is produced by and is the effect of a cause dependent on what brought it into existence. There are two kinds of determinism. While hard determinism precludes free will in human actions, because of their belief that humans cannot act otherwise than they do, soft determinism embraces freewill than they do, Soft determinism embraces free will in human actions. For instance, Holbach (1961: 55) contends that in whichever way man acts, he will act necessarily according to the motives by which he shall be determined. Thus, to Holbach, man has no control over his ideas and decisions. The compatibility of human freedom and the belief that human freedom presupposes determinism was upheld by A.J Ayer (1963). Since man has no control over his actions, as the determinist would want us to believe, should man then be punished or be rewarded for his bad or good actions?

Punishment and reward are means of social control in the human society. Punishment is the infliction of undesirable pain upon an individual or group. It is usually meted out by an authority as a response and deterrent to a particular action or behavior that is considered unacceptable and inimical to the peace and social order of the society. Reward on the other hand is a form of compensation or appreciation given to an individual or group for complying or obeying laid down rules or good actions. The reasons for punishment and reward vary. However, it can simply be summed up that it is to ensure social order and peaceful co-existence in society. Although some are directed at preventing future harm against individual persons and or society, the ultimate aim of punishment is to reform and deter alleged criminals and would be criminals to ensure peaceful coexistence,

justice and orderliness that are vital virtues for the smooth administration of human society.

All the above discussed concepts, *Ori*, human destiny, fatalism and the different versions of determinism, share certain contradictions and similarities that exert influences on and pose certain implications for the existence of human society and the realization of social order. It is therefore necessary to carefully examine these implications and the sacrosanct nature of the belief in Yoruba traditional society.

***Ori*: The myth of its creation**

Various myths have been recorded on the methods of the acquisition, and recounting all in this paper may be impossible given the available space and time. But then, it is pertinent to note that the Yoruba hold a preexistent myth of man before coming into the world. The course of choosing *Ori* is part of the preexisting myth. The preexistent creation myth of man affirms the existence and activities of certain beings; Obatala and Ajala, as coworkers of Olodumare (God). According to Wande Abimbola (1977), Obatala, who is equally referred to as Orisa-Nla (the arch divinity) was saddled with the act of designing the physical creatures of the human being, *eniyan* as he chooses or likes, after which Olodumare would give the body *emi*, (life). It was after the *eniyan* had received *emi* (life) from Olodumare and had become a living being, that he proceeded to Ajala's house to select *Ori* or *Ipin* (portion) which is also known as *Ori-Inu* (inner-head). To Wande Abimbola, (Ibid: xiii) this *Ori-Inu* is the person's destiny.

Worthy of note here, is the nature of these individual extraordinary beings Ori-sa nla (arch-divinity) and Ajala. Orisa-nla who is saddled with the responsibility of moulding the physical body of a person can mould a man's body as he likes. Thus, while some are perfectly molded, others are molded with deformities, i.e, some are molded lame, blind, dwarf, etc. Such people were eventually born into the world with deformities. Ajala, moulder of *Ori* and human Destiny is described as a drunkard, debtor, irresponsible and careless. He

moulds different sizes, shapes and qualities of *Ori*, both good and bad. Therefore, of the three beings that were involved in the creation of man, only Olodumare is seen not to have questionable character, the Yoruba therefore ascribe perfection to him and his works, but then, He remains a co-creator of the imperfectly created man.

Another variant of the Yoruba myth of the selection of *Ori* holds that man, after the creation of the physical body, kneels before Olodumare (God) to have his destiny conferred on him. There are three identical ways by which this could be done; *Akunlegba* (kneeling to receive), *Akunlayan* (kneeling to select), and *Ayanmo* (having the destiny fixed on him). Whichever, of the variants that one may subscribe to, that is, whether the one that has Ajala's direct involvement or the trimorphocisis variants that were adopted by Bolaji Idowu (1962;173), the obvious is that, with the two variants acknowledged first, the Yoruba belief in the predestination of man, which is rooted in the idea of the pre-existence of man. Second, the two variants also establish the belief in *Ipin-Ori* (the portion of *ori*) as a person's destiny, which every man chooses during the pre-existence state. Hence, destiny, which is a metaphysical constituent of *Ori-inu* (inner head) is what the individual human being attempts to fulfill in the world. This is corroborated by the Yoruba maxim, *Akunleyan Ohum ni adaye ba, a de ile-aye tan oju nka gbogbo wa* (the destiny chosen is what we meet in the world, we get to the world and we are anxious beyond our destiny). The Yoruba myth of creation stressed further, that man embarks on a journey into the world and during this journey, man passes through *omi lgbagbe* (the water of forgetfulness), which is at the boundary between heaven and earth. Man drinks out of the water and he thus forgets everything that has happened in his pre-existence state including his choice of *Ori*. However, The Yoruba believe that there was Orumila (an arch divinity) the founder of Ifa (oracle) who witnessed man's choice of *Ori* (destiny). He is also believed to be the only one who can reveal the type and what a person's destiny contains.

