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**INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**METAPHYSICAL FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE.**

**By**

**Joyline Gwara**

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Philosophy and Classics, University of KwaZulu – Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.**

**Supervisor: Prof. B. Matolino**

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**Declaration.**

I declare that the content reported in this dissertation, unless indicated to the contrary, is my original research and that it has not been submitted simultaneously for another degree or diploma to any other University.

Where I have used work by others, I have duly acknowledged. Where other written sources have been quoted, their words have either been re-written with the general information attributed to them having been referenced; or where their exact words have been used, then their works have been placed in Italics or inside quotation marks, and referenced.

**Name of Student..... Joyline Gwara (213574156).**

**Signed .....J. Gwara.**

**Name of Supervisor.....Prof. B. Matolino.**

## **Abstract**

The study places emphasis on the critical and philosophical nature of the African concept of destiny as it relates to the problem of freedom and determinism. In light of this, it focuses on the problem of freedom and determinism as we have it in Western scholarship. Historically, there are two contrasting schools of thought emerged. These are; the hard determinists, who argue that all events, including human actions are determined by causal laws; and the libertarians who believe that human beings are not determined and possess freewill. In an attempt to reconcile these seeming contrasting views another school of thought emerged, which is, Compatibilism. Compatibilists believes that choice and causal determination of human actions are not mutually exclusive but are compatible. The compatibilist position was heavily criticized by both the determinists and the libertarians.

The philosophers who debated on this issue failed to reach a resolution concerning the nature of human agency in this world. The fact that the problem was not resolved in the Western circles necessitated the need to investigate the problem from an African perspective. In light of this, the thesis observes that the cornerstone for the determinists' arguments is the principle of causation. To this effect, the thesis considers how Africans understand the principle of causation. This is done in order to find out whether the African understanding of the principle is detrimental to human freedom. The thesis observes that there are two ways of understanding causation in the African worldview, which are, empirical and supernatural causation. The Africans regard the latter to be of paramount importance in explaining phenomena between events. In light of this, I argue that cause as understood by the Africans is not detrimental to human freedom since an individual can appeal or manipulate mystical powers in order to change his or her fate. Thus, the principle of cause, for the Africans, attests to soft-determinism and not hard determinism.

The principle of cause as well as the African metaphysical components of a person have a strong bearing on the African understanding of human destiny. This is so because one of the constituent parts of a person is the bearer of destiny. For the Akans, it is the *okra* which is the bearer of destiny, whereas for the Yoruba people it is the *ori*. These constituent parts of a human being plays a pivotal role in the Akan and Yoruba people's understanding of human destiny respectively. The thesis goes on to look at the African understanding of destiny as presented by Gbadegesin and Gyekye. I also argue that the concept of destiny is informed by the Western understanding of predestination.

However, in Western scholarship, predestination is understood to be other worldly, whereas for the Africans it is understood to be this worldly. Further to this, two schools of thought have emerged in African philosophy. On the one hand, there are scholars who believe that destiny, once handed down by the Supreme Being, is unalterable. On the other hand, there are scholars who hold the view that, destiny, though handed down by the Supreme being, can be altered for better or for worse. Thus, these schools of thought seem to attest to hard determinism and libertarianism respectively. I argue that there is a middle way between these seemingly contrasting views of Gyekye and Gbadegesin. To push further the argument, the African understanding of destiny does not attest to determinism and neither does it attest to metaphysical freedom. To this effect, I argue that, what is determined for an African person are the circumstances surrounding the individual's life (events), the individual's will (action) is undetermined. In other words, the African concept of destiny speaks to soft – determinism.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my beloved son Jayden.

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## **General Introduction**

The problem of freedom and determinism has received wide coverage in Western philosophy. The central issue surrounding the problem is whether a human being is captain of his or her fate. This has seen the emergency of three schools of thought. There are two rival theories, which are, the libertarians and the determinists. On the one hand, the determinists argue that events, including human actions, are determined by prior events. This argument is buttressed on the principle of causation, which states that there is no such thing as an uncaused event. Building on the principle of cause, determinism holds that all events, human actions included, are determined. In support of the principle of cause, several versions of determinism were propounded by different philosophers. These include theological, physical, logical, psychological and ethical determinism to mention just a few. These versions, however, have not gone unchallenged. In other words, they have faced a lot of criticism which has made it impossible for the theory of determinism to be water tight.

On the other hand, libertarianism is the theory that human beings have free choices and some of our choices and some of our actions are uncaused and the agent is responsible for bringing about actions. The libertarians believe that human beings do actually experience freedom and that to take human freedom away from the agent is tantamount to taking away moral responsibility from him or her. This has led some libertarians to hold on to the view that some events are uncaused. In this regard, indeterminists accept causality in other facets of life except in the human realm. They believe that deliberations, actions and choices are not determined but are free. To further buttress their views, libertarians also believe that human beings are “agents”, a unique kind of causal entity.

This presentation of the state of human affairs presents a seeming dichotomy between the two leading theories in the debate, which are, the libertarians and the determinists. The arguments put

forward is that if determinism is true, then libertarianism is false and vice versa. In short, the two cannot coexist in the world. They are incompatible. This led to the rise of the third camp in the debate, which is the compatibilist version. Compatibilist philosophers believe that there is no need of choosing either one of these seeming contrasting views. For them, choice and the causal determination of human actions are not mutually exclusive but are compatible. However, both the libertarians and the determinists heavily criticised the compatibilist position. The fact that the compatibilists' arguments are not water tight leaves one to wonder about the place of a human agent in this world.

In an attempt to address the problems that emanated from the Western philosophers' treatment of human freedom, the research invokes the African understanding of human agents. It is the belief of the researcher that, there is a lot of Western literature on freedom and determinism; however, little effort has been made to consider these concepts in line with the African concept of destiny. It is the task of the thesis to consider how these concepts are understood vis-à-vis the concept of destiny in African philosophy. In African philosophy, an individual is understood as standing in a particular position with all there is, both visible and invisible. In light of this, the thesis labours to present an African understanding of freedom and determinism in line with the people's understanding of the concept of human destiny. In order to understand the African concept of destiny, the researcher looks at it in line with the metaphysical components of a person and the principle of causality.

In light of the above, the research starts off by discussing the problem of freedom and determinism as we have it in the West. It notes that the central issue in the debate of determinism is that of universal causation. Thus, the whole argument that human beings are determined is hinged on the belief that there is universal causation. In other words, in the West, universal causation implies

determinism. This provokes the research to consider the African understanding of causation. The reason for this is that the researcher wants to find out whether the African understanding of causation is tantamount to determinism. In light of this, the thesis poses a question as to whether the African understanding of the principle of cause is detrimental to human freedom. The research notes that, for the Africans, there is both empirical and supernatural causation. However, the former is not of paramount importance when explaining phenomena in the African world. The latter, then, allows the Africans to be caused and at the same time to be in a position to appeal to some mystical forces in order to change their circumstances. In short, the African understanding of causation is not detrimental to human freedom.

The research then moves on to look at the concept of destiny as it is understood by different African thinkers. On the one hand, it observes that there are scholars who believe that destiny is handed down by a Supreme Being and hence it is unalterable. In other words, if destiny is unalterable once handed down by a Supreme Being, then human beings are determined. On the other hand, there are scholars who believe that, even though an individual's destiny is handed down by a Supreme Being, one can still alter it through prayer, hard work and sacrifice among others. The research then looks at how these can be manipulated by human beings as tools to alter one's destiny. Whilst discussing the African concept of destiny, the research observes that even those scholars who argue that an individual's destiny is unalterable do not want to commit themselves to determinism. For them, a person does possess freewill since it is not every detail of an individual's life which is written in the book of destiny. In this regard, destiny is understood as speaking to the broad outlines of an individual's life. From this understanding of destiny, the researcher notes that there is room for an individual to exercise a certain degree of freedom. It then follows that the Africans believe in the existence of both determinism and freedom in their universe. These concepts are not

mutually exclusive, but they coexist in the African universe. In light of this, the researcher notes that the African concept of destiny is a case for soft-determinism, whereby what is determined are the circumstances surrounding the individual's life (events); the individual's will (action) is still undetermined.

## **Chapter One: Freedom and Determinism: The Nature of the Problem**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The debate on whether a human being is the captain of his or her fate or not is as old as philosophy itself. This is a really fascinating and interesting area in philosophy because in our everyday lives as human beings, we make choices, though we are not aware of what really influences these actions. In other words, the debate grapples with such questions as; why do human beings do the things they do? And why does the world function the way it does? On the one hand, there are arguments to support the view that people make the choices they make because the world is determined by nature and nurture. On the other hand, there are arguments to support the view that human beings have full control of the choices they make and there are no constraining factors whatsoever. In short, the debates lead us to the most important ethical questions to do with moral responsibility.

This chapter looks at the dilemma of freedom and determinism as proffered by different Western philosophers. In this light, the chapter discusses the three main positions in the free will debate, that is, hard determinism, libertarianism as well as compatibilism. Though this study is situated in the African context, it deliberately traces the debate back to the West, where it has its roots, so as to ascertain how different Western philosophers treated the debate. The researcher will also consider the solutions suggested by Western philosophers for purposes of comparison, clarification, refinement and validation as the thesis tackles the same problem from an African perspective. In other words, the debate serves as a forerunner to the African understanding of human agency.



In this spirit, the chapter will first look at the arguments put forward by hard determinists, as well as the founding principle of the theory, which are, the principle of causation. The chapter acknowledges that there are several versions of determinism, but this research will focus on theological, physical, psychological, ethical, and logical determinism. In an attempt to present a balanced argument, the chapter looks at some of the criticisms levelled against these versions of hard determinism. The discussion of hard determinism will end with an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the theory.

Secondly, the chapter discusses libertarianism. Under libertarianism, three theories of liberty will be discussed and these are indeterminism, agency theory and radical existential freedom. The discussion will consider the strengths and weaknesses of these three versions of libertarianism. After a careful examination of the arguments put forward by the determinists and the libertarians, the chapter will acknowledge that it becomes seemingly undeniable that these two views are mutually exclusive. This is a view which is called “incompatibilism” and its major assumption is that an action cannot be both caused and free.

The rift between the hard determinists and the libertarians gives birth to the third theory in the debate, that is, compatibilism. In an attempt to reconcile the two, the chapter considers the views of John Locke and David Hume and Walter T. Stace and John Stuart Mill. As has been the case with other theories, the chapter gives a critical evaluation of compatibilism, unravelling the strengths and weaknesses of the theory. The chapter then goes on to discuss the African conception of human agency which is informed by their understanding of reality, the belief that an agent stands in a particular relationship with all there is both in the visible and invisible worlds.

## 1.1 Problematising the Freewill – Determinism Debate

Graham Mcfee (2000:2) argues that the world around us and our place in it presents us with two related contrasts whose closer identification will take us into the question of the freedom of the will. He further notes that the first distinction contrasts what might be called “agency” with what might be called “natural phenomena”; roughly, a distinction between things that people do as opposed to things that just occur (2000:2). In other words, Mcfee’s argument is that on one hand, in the world around us, there are some things that simply happen following the laws of nature. On the other hand, human beings do have the possibility of agency. He further notes that this distinction raises questions as to which events should be explained in terms of agency and which ones as the working out of natural processes (McFee; 2000:3).

This leads to the two contrasting views in the debate, which are, determinism and libertarianism. The belief in determinism is hinged on the view that there is universal causation in the universe. In other words, determinism affirms the truth of universal causation. This affirmation of universal causation implies that if we have knowledge of the universe at the present moment, then it is possible to predict the future with precision. This view has been elaborated by French astronomer Pierre-Simone Laplace in *Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*. He asserts that;

We ought then to consider the present state of the universe as the effect of its previous state and as the cause of that which is to follow. An intelligence that, at a given instant, could comprehend all the forces by which nature is animated and the respective situation of the beings that make it up, if moreover it were vast enough to submit these data to analysis, would encompass in the same formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the lightest atoms. For such an intelligence nothing would be uncertain, and the future, like the past, would be open to its eyes (Laplace; 1995:2).

In light of this, determinism implies that even our choices, desires and actions are themselves events, and they too are the necessary results of previous causes. Though determinists do not agree on which cause is important for our behaviour, they do however agree on the view that everything that happens in nature and in human behaviour is the inevitable outcome of the causal order. A determinist would subscribe to what John Stuart Mill (1974:836-7) says about the doctrine of necessity;

Correctly conceived, the doctrine called Philosophical Necessity is simply this: that, given the motives which are present to an individual's mind, and given likewise the character and disposition of the individual, the manner in which he will act might be unerringly inferred: that if we knew the person thoroughly, and knew all the inducements which are acting upon him, we could foretell his conduct with as much certainty as we can predict any physical event.

The determinists, however, can only grant human freedom only as circumstantial freedom and never as metaphysical freedom. Circumstantial freedom should be understood as the ability and the opportunity to perform whatever action we choose; that is, freedom from external forces, obstacles, and natural limitations that restrict and compel our actions (Lawhead; 2000:328). Metaphysical freedom, on the other hand, is the power of the self to choose among genuine alternatives; which implies freewill (2000:330). On the other hand, there is the libertarian position which rejects determinism. Contrary to the determinist position, the libertarians claim that human beings do possess metaphysical freedom. If this is the case, then it follows that at least there are some human actions that are exempted from causal necessity, hence these are free. For the libertarians, free actions are originated by the self; that is, they are grounded in the freewill of the person, hence, are not the inevitable result of previous causes. Contrary to the determinists, the libertarians claim that it is impossible to predict every detail of a person's behaviour.

These two positions are regarded as mutually exclusive and are both classed as incompatibilist as they deny that the will of the agent can be free if determinist theory is true. Incompatibilism is the claim that determinism is incompatible with the sort of freedom necessary for one to be morally responsible for their behaviour (Lawhead; 2000:332). To be morally responsible for an action, then, means an individual deserves rebuke, praise or blame, reward or punishment for that action (Lawhead; 2000:332). Thus, both the determinists and the libertarians agree that a determined person cannot be held morally accountable for his or her actions. However, the libertarians refute the view that human beings are determined and hence they conclude that individuals are morally responsible for their actions, whereas determinists deny individuals moral responsibility since they believe they are determined.

The third position in the debate is the compatibilist position, which holds that both determinist theory and a theory of freewill may be true simultaneously. The argument is that we are both determined and have the sort of freedom necessary to be morally responsible for our actions (Lawhead; 2000:333). In other words, it is possible to hold the view that determinism is true and that human beings have freewill without committing a contradiction. For the compatibilists, then, an action is free to the degree that it is not the product of external compulsion. If the immediate cause of your action is your own will, choices, values, or desires, then it is a free or voluntary action for which you can be held responsible. William Lawhead (2000:333) notes that for the compatibilists, a person's personality, motives, and values are completely determined by previous causes. Thus, they deny that individuals have metaphysical freedom. However, contrary to the determinists and the libertarians, the compatibilists believe that circumstantial freedom is the only kind of freedom necessary for human beings to be held morally accountable for their choices and actions.

The problem of freewill is of paramount importance to philosophy since it has serious moral implications to human agency. From the above arguments, the freewill–determinism dilemma can be characterised as a tension between the central thesis of determinism, supported by scientific success, and the idea that persons are free, responsible agents. This tension between two ideas raises certain questions. For instance, what reason is there for rationally choosing one rather than the other of these seemingly incompatible assertions? At this juncture, the research explores these theories in detail.

## **1.2 Hard Determinism**

Determinism is a philosophical position according to which all human actions are predetermined. The thesis that all events have causes is one of the most forceful in human intellectual history. Determinists believe that every event that occurs in the natural world is the necessary outcome of the conditions that preceded the event and therefore everything that does happen has to happen (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:282; Solomon; 1997:469). According to this position, a person in a given situation may think that he is able to do this or that, but in every case the stars, the laws of physics, his character, the conditioning he has received or something else makes him unable to do any but one thing (Cowburn; 2008:144). It is essential to note that determinists do not say that some actions of some people are determined (2008:144). They say that all human acts are determined (2008:144). Determinists go on to say that all human actions are predictable (2008:144).

According to Cowburn (2008:144), determinists admit that it is, in practice, impossible to obtain complete information about any human being, including his or her genes and entire past history, and to know absolutely everything about any situation in which a human being is to make a decision. Also, we do not yet have a full understanding of the laws which (according to

determinists) govern human behaviour, and if we did have this information, the decision would probably be made long before the calculations could be carried out, so that it would in practice be impossible to predict it. Thus, if human actions are among the events to which the deterministic thesis applies, then when persons act as they do they are not able to act otherwise. Hence, they introduce a qualification into the statement and say that all human actions are in principle predictable (Cowburn; 2008: 144).

There are several principal positions taken in the debate over the causes of action in philosophy. Determinists argue that all human actions are caused and as such not free. The causes cited may be logical, ethical, theological, physical, and psychological. It is necessary at this juncture to discuss these versions of determinism in order to have a fuller appreciation of the doctrine.