Ori determines human destiny, hence the saying *Eda ole Sare Koja ayanmo* (no man can run past destiny). The Yoruba also believe that *Ori* (destiny) whatever means through which a person gets his own, whether chosen by him or conferred on him remains unalterable. It becomes doubly sealed, therefore, the existence of the person in this world and whatever becomes of him is nothing but the aftermath of the kind of *Ori* he has chosen or he has conferred on him.

If the above myth on *Ori* is accepted, then it can be contended that irrespective of the versions, a man was not guided in any way as to the kind of *ori* that was available in Ajala's house from which he could make his choice. Added to this is the fact that the character of Ajala, who is in charge of molding *Ori* is questionable. And, where it was upheld that human destiny was conferred by God, man was also not consulted as to what type of destiny he would want to be conferred with. No person would certainly prefer a bad *Ori* (destiny) to a good one in a matter of choice. Thus, man cannot claim to be free, have been guided, or have any input as evidenced in the myth, he was in a state of unconsciousness during creation. A man simply accepts what is set before him or conferred on him unconditionally and ignorantly pursues the same in the world.

Ori and human destiny metaphysically indicate the essence of a person in life. It entails Olodumare's plan for man. In the words of Gbadegesin (1983; 183) *Ori*, "is like a forerunner, the pathfinder in the earthly bush". Thus, when a person chooses a good *ori*, his sojourn on earth will be characterized by success and prosperity, but the choice of a bad *ori* means that his life will be characterized by failure and misfortune. In the same vein, *ori* and human destiny also underpin the assessment and the regard, a person observed by the Yoruba to be immoral is often regarded as "*olori buruku*" (a person with a bad head), and a person with absolute moralism is referred to as *Olori ire* (a person with a good head). Individual behavior in a society according to Yoruba belief is informed by a person's *ori* and destiny.

Thus, a person who acts and does well in society always does not learn it on earth but rather it is part of his destiny- thus they say *Ayanmo e ni* (it is his destiny). A person who is known to be notorious and whose life is characterized by vices always, also, does not learn it on earth but it is what he has been destined to be. This suggests that the Yoruba does not, in the real sense, accept that either nature or situation can influence a person's character positively or negatively. Furthermore, no two persons can share the same *ori* or destiny, "*Ori Taye yato si ti Kehinde*" (Taiwo's head is different from that of Kehinde). To buttress this belief among the Yoruba is the saying *Iwa kii fi oniwa sile*" (a person's character cannot leave him). Given this saying, it becomes obvious that character is part of the *ori* and human destiny that was either chosen by the individual or conferred on the individual during the preexistence state. It is this that man actualizes in the world. Thus, a good character or bad character is also underscored by the kind of *ori* and human destiny. The Yoruba concept of *ori* and human destiny therefore entails some sort of ethical dimension with the attending implications on the individual and the society at large. But, then before analyzing the implications, it is imperative to point out that there have been various metaphysical interpretations of the Yoruba belief in *ori* and human destiny. These metaphysical interpretations need to be examined for this paper.

The various attempts made by scholars to interpret the idea of *ori* have been under the following metaphysical concepts: Fatalism/pre-determinism, and Determinism. The fatalistic interpretation of the concept of *ori* and human destiny denotes that every event of man is predetermined and therefore remains inevitable. This happened at the time man chose his *Ipin-Ori* (portion) or when it was conferred on him, before coming into the world and this cannot be changed by any circumstances. One of the proponents of this position is Wande Abimbola. Cited by Akin Makinde (1985: 57) the Abimbola contended that "even the gods cannot change human destinies." Makinde 1984:

198) corroborated Abimbola's view when he asserted that what the gods could do in this regard was to guide man in the fulfillment of his destiny. The fatalists' position, therefore implies that man is not a free agent but an actor of an already-written script. Thus, the idea of moral responsibility for acting out what is inevitable for him to act should not be raised. In other words, man should not be held morally responsible for his actions. The fatalistic interpretation is better summed up that given the nature of the selection or conferment of *ori* during man's preexistence state and the consequences of this irrevocable choice for every person, 'what will be will be' no matter what happens.