Theological determinism states that everything that happens has been pre-ordained or predestined by an all-powerful, all knowing God. According to this view, God is omniscient and so knows everything, and that includes not only all that is in people's hearts, all that they desire, covet, and their intentions, but also all that has happened, is happening and will happen (Ilman. Dilman; 1999:72). Their argument leads them to the conclusion that if God knows all that will happen in the way that He knows all that has happened, that is directly, by memory, then the future is closed or foreclosed, which would leave no logical room for free will (2001:72). So how is free will compatible with divine foreknowledge? Chief proponents of theological determinism are St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and Gottfried Leibniz among others.

Scholars such as Derk Pereboom see it fit to define theological determinism in terms of divine causation. According to Pereboom (2001:262), theological determinism is "the position that God is the sufficient active cause of everything in creation, whether directly or by way of secondary

causes”. However, Pereboom’s characterisation of God as a cause does not impress scholars such as Hebert McCabe (1987:12) who believe that when we act freely, we are not caused to act by anyone or anything other than ourselves. What he means here is that God is not an existent among others as created causes are (1987:14). In tandem with McCabe, Austin Farrer (1967:62) invokes Aquinas’ doctrine of analogy, which states that God’s providential activity cannot be conceived in causal terms without “degrade[ing] it to the creaturely level and plac[ing] it in the field of interacting causalities” — the results of which can only be “monstrosity and confusion”.

However, several arguments are offered in support of theological determinism, chief among these are the divine foreknowledge, divine providence and divine aseity. Divine knowledge points out that there are truths about the future to be known, then exhaustive divine knowledge, that is, God’s foreknowledge of every future event. The doctrine of divine foreknowledge holds that God knows infallibly every future event, every future effect of every present cause and every choice which human beings will make. Now this understanding of God presents us with the challenge of reconciling human choices and God’s infallible foreknowledge. Articulating this problem, Boethius has it that (2002: 94-95);

For if God sees everything in advance and cannot be deceived in any way, whatever his Providence foresees will happen, must happen. Therefore, if God foreknows eternally not only all the acts of men, but also their plans and wishes, there cannot be freedom of will; for nothing whatever can be done or even desired without its being known beforehand by the infallible Providence.

The above argument raises the question, does divine foreknowledge imply lack of freewill for humans?

However, some philosophers who defend divine foreknowledge base their argument on the view that God does not have exhaustive divine knowledge. Open theists hold the view that God leaves

some future events undetermined, and so does not know exactly what the future holds (Leigh Vicens; Internet Encyclopaedia of philosophy). Vicens further notes that, this, however, does not negate God's attribute of omniscience. Rather, for some open theists, propositions about undetermined events are simply not true (or false) before those events occur; or, according to others, there are true propositions about undetermined events, but they are in principle unknowable (Vicens; Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy). Either way, open theists maintain that it is not real limitation on God not to know what it is impossible to know, and so the denial of exhaustive foreknowledge is compatible with the affirmation that God is a supremely perfect being.

In response to theological determinism, Augustine raises the question whether God's foreknowledge is inconsistent with humans' freedom (Dilman; 1999:72). For Augustine, freedom may be understood as the absence of constraint, the capacity to follow one's desires and inclinations without hindrance (Bonner; 2007:49). Augustine believes both that humans have free will, as we have seen, and also that God knows everything, including everything that is going to take place in the future (Dilman; 1999:72). He calls this foreknowledge: knowledge of what will happen before it has happened. The two at first sight seem incompatible. He wants to show that this incompatibility is only apparent and not real.

Augustine's answer is that not all things of which God has foreknowledge come about by necessity; some come about by will (1999:72). For instance, God knows that we are going to grow old, and who but a madman would deny that we grow old by necessity? (1999:83). God equally knows what we shall will, before we have willed it. Yet when what He foreknows comes to pass what comes to pass is my willing itself. His foreknowledge of what I shall do does not by-pass my willing it – my agency or authorship (1999:83). In this light, Augustine denies that divine foreknowledge implies determinism.



Physical determinism is a version which makes reference to laws of physics. Modern theories of determinism were inspired mainly by the development of physical science, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. As Paul Edwards (1967:362) notes, scientists then discovered that the motions of the heavenly bodies were not only regular, but also obeyed certain laws which could be expressed with mathematical exactness. What this implies is that all things in nature, human beings included, behave according to the inviolable and unchanging laws of nature. Materialist philosophers Democritus and Leucippus, again with extraordinary prescience, claimed that all things, including humans, were made of atoms in a void, with individual atomic motions strictly controlled by causal laws (Doyle; 2011:71). Thus, Leucippus argues for absolute necessity which leaves no room in the universe for chance. In defence of physical determinism, Thomas Hobbes argued that liberty is simply “the absence of all the impediments to action that are not contained in the nature and intrinsic quality of the agent” (Cowburn; 2008:165). He asserts that the voluntary actions of a freewill all have prior necessary causes and are thus determined (Doyle; 2011:84). He further explains that any unobstructed moving body can be considered free. In light of this argument, he concludes that, the unobstructed water of a flowing stream, for instance, descends freely, though it is not at liberty to ascend or to flow across the river bed (Cowburn; 2008:165). In line with Hobbes, Arthur Schopenhauer argues that the proposition that all events, including all human actions are caused is known to be true *a priori*, that is, before experience (Curd; 1992:410).

Critics of physical determinism argue that it is not conclusively proved. Thus they hold the view that even if it holds true for most of nature, human beings are quite different from other beings in nature (Curd; 1992:410). They further argue that humans are not merely physical, but are also mental (and or spiritual) beings, and that because they are more than physical, they are able to

transcend physical laws. This leads us to another version of determinism: psychological determinism.

The major proponent of psychological determinism is Sigmund Freud. In his determinism, Freud is close to Schopenhauer. He was acutely conscious of that aspect of human bondage rooted in the individual's psychology and of the way the individual himself contributes to his own bondage (Dilman; 1999:179). Like Schopenhauer, he thought of it as an instance of the causal determinism which holds sway in human life: "are you asking me, gentlemen, to believe that there is anything which happens without a cause?" (1999:179). Like Schopenhauer and Hume, he thought that to deny this is to turn human thinking and behaviour into something accidental, random and unpredictable (1999:179). He then argues that "there is within you a deeply rooted belief in psychic freedom and choice... but this belief is quite unscientific and ... must give ground before the claims of a determinism which governs even mental life (1999:179).

Another version of determinism is ethical determinism and its major proponents are Socrates, Plato, Descartes and Leibniz among others. Socrates observes that every human being always chooses what seems best to him, that no one can set as the object of his choice something that seems evil or bad to him (Edwards; 1967:359). In the same vein, Plato has it that no human being who knows what is good can possibly choose anything else. For both Socrates and Plato, wrongdoing or the pursuit of evil must always be either involuntary or the result of ignorance. It is evident that in this ethical intellectualism, which is so central to Platonism, there is the theory of determinism (1967:359). Men's voluntary actions are invariably determined by this, if by nothing else. However, this enhances rather than debases human freedom. In the same vein, Descartes believes that no human being who knew his or her true end or highest good could reject it in favour of something less. He maintained that a person's freedom consisted precisely in knowing that good

and being thereby determined to seek it (Edward; 1967:359). Similarly, Leibniz took for granted the fact that God could not possibly be guided by anything except the true good which he must surely know, and that in creating a world, for example, he therefore could not create any but the best of possible worlds (Edwards, 1967:359). Leibniz maintained that this is no derogation of God's freedom; on the contrary, it is the most perfect freedom to have one's will thus determined. Aristotle does not buy the argument of ethical determinism. The reason why he rejects ethical determinism is that it conflicts with what he took to be the evident fact of incontinence. He observes that sometimes human beings' desires and appetites are in conflict with his or her reason, precisely in the sense that he desires something bad even while knowing that it is bad, which is the very essence of incontinence (1967:359). In line with this argument, Locke has it that, a drunkard well knows that his use of spirits is bad for him or her, but the mere knowledge of this cannot be depended upon to extinguish his or her desire for them (1967:359).

Finally, for purposes of this research, the final version of determinism to be discussed is logical determinism. This is the view that some logical principles entail ontological determinism, that is, the view that the past forces the shape of the future. Such views were associated by the ancients with the idea of fate. For thinkers such as Diodorus Cronus, logic alone suggests that men's wills are fated, that nothing is really in their power to alter (Edwards; 1967:359). Thus, following this understanding of logical determinism, one can argue that if no human's destiny is in any degree up to him or her, if everything that he ever does is something he could never have avoided, then in the clearest sense it is idle to speak of his or her having freewill. In a famous passage in *The Works of Aristotle* (1928), the Stagirite argues that:

Everything must either be or not be, whether in the present or in the future, but it is not always possible to distinguish and state determinately which of these alternatives must necessarily come about. Let me illustrate.