The two scholars, whose fatalistic interpretations have been considered here, have at another forum expressed ideas that differ from the above to avoid the identified implications of the fatalists' interpretation of *Ori* and human destiny. Makinde on the one hand contended that *Ori*, chosen in heaven is nothing but mere potentiality (Mankinde 1984; Ekanola 2006: 14). Thus, *Ori* chosen in heaven is just a potentiality that needs certain things to be done before it is actualized. There is, therefore, the need for one to work hard, consult with *Orunmila*, and make necessary sacrifices before a potentially good *Ori* is actualized or a potentially bad *Ori* is improved. On the other hand, Balogun (2007: 123) in his assessment of Wande Abimbola averred that Abimbola is not a fatalist. His argument is based on Abimbola's position that although a child might have chosen his *ori* before birth, that eventually serves as a casual antecedent in the determinant of the child's biography after birth, the child is, however, free to make use of *ebo* (sacrifice) and *ese* to change the outcome of a bad *ori*. Abimbola asserts that when sacrifice is made to a person's *ori*, which to him requires free will, and if a man compliments it with *ese*, which also involves decisive struggle and hard work, there is a possibility of change of fortunes. Wande Abimbola's point is that making *ebo*, (sacrifice) to one's *ori*, when complemented with *ese*, and *iwa* (character) all of which involve free

will can alter a person's destiny. The above position of Wande Abimbola is favourably disposed to a soft-deterministic interpretation of the idea of *Ori* and human destiny.

Determinism, as explained earlier, is the thesis that every event, past, present and future has a cause. Such an event must be produced by and must be conditioned by what brought it into existence. There are two forms of determinism: hard determinism and soft determinism. In the interpretation of *Ori* and human destiny, hard determinism contends that the idea of freedom is not involved in the concept of *ori*. It is an illusion within the Yoruba causal mode of explanation. Oduwale (1996:48), in her attempt to justify the fatalistic interpretation of the Yoruba idea of *Ori* and human destiny, expressed a hard deterministic interpretation. Upholding the view of Taylor (1983), she asserted that whatever a person does in the world is not done out of free will but because it has been preordained. Like the real fatalistic, she did not see chance or luck in whatever a person does, rather, it is what has been settled by fate. The concept of *Ori* is forced on man by forces more powerful than man himself and there is nothing like choice, free will, and moral responsibility (Ibid: 53).

The soft-deterministic explanation of the Yoruba conception of *Ori* and human destiny harps on the possible alteration of *Ori* and human destiny. Dele Balogun (2007) when advocating for a soft deterministic understanding of the Yoruba belief in *Ori* and human destiny argued that the fatalistic explanation of the concept extended the interpretation of the concept beyond the issues of material success. According to him, *Ori* is limited to issues of material success and issues of prosperous or impoverished destiny. It has nothing to do with moral character and as such, it does not affect all human actions or inactions. (Ibid: 125). Balogun based his argument for soft determinism on his belief that several factors have occasioned an alteration in destiny on earth either for good or bad. A person can visit *Orunmila* (Yoruba god of divination) to know the kind of destiny one has chosen and perhaps alter an unfavourable destiny. One can also

engage the support of some spiritual forces, making *ebo* (sacrifice), *ese* (the principle of individual strife and struggle), *iwa* (character), *afowofa* (the infliction or causation of a problem on oneself). Through these means a person's *Ori* and human destiny can be altered. He avers that the Yoruba often trace the cause of some events to the person who performs the action and not any supernatural force outside of man. Hence, people are held responsible and are so punished for their wrongdoing. Balogun therefore, assigns a soft-deterministic interpretation to the Yoruba concept of *Ori*.