A sea-fight must take place to-morrow or not, but it is not necessary that it either should not take place to-morrow, neither is it necessary that it should take place, yet it is necessary that it either should or should not take place to-morrow. Since propositions correspond with facts, it is evident that when in future events there is a real alternative, and a potentiality in contrary directions, the corresponding affirmation and denial have the same character.

The principle of bivalence and the law of excluded middle are of paramount importance to the discussion of logical determinism. According to Lou Goble (2001:309), the principle of bivalence states that every declarative sentence expressing a proposition has exactly one truth value, either it is true or false. The law of excluded middle basically states that a proposition cannot be true and its denial false, or its denial be false and it fails to be true. It has been traditionally formulated in various ways by different philosophers. For Aristotle (1956:149), there can be no intermediate between contradictories; any given predicate must be either affirmed or denied of one subject. John Stuart Mill (1843:183) has it that the principle of excluded middle (or that one of two contradictories must be true) means that an assertion must be either true or false: either the affirmative is true, or otherwise the negative is true which means that the affirmative is false. However, whichever version one subscribes to, they all result in the denial of the view that human agents possess freewill and thus affirm universal causation in the universe.

### **1.1.2 Universal Causation**

This theory which, it is claimed, is the basic presupposition of science, implies that there is no such thing as an uncaused event (Pojman; 1996:302). Hence, since all human actions are events, human actions are not undetermined, are not free in a radical sense but are the product of a causal process (1996:302). This idea of not being able to do otherwise as one acts, is pivotal in the whole controversy about freewill and determinism. According to Mcfee (2000:21), what it means for an

action to have an antecedent cause is that there is a sufficient condition for its occurrence which means that things could not be otherwise than the way they are.

Therefore if human actions have antecedent causes, it is false that the individual could have acted otherwise, therefore he or she was not free to do otherwise. The proponents of universal causation believe that there are necessary connections in nature (Stathis; 2014:21). They think that when *c* cause *e*, there is something in virtue of which *c* produces, or brings about, or necessitates *e*: the cause has the power to produce the effect and the effect follows with necessity the cause (2014:21). Prominent Western philosophers such as David Hume, Baruch Spinoza and Immanuel Kant are of the view that the principle presupposes a necessary connection between cause and effect. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza notes that, “From a determinate cause the effect follows necessarily” (Edwin Curley; 1985:3). Also, Hume, in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, gives an analysis of causal relation and maintains that “the idea of necessary connection” between a cause and its effect is of great importance (Selby-Bigge; 1978:77). In the same spirit, Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, argues that, “The very concept of a cause...manifestly contains the concept of necessity of connection with an effect” (Smith; 1996:44). In simple terms, this means that to assume that *c* caused *e* is to mean something like, given that *c* occurred, *e* had to occur (Barcalow; 1997:141). These views will be explored in detail later. At this juncture there is need to explore the views of different philosophers on the principle of causality.

There are several versions of the arguments on determinism. However, the bottom line in the determinists’ arguments is that they uphold the idea of universal causation and also believe that the language of action can be discarded as vacuous, meaning that there is no such thing as responsibility. According to McFee (2000:21), the argument for determinism can be understood as follows:

1. Every event has a cause (as science tends to show).
2. Actions are a kind of event.
3. Therefore every action has a cause (from 1 and 2 above).
4. Therefore every action which actually is performed has to be performed, given the antecedent state of the world (the “cause” in premise 3).
5. Therefore it makes no sense to talk of “choosing” to do this or that. For, given the causal antecedents (that is, the antecedent state of the world), we could not do otherwise than we do. We are governed by causal necessity.
6. Therefore explaining events in terms of reasons, which depends on the notion of people choosing to do this or that, can be discarded as empty.

Thus, to be a determinist is not to only hold that every event has a cause but to push further to say that talk of choice is an illusion. Though there are many versions of determinism, this research focuses on Mcfee’s understanding of the argument of determinism which presupposes that human actions are events. The concept of cause can be understood as being derived from the fact that human beings devote their time to finding the causes of things. For instance, people seek to understand the cause of such a disease as cancer, the cause of a bus accident, the cause of a person’s death and so on. This indicates that causal connections between events are pervasive. In this case, it does not make sense to talk of an event which comes about with no cause. The problem becomes how to understand this new event without a cause. Generally, talk of an event without a cause, for most people, makes no sense. With the aid of examples, I will show how it is regarded as impossible to talk of an event without a cause. Suppose that a person dies and a coroner performs an autopsy to find out the cause of the death. After the examination, the coroner then releases the report that he could not find the cause of the death and concludes that there was no cause of death.

Is it possible to hold that a person dies and there was no cause of his death? Or suppose a bus is involved in a crash and after the accident investigation, investigators conclude that there was no cause of the crash. Would this be believable? Most philosophers would not agree to this. For them, every event has a cause, even if in many cases we may not know what these causes are. Causality refers to the relation between two items, one of which is a cause of the other. It can also refer to a group of topics including the nature of the causal relation, causal explanation; and the status of causal laws. In modern philosophy, the notion of cause is associated with the idea of something's producing or bringing about something else (its effect); a relation sometimes called efficient causation (Honderich; 1995:126). Honderich (1995:126) notes that, "historically, the term 'cause' has a broader sense, equivalent to 'explanatory feature'. This usage survives in the description of Aristotle as holding the doctrine of four causes". In order to have a full appreciation of the concept of cause, there is need to distinguish between what is called singular causal statements and causal generalisations. For Emmett Barcalow (1997:141), singular causal statements can be understood as those that attest that, "Event *c* caused event *e*." For instance:

- His being shot (*c*) caused his death (*e*).
- A sudden wind shear (*c*) caused the plane crash (*e*) (1997:141).

On the other hand, causal generalisations are of the form "Events of *kind c* cause events of *kind e*" (1997:141). For example, "hitting a car causes dents in it and wind shear causes plane crashes" (1997:41).

It can then be concluded from the above arguments that causality can be understood as a relation between events. In other words, it is events that are caused, and it is events that are causes. The next question that comes to mind then is: what is the nature of the causal relation between events?

Those who hold on to the principle of causality assume that causes always precede their effects. What this means then is that the effect follows the cause. For instance, lighting the fuse on the dynamite comes before the explosion. However, this is not all that the principle of cause means.

### **1.2.3 Philosophers on the Causal Principle**

Different philosophers came up with their own arguments pertaining to the principle of causality. This section traces the historical development of the concept of causation in philosophy. It is believed that the concept of causation emerged in Pre-Socratic philosophy. Thus, Greek natural philosophers presented the early views on the principle of causality. The early Greeks conceived of the law of cause and effect in the form expressed by Hippocrates. According to Hippocrates; “Every natural event has a natural cause”. Plato (427-347 BC), in one of his dialogues, *Timaeus* argues that “everything that becomes or changes must do so owing to some cause; for nothing can come to be without a cause.” For Plato, then, it is necessary for everything that happens to happen through a cause; for how could it happen without this? He further argues that all that happens must necessarily happen by virtue of a cause, for it is impossible for anything to come into existence without a cause (1974:9).

However, Aristotle (384-322 BC) had a richer view of causality than Plato as he accepted also some of the doctrines expressed earlier upon the matter (2004:3). Much of his ideas on causality are found in his *Posterior Analytics*, his *Physics*, and his *Metaphysics*. In the *Physics* (II.3, 194b23-195a3), Aristotle argues that there are four main types of causes. For him, the question ‘what is this?’ can be answered in four different ways. He gives an example of a marble statue. To this the question, ‘what is this?’ could be answered in the following ways; firstly, that it is a statue; secondly, of marble; thirdly, by a sculptor; and fourthly, for a decoration. The answers to these



questions have come to be known as the formal cause (which determines what a thing is), the material cause (that out of which it is made), the efficient cause (by what a thing is made) and the final cause (the end for which it is made) respectively (Russell;1946:17). However, of these four causes, efficient cause has come to resemble features that are now associated with the idea of causation. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle defined efficient cause as the “primary source of the change” (*Metaphysics*. V.4, 1014b18-20). Thus, Aristotle’s position is that given a certain effect, there must be some factors that brought about that effect.