Given the above discussion, it is obvious that the various interpretations given to the Yoruba concept of *Ori* and human destiny borders on the idea of freedom and choice, which further begs the question of whether man can be punished for his actions or inactions. These interpretations hold serious implications for the principle of punishment and reward, and the realization of social order in human society. But, before these implications are discussed, it is important to note that none of the interpretations is free from absurdities.

Balogun's soft-deterministic interpretation of my mind underplays what *Ori* and human destiny entail when he accuses the fatalists of extending the concept of *Ori* to include human character. He, like Bolaji Idowu and Wande Abimbola, limits the idea of *Ori* to issues of material success in life at a general level. The position of Balogun in this case contradicts the explanation he gave in his conceptual analysis of *Ori* (2007:118), where he, citing Idowu claimed that "*Ori* represent the individuality element in a person. *Ori* is the element responsible for a person's personality and represents human destiny. It is responsible for the actuality and worth of a man in the material world.... not only the bearer of destiny but also to be the essence of human personality which rules, controls and guides the life and activities of the person" (Idowu, 1962:170; Balogun 2007:118) explaining *Ori* this way implies that, it is the totality of man, this is because a person's personality is not restricted to his wealth, success or failures, achievement, but also his integrity, virtues, or vices, which

are central to his moral life. *Ori* embodies both the material success and moral character of a man, i.e., the concept of good and bad. It is the gamut of man and his existence on earth. The Yoruba assessment of a person is not based only on the acquisition of wealth, but it includes his relationship with other people and his character in the society. It can therefore, be suggested that his introduction and adoption of soft-deterministic principle for the Yoruba conception of *Ori* and human destiny stands on a wrong footing.

Secondly, the identification of various factors like *ebo*, *ese*, *Iwa*, *afowofa*, as possible means of altering a person's destiny is equally contestable. Going by Oduwole's hard deterministic interpretation, *ebo* (sacrifice) and other attempts are ways of fulfilling a person's destiny. While it can be maintained that not all sacrifices like prayers are acceptable by the gods, when a sacrifice is accepted or rejected, it is because it has been destined to be so. Beyond, this point, all the parts of the human body *Oju*, *eti*, *ese*, *owo* etc were present at Ajala's house when the choice of *Ori* was made by man. It is doubtful, therefore, if they would want to work against what they agreed to at the point of selection of *Ori*.

On the other hand, the fatalistic interpretation seems to ignore the idea of change as the only constant element. Heraclitus, an ancient philosopher emphasis this in his philosophical expedition and attempt to determine what ultimate reality is. He is of the opinion, that change is the law of nature and the conditions of all things, for all things are ceaselessly changing (Russell 1995: 62-3; Omoregbe 1997: 11-2). The fatalistic did not consider this principle of change as fundamental to human existence and the society in general. If change is constant as it has been continually observed to be so, then the fatalist principle is on either the verge of being faced out or the principle is weak in its claim.

The metaphysical interpretations of *Ori* and human destiny: Implications for the realization of social order

The idea of punishment and reward is conceived as an instrument of social control in society. Society as we know, consists of the weak and the strong, and individuals whose social lives are characterized by vices and virtues. In this regard, the possibility of clashes between the opposites is inevitable. To enhance orderliness, control acts of vices, and promote virtue, the administration of punishment and rewards was instituted in society.

However, the idea of *Ori* and human destiny as explained by the fatalists, determinists, and soft determinists hold some implications for these instruments of social control as it tends to adversely affect social order in human society. As enunciated earlier, the idea of *ori* and human destiny is not all about the material success of a man but it includes the determination of a person's behavior in society. A person's character, which is part of his personality is embodied in his destiny. Thus, the idea of punishment and reward is embedded in the principle of *ori* and human destiny. With this in mind, the fatalists' interpretation that the future will be of a particular nature regardless of what we do, therefore, there is no point in a man trying to do anything about it, has reduced punishment and reward to a valueless concept. There will be no need for the institution of punishment and reward against any man in society. The fatalist principle if applied is that every member of the society will be acting the script that was written at the prenatal state. Consequently, an armed robber would not behave otherwise, so also a liar, corrupt politician, rapist, murderer, etc. This is because; the idea of predestination indicates them to be acting their autobiobiography. Punishing them therefore will amount to an injustice against the actualization of their destiny. In the same vein, a philanthropist, truthful person, and benevolent man need not be rewarded, because, this is what they have been destined to do on earth.

Consequently, punishing an offender to reform him or to deter other would-be criminals is an act against the realization of their

destiny. In Segun Oladipo's view, *Ori* will go back to *Elada* (creator) to give an account of what he has done on Earth. If so, it follows that preventing a man from actualizing his destiny would expose him to the punishment *Eleda* (creator) would inflict on him for failing to accomplish his mission on earth. This in a way amounts to double punishment, the one which he suffers from society's attempt on earth to achieve social order and peace and from *Eleda* for not fulfilling his destiny on earth.

Furthermore, the fatalistic or deterministic metaphysical interpretation of *ori* and human destiny, which considers past, present, and future events and actions as fixed and not alterable, leaves human society at the mercy of human actions. In this case, society is open to injustice, chaos, and all sorts of social vices that can degenerate into social disorder. Some of the fatalists' conclusions will leave society with the option of not being able to justify holding any man responsible for his actions since the causes of his action are not only external to him, but also the causes consist of forces that are beyond his control. Their interpretation therefore renders the practice of performance of character formation *otiose*, since it is not a product of man's making (Balogun 2007:125). Invariably, the concept of punishment and its objectives will remain baseless. The concept of punishment is generally based on the principle of freedom and the ability to choose between good and bad behavior. However, since human action is pre-determined, holding man responsible for what he is not in control of will be an injustice against the person. Since the forces that determine man's actions cannot be held responsible, society will become nasty, brutish, and short, as we have in the hypothetical state of nature in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau's political philosophy.

Consequent to the above, the metaphysical interpretation of *Ori* and human destiny will end up creating an open-ended situation in society where social control in any form will have no effect. Blaming or

condemning a person for what he did not freely choose to do or what he was forced to do will demand an answer to the question of justice that may arise therein.

Furthermore, the idea of constituting security agencies to police or secure society would become unnecessary. There would be no need for any form of economic, or political control as everyone in the society would believe to be acting according to what has been determined at the prenatal state. Although, one may consider this as an opportunity to not waste the societal funds on such agencies, but, would the state thrive in such a situation? It also follows from here that citizens would have no justification in blaming the state for failing in her social responsibilities of securing the society, taking care of the needy, providing a veritable environment for economic progress, etc.

The deterministic interpretation also nullifies the religious claim especially Western religious attempts at saving and reforming human beings from their sinful ways and reconciling them to God. This is because, those who have been destined for destruction, will no matter what be destroyed. This position seems to find expression in the biblical passage, John 17:12

“While I was with them in the world,
I kept them in Your name. Those
Whom you gave Me I have kept;
And none of Them is lost except
The Son of perdition that the
Scripture might be fulfilled” KJV

This passage points to the fact that while some people have been destined to be kept by Jesus, others are destined for perdition and these are the ones He cannot keep. Given this position, the role of religion as a means of social control becomes unfounded. For, while religion is seen as a means of promoting peace, unity, justice, love, and other related virtues, for the enhancement of national integration, cohesion, and social order, these are realizable, only where citizens are said to be free and can make choices. The pre-deterministic position of *Ori* and human destiny does not accept the value of

freedom and choice for man, which further nullifies the idea of punishment and reward in society.

While it is not the intention of this paper to contend that the soft deterministic metaphysical interpretation of *Ori* and human destiny is based on a weak premise, it is worth saying that the concept of *Ori* and human destiny, if critically examined could be seen as a process. The process began from the time of the preexistence of man through the selection or conferment of *Ori*, man's journey into the earth, and then the actualization of the process on earth.

If by 'process' we mean a "series of actions or steps taken to achieve a particular end" (Oxford Dictionary), then, soft determinism's claim that human destiny can be altered through *ebo*, *ese afowofa*, and *Iwa* could also be seen as part of the process that must be followed for the fulfillment of human destiny. Thus, whichever way it works for man i.e. whether it alters bad destiny to a good destiny or good destiny to a bad destiny, the process is part of fulfilling the destiny, which is man's preordained events. The soft deterministic interpretation, therefore, suffers the same criticisms as the fatalists or the hard determinists' position.