In support of causation, the Stoics believe that an organism is impregnated with divine reason and is providentially ordained by fate. They were the first philosophers to systematically hold the idea that every event is necessitated by certain causal conditions. Thus, for them every event has a cause. This leads us to their rejection of the view that events can be uncaused, since this would run counter to their basic belief in the coherence of the universe (for instance, Cicero, *De Facto*, 43). Thus, the Stoics subscribe to the principle of universal causation which holds that chance and possibility only refer to our ignorance of the causal connection between events (Long;1996:164).

To elaborate this point, Long quotes an unknown Stoic author who has it that:

Prior events are causes of those following them, and in this manner all things are bound together with one another, and thus nothing happens in the world such that something else is not entirely a consequence of it and attached to it as cause. [...] From everything that happens something else follows depending on it by necessity as cause (Long; 1996:164).

In the middle ages, views on causation took another dimension, with Christian philosophers trying to reconcile Aristotle’s conception of causation with the idea that God created the universe out of nothing (Gilson; 1962:40). This research will analyse the views of Thomas Aquinas as he is regarded as the most influential representatives of later medieval philosophy.

Thomas Aquinas argued that in the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes (Melchert; 2002:275). There is no cause known in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. For Aquinas, to take away the cause is to take away the effect (2002:275). In the *Summa Theologiae* (1a 2, 3), Aquinas distinguished between internal and external final cause. For him, all natural things created by God have internal final causes themselves, God is the ultimate external goal himself. Thus, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (II:42.5), Aquinas notes that in the formation of the world, but also in all created causality, final causality comes first and works in and through the efficient causes. The efficient causes are subordinate to the final causes inasmuch as they are means to ends.

The Modern period saw a radical change in the development of the concept of cause. This saw the rejection of explanations by formal and final causation in favour of efficient causation. However, there was a new way of understanding the concept of efficient cause which is different from the way it was understood by previous philosophers. Of paramount importance to this research is how the discussion on causation was understood in the modern period as involving determinism. This view is, however, hinged on the theological belief that all things are causally determined because determinism entails the idea of God's omnipotence and omniscience. In this regard, finite agents cannot be 'genuine' causes, that is, cannot be active initiators of change. Only God can be the cause of anything.

Descartes accepts the principle that there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect, and declares it the belief that every state or event has a cause evident by the natural light of reason. He endorses two different concepts of efficient causality, which are, particular causes and one general cause. For him, God is the general cause which insures the constancy of quantity of motion in the universe ([1644] 1983, II: 36). He further asserts that the

particular causes are not the motions of the individual parts of matter, but the general principles or laws of nature ([1644] 1983, II: 37). He is led to the conclusion that the only active initiator of change was the cause of all cause, which is God.

However, Descartes faced serious criticism from Schopenhauer. According to him, there is no distinction between requiring a reason of knowledge in support of a judgement of requiring a cause for the occurrence of an actual event (Schopenhauer; 1974:9). Descartes ought to have said; “The immensity of God is a reason or ground of knowledge from which it follows that God needs no cause” (Schopenhauer; 1974:9). However, he confuses the two, and he is not clearly aware of the difference between cause and ground of knowledge (1974:9).

Following Descartes, Thomas Hobbes rejects formal and final cause in favour of causal determinism. For him, causation was only relevant to motion (Hobbes [1655] 1839, 9.3; 9.9). He understands efficient cause as “the aggregate of accidents in the agent or agents, requisite for the production of the effect” (Hobbes [1655] 1839, 9.4). And an effect for him is “that accident, which is generated in the patient” ([1655] 1839, 9.1). Thus, following the above premises, causation for Hobbes is a relationship between the motions of different bodies. For Hobbes, there is a distinction between efficient cause and material cause. The material cause is just the receptor of the agent's activity, “the aggregate of accidents in the patient”, the efficient cause is the aggregate of properties in the agent required for the production of the effect. The material and efficient causes are both part of the entire cause ([1655] 1839, 9.4). With this in mind, Hobbes was led to conclude that in the universe, everything happens by necessity: “all the effects that have been, or shall be produced, have their necessity in things antecedent” ([1655] 1839, 9.5). Moreover, given the cause, “it cannot be but that the effect will follow” ([1655] 1839, 9.7]).

In his defence of universal causation, Spinoza holds the view that necessitation means implication. Thus, causes logically necessitate their effects and vice versa. To develop his position, Spinoza distinguishes between what he termed 'free causes' and 'necessary causes'. Free causes for Spinoza act from the necessity of their own nature, whereas necessary causes are necessitated by other causes (Spinoza [1677] 1949, Definitions.7). God is the only free cause, and he alone exists and acts from the necessity of his own nature. For him, God is the only genuine cause. He thus asserts that "God's intellect is the sole cause of things, both of their essence and of their existence" ([1677] 1949, Propositions. 17). In addition to this, Spinoza is of the view that there is a necessary connection between cause and effect as indicated earlier on.

In order to advance his views of causality, Leibniz first saw it necessary to critique the views of Hobbes, Descartes and Spinoza, which hold that matter is an extended substance; and the reduction of change to locomotion. He states his argument as follows: "I do not think that substance is constituted by extension alone, since the concept of extension is incomplete. Nor do I think that extension can be conceived in itself, but I consider it an analysable and relative concept" (Leibniz [1699] 1969:516). In this regard, he advances a different conception of causality. He builds his views of causality around his principle of sufficient reason. The principle states that "there is nothing without a reason, or no effect without a cause" (1969:268). For him, efficient causality and final causality complement each other. In his explanation of the relationship between efficient cause and final cause, he argues that each efficient cause happens in accordance with a general rule or final cause, which is preordained by God. In short, Leibniz's concept of causality implies the doctrine of finality and spontaneity of simple substances; which presupposes that in each act of causation there is an efficient and a final component.

Critiques argue against Leibniz, citing that he confused notions of reason and cause. Schopenhauer is one amongst those who note this anomaly in Leibniz's concept of causality. After noting this anomaly, Schopenhauer (1995:859) went on to distinguish four distinct explanatory applications of the principle: the physical (in explaining change in the natural world), the logical (in deriving truths a priori), and the mathematical (in geometrical demonstrations), and the moral (in explaining actions in terms of motives).

John Locke also defended the view that there is universal causation. Of paramount importance to Locke's approach to the concept of causation was his idea of power. For him, causes are substantial powers put to work. He says that, "Power being the source from whence all action proceeds, the substances wherein these powers are, when they exert this power into act, are called causes; and the substances which thereupon are produced ... are called effects" (Locke [1690] 1975, II, xxii, 11). A closer look at Locke's argument shows that he does not link causation to necessity, but instead he links it to power. In short, for Locke the idea of causation does involve the idea of necessary connection.

In support of the doctrine of universal causation, Immanuel Kant grounded the principle in the structure of reason. He thus justified causality by asserting that it is an *a priori* conception. In the *Transcendental Analytic*, Kant says that the concept of cause "signifies a special kind of synthesis, whereby upon something, A, there is posited something quite different, B, according to a rule (1781/87] 1963, A 91-2/B 123-4)." However, Kant adds, "it is not manifest *a priori* why appearances should contain anything of his kind ... and it is therefore *a priori* doubtful whether such a concept be not perhaps altogether empty, and have no object anywhere among appearances" (Kant1781/87] 1963, A 91-2/B 123-4).

This led him to conclude that, either the concept of causality be completely deserted or it ought to be grounded *a priori* in reason. He asserts that;

If we thought to escape these toilsome enquiries by saying that experience continually presents examples of such regularity among experiences and so affords abundant opportunity of abstracting the concept of cause, and at the same time of verifying the objective validity of such a concept, we should be overlooking the fact that the concept of cause can never arise in this manner. It must either be grounded completely *a priori* in the understanding, or must be entirely given up as a mere phantom of the brain. For this concept makes strict demand that something, A, should be such that something else, B, follows from it *necessarily and in accordance with an absolutely universal rule*. Appearances do indeed present cases from which a rule can be obtained according to which something usually happens, but they never prove the sequence to be *necessary*. To the synthesis of cause and effect there belongs a dignity which cannot be empirically expressed, namely, that the effect not only succeeds upon the cause, but that it is posited *through* it and arises *out of* it. This strict universality of the rule is never a characteristic of empirical rules; they can acquire through induction only comparative universality, that is, extensive applicability. If we were to treat pure concepts of understanding as merely empirical products, we should be making a complete change in [the manner of] their employment (Kant [1781/87] 1963, A 91-2/B 123-4).