Aside from the implication of the various metaphysical interpretations of *Ori* and human destiny on punishment and reward, it suffices to say also, that these interpretations stand in opposition to the Yoruba belief in Olodumare (God) as a benevolent, omniscient and omnipotent. The questions that bother the mind, is why Olodumare, who they believe possesses all these anthropomorphic attributes assigns the responsibilities of molding the human body to *Orisa nla* and *Ajala* whose characters are questionable. Based on their characters, while *Orisanla* moulds men of different kinds, some with deformities, *Ajala* on the other hand, moulds both bad and good *Ori*. Is it the case that *Olodumare* does not know that *Ajala* would turn out to mold bad *Ori* for man, or He allowed *Ajala* to do so, such that man can make choices out of the available *Ori*? Is it the case that He does not know the nature of *Ajala* before assigning the responsibility of molding

the most crucial elements in human beings? If He knows, why did He not assign the responsibility to another deity? Or has He power to correct *Ajala* but He did not? Does it mean *Ajala* is more powerful if not, why did He not use His power to control or correct *Ajala* from putting man into a difficult task on earth? Why did He not in His benevolence guide man in the course of choosing *Ori*? Is *Olodumare* deriving pleasure in inequality that has plunged some people and their society into a serious crisis of lack, and hardship while some enjoy affluence? These and many other related questions are similar to the idea of theodicy in religion. Theodicy, a term coined by the German Philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, is a theological construct that attempts to vindicate God in response to the evidential problem of evil that seems inconsistent with the existence of an Omnipotent and Omnibenevolent deity. Thus, while the problem of evil in the theodicy is a challenge to these identified natures of God, in the same vein, the idea of *Ori* and human destiny as we have seen poses challenges to the administration of punishment and reward in society. But then, a swift response to the above-adumbrated question is that *Olodumare* is 'A *Seyi O wuu* (He who does what He likes). Although this may not resolve the challenges possessed by the various interpretations of *Ori* and human destiny on the realization of social order in the society by scholars, the Yoruba finds respite in *Olodumare as a s'eyi to wuu* cannot be undermined.

Conclusion

The idea of punishment is made possible by the belief that every offender is free, he is not under any human or spiritual influence or control and can choose whether to commit a crime or not. But from the above discussion, the concept of *Ori* and human destiny does not portray man as a free agent; therefore, applying punishment and reward to human conduct in society raises the ethical question of justice. Probably, the essence of *Ori* and human destiny, and the idea of punishment and reward by the Yoruba should be understood and accepted from Awolalu and Dopamu's view. *Ori-Inu* is the element in

man that guides man from birth to death and finally leads man back to the *Eleda* creator and gives an account of his conduct while on earth. This implies, therefore, that the idea of punishment and reward that are often seen to be associated with *Ori* and human destiny and the application of punishment and reward is beyond the empirical world. In other words, whatever the actions of every human being, only the creator deserves to punish and reward.

To further support the above position, it would be agreed that the idea of punishment and reward in any human society is the responsibility of the society that developed the laid down rules, wherein actions to be rewarded or punished are laid down. Since it is the authority that gives the rules, it is the same authority that punishes and also rewards man according to the principles of the rule. It is only through this process that we determine the idea of justice and injustice in the state.

Since it is only *Eleda* (Creator) that knows why he has given individual persons a particular *Ori* or has allowed Ajala to mold both good and bad *Ori* and He understands why individual persons chose either a good or bad *Ori*, it is only imperative that he punishes or rewards accordingly whenever *Ori* returns to Him and gives account of all man has done on earth. Thus, the idea of punishment and reward in human society remains unjust to every human person. To punish a person for actualizing his destiny is unjust and on the part of man, obeying the state and not being able to actualize his destiny is also an injustice to his destiny and man is disobedient to *Eleda* who has given him all that is required for the actualization of his destiny. But if we accept this submission, what would be the state of society? The society will be vulnerable to different uncontrollable activities of human beings, both good and bad. The society must then be ready for a return to the state of nature, a hypothetical description of a society without law by Western political philosophers.

Accepting the Yoruba belief in *Ori* and human destiny would continue to generate controversy and prevent the realization of social

order in human society. Can it be said then that this myth and concept be disregarded and declared not meaningful? The response to this question would be negative. This is because the myth of *Ori* and human destiny as used by the Yoruba plays a vital role in explaining certain issues that are beyond human comprehension, thereby reducing friction, and possible human conflict and also providing justification for certain occurrences that could be considered spiritual, natural or manmade in human lives and the society in general.

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