From the argument above, it can be inferred that Kant endorses necessary connection. Further to this, he holds that the universality involved in causal relations is not based on induction. Thus, he argues that “the concept of cause implies a rule according to which one state follows another necessarily” ([1783], 1950:315). What this means is that for an event *A* to be the cause of *B* there is a universal law which stipulates that events of the type *A* are necessarily followed by events of type *B*. It follows from Kant’s arguments that a judgement that *A* caused *B* must be grounded in the *a priori* condition. From Kant’s arguments, one can conclude that the principle of causality is an *a priori* conception, grounded in the structure of reason. It can also be deduced that every event

has a cause, and this cause is a prior event. The effects, however, follow with necessity from the cause in conformity with a universal law known to us through reason and not through experience.

John Stuart Mill's understanding of the principle of causality was at variance with that of Kant. His views can be used to critique those of Kant. He thus defined cause as "the antecedent, or the concurrence of antecedents, on which [a given phenomenon] is invariably and *unconditionally* consequent" (Mill; 1874:245). To the above view that A is the cause of B, if things similar to A are always followed by things similar to B, Mill adds the limitation that the two must be unconditionally conjoined. In his essay about the *Law of Causation*, he dismisses his earlier conviction that there is necessary connection between cause and effect. For him, "No such necessity exists for the purposes of the present inquiry, nor will any such doctrine be found in the following pages" (1874: 236). Mill notes that what is usually called cause of an event constitutes only partial cause. In other words, for every effect that we observe there are a number of factors which contribute to its being produced. However, the ordinary understanding of cause is just one condition out of a multitude of conditions. In his own words, Mill (1874:238-39) has it that what we call cause is "the last condition to be fulfilled before the effect takes place, or the condition whose role in the affair is superficially the most conspicuous". For Mill then, understanding cause in this way is misleading, since there are many more conditions that contributed to the occurrence of the effect. With this in mind, Mill goes on to define cause as a set of conditions upon which the event occurs. He asserts that, "The cause, then, philosophically speaking, is the sum total of all the conditions, positive and negative taken together, the whole of the contingencies of every description, which being realised, the consequent invariably follows" (Mill; 1874:241).

For the determinists, causal necessity implies that only one set of outcomes is possible, given the initial situation, the past determines a unique future. For Mill, the principle is not 'necessary' in

any sense but is simply an empirical generalisation. Thus, the doctrine of universal causality is a conclusion of inductive reasoning (Pojman; 1996:303). We have had an enormous range of experience wherein we have found causal explanations to individual events, which in turn seem to participate in a further causal chain (1996:303). Pojman (1996:303) notes that the problem with Mill's view, however, is that we have only experienced a very small part of the universe, not enough of it to warrant the conclusion that every event must have a cause.

#### **1.2.4 Criticism of the Principle of Cause**

Isaac Newton and David Hume powerfully challenged the causal principle. Newton rejected the principle of causality in his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. For him, the world consists of material bodies, that is, masses that are made of solid, hard, massy, impenetrable, moveable particles. These material bodies are either at rest or in motion. Newton further explains that these interact according to the laws of motion. For him, there are three laws of motion, and these are:

(1) Every body perseveres in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed thereon.

(2) The alteration of motion is ever proportional to the motive force impressed; and is made in the direction of the right line in which that force is impressed.

(3) To every Action there is always opposed an equal Reaction; or the mutual actions of two bodies upon each other are always equal, and directed to contrary parts (Newton [1687] 1968, I: 19-20).

In the *Scholium*, Newton made some distinctions between what he called relative motion and true motion. It is in these distinctions that his ideas of cause come out. He says;



The causes by which true and relative motions are distinguished, one from the other, are the forces impressed upon bodies to generate motion. True motion is neither generated nor altered, but by some force impressed upon the body moved; but relative motion may be generated or altered without any force impressed upon the body. For it is sufficient only to impress some force on other bodies with which the former is compared, that by their giving way, that relation may be changed, in which the relative rest or motion of this body did consist. Again, true motion suffers always some change from any force impressed upon the moving body... (Newton [1687] 1968, I: 14).

For Newton then to be caused means to be constrained or compelled and for a body to exercise free motion implies that it is unconstrained. Thus, a body that continues in its state of rest or of uniform behaviour in a straight line is uncaused or free. From a closer analysis of Newton's ideas, it can be inferred that there is no room for universal causation. In other words, he denies that every event must have a cause. According to his first law of motion, any movement that happens is an uncaused event. Thus, if a body moves freely from *A* to *B* to *C*, the event which is the movement from *A* to *B* is in no way the cause of the event which is the movement from *B* to *C*; it is not caused at all. The first law of motion is in fact a law of free or causeless motion (Collingwood; 1991:159).

Hume starts his analysis of causation from the basic principle that the concept involves necessity. Causation for him is characterised by; (1) contiguity (in space and time) of cause and effect, (2) priority in time of cause to effect, and (3) a necessary connection between cause and effect. For him, the view that there is a necessary connection between cause and effect is by far the most important, since it is the criteria by which we seem to distinguish causal from non-causal relations (Hume [1739] 1978:77).

He adds that causal necessity can only be justified if and only if it could be shown to be as stringent as logical necessity. However, this in Hume's view is impossible and the necessity that we ascribe

to causal relationships is just an illusion. This necessary connection, Hume observes, is due to our habits. The idea of necessity cannot be derived from the experience of individual cases. It instead arises from our experience of similar instances ([1739] 1978:266). Thus, constant conjunction is responsible for the production of the association of ideas and the production of the feeling of necessary connection in the mind ([1739] 1978:266). This leads us to two roots of the idea of necessary connection; which are, constant conjunction of objects and the feeling of necessary connection. The necessary connection is not discovered in the world but is projected onto the world by our minds ([1739] 1978:266).

So for Hume, causes and effects must be contiguous to each other, and that causes must be prior to their effects. But this is not enough; we feel that there must be a necessary connection between cause and effect, though the nature of this connection is difficult to establish (Kenny; 1998:238). He thus denies that whatever begins to exist must have a cause of existence.

As all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, it will be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of cause or productive principle (Kenny;1998:239).

Kenny (1998:240) notes three novel principles of great importance in Hume's arguments against causation. These are:

- (i) Cause and effect must be distinct existences, each conceivable without the other.
- (ii) The causal relation is to be analysed in terms of contiguity, precedence, and constant conjunction
- (iii) It is not a necessary truth that every beginning of existence has a cause.

Following Hume, other philosophers also argue against universal causation. For instance, Mill argues that the law of causation is but the familiar truth that invariability of succession is found by observation to obtain between every fact in nature and some other fact which has preceded it (Mill; 1911:213). Further to this, Russel (1948:472) points out that we must ask ourselves: when we assume causation, do we assume a specific relation, cause –and – effect, or do we merely assume invariable sequence? That is to say, when I assert “every event of class *A* causes an event of *B*”, or do I mean merely “every event of class *A* is followed by an event of class *B*”, or do I mean something more? (1948:472). Before Hume, the latter view was always taken. Since Hume, most empiricists have taken the former. According to Ayer (1963:183), in nature one thing just happens after another. Cause and effect have their place only in our imaginative arrangements and extensions of these primary facts (1963:183).

In tandem with Hume, Quine observes that, the trouble with causation is as Hume pointed out, that there is no evident way of distinguishing it from mere invariable succession. Furthermore, Carnap (1974:201), argues that a statement about a causal relation ... describes an observed regularity of nature, nothing more. A general overview of Hume’s arguments shows that he subscribes to the view that constant conjunction is a necessary condition for causation. This however, seems to be in tandem with our common sense view. However, his view that regularity is also a sufficient condition for causation invited criticism from various scholars. For instance, Thomas Reid (1967:627) finds this hard to believe since for him, there are many examples of constant conjunctions, such as day following night, that are not causal relations. Further to this, not all empiricists share the same views with Hume. For Locke and Newton, the idea of causation does not involve the idea of necessary connection. According to Newton, the ideas of causation and necessary connection are mutually exclusive since necessary connection would imply the denial

of causal efficacy. In other words, from the ongoing discussion, Hume's criticism of the concept of cause only applies to the views of Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza who subscribe to the rationalist scientific conceptions.

### **1.3 Critical Evaluation of Hard Determinism**

This section critically evaluates hard determinism by looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the theory. On the one hand, it seems that determinism captures some of the basic intuitions we assume in our daily life (Lawhead; 2000:359). For instance, we do assume that the more we understand a person's personality, the better we are able to anticipate or predict his or her behaviour (2000:359). We assume that we are able to causally influence other people's behaviour (2000:359). We assume that a person who does something can offer an explanation for what he or she did (2000:359). These facts however, seem to lend support to determinism.

Furthermore, Lawhead (2000:359) argues that since science has opened up our understanding of nature by formulating the laws that explain events, it is likely that a science of behaviour will likewise enable us to understand the causes that determine human actions. Another strength of determinism is that it eliminates the need to postulate the existence of events such as acts of the will for which there is no cause or explanation.

The first weakness of determinism that the research notes is its dismissal of moral responsibility for human beings. It will not make sense for societies to punish or reward people for a bad and good deed respectively. The very fact that in our contemporary society people are punished for wrong doing and praised for good deeds points to the fact that human beings are morally accountable for their actions.

In addition to this, Lawhead (2000:361) notes that the determinists may be able to show that our genetic makeup, our biochemical condition, or our past experiences have an influence on our behaviour and choices. But there is a difference between being ‘influenced’ by previous causes and being totally determined by them. For Lawhead (2000:361), influences may create certain tendencies, but their outcome is neither inevitable nor perfectly predictable. So the best that the determinists can say is that some behaviours are determined, which does not, however, warrant the conclusion that all behaviour is determined. Determinism, therefore, can never be decisively proven.

Another charge that is levelled against determinism is that it undermines the notion of rationality. There are two ways that an individual can arrive at his or her belief, which are, through either causes or reasons. In light of this, Lawhead (2000:362) observes that beliefs:

...can be a result of causes within or without you over which you have no control, or it can be the product of reasons that you have freely chosen to guide your behaviour. We tend not to take seriously beliefs that are the result of impersonal, irrational causes. However, the determinist must have to say that the brain tumour of the Freudian dynamics that caused Susan’s behaviour are not exceptions to the normal course of events, because all behaviour is deterministically caused.

This view then points out that the psychological factors that produce our deliberations, thoughts and behaviours are ultimately the result of external causes over which we have no control. The question becomes; if our thoughts are the result of impersonal, irrational causes, can they be really considered rational?

Critiques of determinism cite that it confuses the methodological assumptions of science with metaphysical conclusions. In advancing the doctrine of determinism, Skinner (1953:189) argues that, “A scientific analysis of behaviour must, I believe, assume that a person’s behaviour is

controlled by his genetic and environmental histories rather than by the person himself as an initiating, creative agent.” Lawhead offers two objections against Skinner’s position. Firstly, he argues that this methodological assumption is not necessary (Lawhead; 2000:363). And secondly, the methodological assumption maybe useful without being a true description of reality (2000:363). He adds that the methodological principle, “it is helpful to think of humans as though they are mechanism ruled by causes,” may be helpful in guiding us to seek out the regularities in human behaviour (2000:363). However, that assumption in no way guarantees that such causal regularities are present in all behaviour (2000:363). To explain this point, one can borrow an analogy by Bertrand Russell who bases his activity on the principle that ‘always look for causes’, but that principle does not imply that there will always be gold to be found. Likewise, the same advice can be given to determinists that they should always look for causes, but the rule should not be taken to mean that all human behaviour is caused.

From the foregoing discussion of determinism it has been seen that versions of the theory suffered serious criticisms. Also the founding principle of the theory has major flaws as evidenced from the charges levelled against it by Newton and Hume. With the coming of Hume, the principle of universal causation, which is the basis of the determinists’ arguments, falls away. That being the case then, determinism as a theory has some loop holes so that at this juncture there is need to look at the arguments proffered by the libertarians in support of human freedom.

#### **1.4 Libertarianism**

Libertarianism is the theory that we have free choice and that some of our actions are not completely determined by preceding causes (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:282). There are two versions of libertarianism. To be a libertarian is to negate the determinists’ view that every event has a cause

and assert that some events are uncaused, or to argue that no events have causes. Libertarians believe that human choices are uncaused, free actions (or events). Thus they affirm the claim that at least some human choices are free; accept the claim that if every event has a cause then no human choices are free; and deny the claim that every event has a cause.

Libertarians typically base their case for the freedom to choose on several grounds, which are, on the experience of freedom and the desire to preserve moral responsibility, arguments from introspection and arguments from deliberation. Human beings have the experience of feeling that some actions they would have performed result from their free choice, and that if they had wanted to they could have chosen otherwise (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:282). Moreover, sometimes human beings deliberate about what they will do. They think about the alternatives, weigh the pros and cons, and perhaps seek advice of others and so on and weigh the probable consequence of an action and evaluate all this data in terms of their values and desires (Lawhead; 2000:370). In light of this, the libertarians hold the view that human beings experience the fact that the decision is not already latent in the causes acting on us; instead, they have a distinct sense that they are actively deciding what the decision will be (2000:370). This is contrary to the determinists' account.

If there were no free choice, then it follows that deliberation would be pointless, and libertarians argue that humans would not deliberate if the decision were not up to them. They further argue that humans are in many cases morally responsible for their actions, and that if they did not have free choice they would not be morally responsible for anything they do, good or bad.

Further to this, libertarians also hold that when we act, experience shows that our actions were freely chosen since we could have acted otherwise than we did. And this for them provides a serious challenge to the determinist view that our actions are determined and unavoidable. The

determinists claim, however, that in those situations in which we face multiple alternatives and feel as though we are freely choosing among them, there is always one motivating cause within our current psychological state that compels us because it is the strongest one (Lawhead; 2000:370). The determinists, therefore, claim that persons always act upon their strongest desire. However, contrary to determinism, the libertarians argue that sometimes human beings can choose or overrule their desires.

Another argument that the libertarians cite to argue that human beings make free choices is that from moral responsibility. Take for instance, a person who devotes his life to helping the poor, the needy and the orphans with food and shelter. We often say these acts are commendable, admirable and worth of praise (Lawhead; 2000:370). On the other hand, if a person emotionally hurts others by pretending to love them only to get something from them, we often say this person's acts are despicable and morally bad, hence deserving blame (2000:370). If this is the case then, libertarians ask whether it is possible to make these judgements if the person's actions were the inevitable outcome of the deterministic causes (2000:370). It follows then from the libertarian arguments that making moral judgements about persons and praising or blaming them requires that actions be freely chosen. If determinism is true, then both individuals in our example above are morally equal since they simply behaved as they were caused to behave.

Following the arguments above, the libertarians claim that if determinism is true, then our moral judgements and ethical struggles are absurd. In view of this, Arthur Eddington (1935:242) has it that;

What significance is there in my mental struggle tonight whether I shall or shall not give up smoking, if the laws which govern the matter of the physical universe already pre-ordain for the morrow a configuration of matter consisting of pipe, tobacco, and smoke connected with my lips?



To this charge determinists would respond that simply because their theory conflicts with sensibility does not mean that it is false. Thus, for them maybe it is time to abandon the notion of moral responsibility. For the libertarians then, there are several reasons to believe in moral responsibility. In view of this, Eddington (1935:90) further argues that, “To me it seems that responsibility is one of the fundamental facts of our nature. If I can be deluded over such a matter of immediate knowledge – the very nature of the being that I myself am – it is hard to see where any trustworthy beginning of knowledge is to be found.”

If the libertarian view is anything to go by, then it follows that at least some aspects of human behaviour are a result of agent-causation and are freely chosen, initiated and performed by persons based on their rational deliberations and value choices. However, the libertarians do not believe that human beings are either totally free or totally unfree like Sartre claims. However, their view can be understood as presupposing that, on the one hand, human beings are determined by forces acting on them. On the other hand, they can strive to rise above these influences and take charge of what they do. Peter Burger (1963:176) expresses this libertarian view well when he says;

We see the puppets dancing on their miniature stage, moving up and down as the strings pull them around, following the prescribed course of their various little parts. We learn to understand logic of this theatre and we find ourselves in its motions. We locate ourselves in society and thus recognise our own position as we hang from its subtle strings. For a moment we see ourselves as puppets indeed. But then we grasp a decisive difference between the puppet theatre and our drama. Unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step towards freedom.

The question that arises from the above discussion then is, which of our actions are determined and which ones are free? The libertarians differ as to what events are uncaused and how such

events come about. Campbell (2000:54) argues that there are discontinuities in causal chains in respect of moral decisions. He further argues that human decisions and actions can arise, on the one hand, from inclination (following what one wants to do) or, on the other, from duty (2000:54). For Campbell, those that arise from inclination preserve causal continuity, but those that are done out of duty do not preserve causal continuity (2000:54). He adds that introspection makes it quite clear to us that when acting against our strongest desires or wants, we are combating causal forces. From his analysis, differentiates between actions done out of duty and actions done out of inclinations. This leads him to the conclusion that only actions done out of duty operate counter – causally. Thus, since it is in the nature of duties to impose a moral obligation, then moral actions are the only ones that are uncaused.

There are several arguments that are proffered to support the freewill thesis, however, for the purposes of this research only three shall be examined and these are: Indeterminism, Agency Theory, and Radical Existential freedom. I will explain the reasons for the choice of these three briefly. Following some of the criticism of determinism above, it is the conviction of the researcher that not all human behaviour is caused. Thus, indeterminism helps in advancing the argument that some events are uncaused. These uncaused behaviours are, however, acts that individuals freely choose, initiate and perform basing on their rational deliberations. If some acts are brought about as a result of individual choice, a discussion of agency is therefore warranted. This explains my choice of discussing agency theories under libertarianism. Further to this, the choice of agency theory is based also on the fact that this is the theory that informs this research. Also agency theories help this research highlight the major pitfall of determinists who classify human acts as events, thus taking away agency from human beings. Last but not least is radical existentialism. This view holds that human beings are free and that there is no God who defines human nature.

This is a direct response to theological determinism, which is of the view that everything that happens has been pre-ordained or predestined by an all-powerful, all knowing God. However, this view presents some problems for theists and also for other libertarians. This will open the way for a full discussion on predestination in the coming chapters.

### **1.4.1 Indeterminism**

Indeterminism contends that, contrary to determinism, some events are uncaused (Solomon; 1997:474). Indeterminists will accept causality in all other aspects of nature except the human realm, although they may argue that there is a certain amount of freedom even in the physical realm, especially at the sub-atomic levels of nature (1997:474). However, they accept some causality in the human realm, for example, in the area of our autonomic nervous systems and in reflex actions (1997:474). But to the extent we deliberate, choose and act, our actions are not determined but free.

Indeterminists observe that there is some randomness and indeterminacy in nature. This leads them to the conclusion that some events in nature are uncaused. To this effect, Eddington (1935:87) claims that; “The revolution of theory which has expelled determinism from present-day physics has therefore the important consequence that it is no longer necessary to suppose that human actions are completely predetermined.” For the indeterminists, then, human actions are amongst those events in nature that are uncaused. To clearly express indeterminism, Richard Taylor (1992:48) gave us a thought experiment in which he asks us to consider the following scenario:

Suppose that my right arm is free, according to this conception; that is, that its motions are uncaused. It moves this way and that from time to time, but nothing causes these motions. Sometimes it moves forth vigorously, sometimes up, sometimes down, sometimes it just drifts vaguely about – these motions all being wholly free

and uncaused. Manifestly I have nothing to do with them at all; they just happen, and neither I nor anyone can ever tell what this arm will be doing next. It might seize a club and lay it on the head of the nearest bystander, no less to my astonishment than his. There will never be any point in asking why these motions occur, or in seeking any explanation of them, for under the conditions assumed there is no explanation. They just happen, from no causes at all.

Taylor's point here is that an uncaused motion of my body could hardly be considered a free action. By freedom of the will we ordinarily mean that our actions are not the inevitable outcome of previous causes, and neither are they random and uncaused events. To be free then means that we are the cause of our actions, we produce them and initiate them; they do not simply happen. For the simple reason that indeterminism rejects determinism, it is considered a synonym of libertarianism.

William James, another proponent of indeterminism, poses what he calls *The dilemma of determinism*. He defines indeterminism as a doctrine that includes libertarianism. He argues that among the possibilities in the universe that might have existed in the past are actions that people could have chosen through free choice but did not, and among the possibilities that exist in the future are decisions that are genuinely up to us (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:285). James felt that we should affirm our freedom first as an act of freedom, and he seemed to be saying that, to be free, we have to affirm our freedom (Nolan; 1995:90). He also argues that many of human actions cannot be predicted (Cowburn; 2008:144). Since our actions cannot be predicted with any accuracy as the actions of molecules and atoms can, for instance, then we must be free and unlike other parts of or beings in the universe (2008:144).

Another argument that he gave for indeterminism was that the very fact that we human beings feel regret for some of our actions assures us that we are free (2008:144). For James, there are things

we regret having done or not having done (2008:144). But regret is pointless in a deterministic world. For James, while neither determinism nor indeterminism can be scientifically proved, he finds indeterminism more plausible because it can account for judgements of regret (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:285). The term ‘judgement of regret’ is understood by James to denote a wish that something in the universe be otherwise (2002:288). According to James, the very fact that we human beings feel regret for some of our actions assures us that we are free. If we were not free, then why should we feel regret since we could not have been responsible for having done something for which we would have regret.

To avoid pessimism and still be consistent, determinists would have to abandon all judgements of regret (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:288). But even if they do so, they are still caught in a dilemma, for they would have to judge other people’s judgements of regret as bad – and since these judgements had to occur, the universe is still flawed (2002:288). He further argues that deterministic pessimism recurs because the world turns out to be “a place of which either sin or error forms a necessary part.” (2002:288). Thus, the only way to preserve judgements of regret and avoid pessimism is to adopt the postulate of rationality that allows possibilities and free choice into the universe (2002:288).

According to James, the truth of determinism or indeterminism could never be solved by science, since science bases its conclusions on what has actually happened and what has actually happened does not tell us whether something else could have happened instead, or whether one thing could happen in the future (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:288). This led James to argue that our decision whether to accept determinism or indeterminism will be based not on science, but on our “postulate of rationality” (2002:288). For James, a world of genuine alternative possibilities is more rational than one that is completely determined (2002:288).

Though indeterminism offers criticism to determinism, it however simply states that there are some actions which are not a result of previous causes. As an alternative to this, Richard Taylor and Roderick Chisholm offer another version of libertarianism, the agency theory, in which they bring about a distinction between event causation and agent causation.

### **1.4.2 Agency Theory**

Agency theory is the framework upon which this research project is constructed. Agency theories help this thesis advance its argument by distinguishing between event and agent causation. This, however, is necessary since determinism had bunched the two together, distorting our understanding of reality. Agency theories, thus, take us somewhere in the debate of freedom and determinism. The research finds them relevant, but lacking at the same time. They depict causation as either event or agent causation. This understanding, though giving us insights into how we can understand agency, is not representative of other cultures, in particular African culture(s) which believes in agentic supernatural causes. These theories help us bring in the African understanding of agency, which does not only end with agent and event causation, but moves a step further to include a metaphysical kind of causality. When analysing the concept of destiny, the Africans believe that there are three things that can influence a person's destiny, which are, God, evil forces and other human beings. The research has thus been inspired by the fact that the agency theory leaves out factors that are of paramount importance in other culture(s), in this case African cultures. The theories of agency then provoke the researcher to investigate how causality is viewed by the Africans who believe in the interactive nature of the invisible and the visible world. In support of the African understanding of causation, Lowe (2002:195) notes that a paradigm example of an agent would be a human being or other conscious creatures capable of performing intentional actions.

In the West, agency is understood to be the capacity of an entity to act in any given environment. Roderick Chisholm and Richard Taylor argued for libertarianism by developing a position known as the agency theory to which human beings are “agents”, a unique kind of causal entity (Lawhead; 2000:365). Agency may be classified either as unconscious, involuntary behaviour, or purposeful, goal-directed activity. To be an agent is to have some sort of immediate awareness of one’s physical activity and the goals that the activity is aimed at realising. In “goal-directed action”, an agent implements a kind of direct control or guidance over their behaviour (2000:365).

Agent theorists reject the dichotomy that: “An event is either (1) the necessary outcome of previous causes or (2) an uncaused, random event that simply happens” (2000:365). This version of libertarianism rejects both determinism and indeterminism (2000:365). While agency theorists may agree that both kinds of events occur in the world, these philosophers insist on a third category of events as well, events that are brought about by agents (Lowe; 2002:195). An agent in the sense intended here is a persisting object (or substance) possessing various properties including, most importantly, certain causal powers and liabilities (2002:195). Agent theorists also argue that there are two kinds of causes operating in the world (Lawhead; 2000:365). On the one hand, there is event – causation, which occurs when a prior event necessarily causes a subsequent event (2000:365). This can also be understood as natural forces, which are causes devoid of thinking, but act according to the deterministic processes.

On the other hand, there is agent – causation, which implies events that are brought about through the free action of an agent (self, person). According to Lawhead (2000:365), the notion of agent – causation seems to capture what we mean when we say our actions are free. In this regard, human

agency can be understood as the capacity of individuals to make choices. However, there is need to dig deep into the nature of agency. What exactly does human agency mean? In an attempt to shed light on this question, Taylor in *Metaphysics* distinguishes between the “reason for an action” and the “cause of an action”;

The only conception of action that accords with our data is one according to which people – and perhaps some other things too – are sometimes, but of course not always, self-determining beings; that is, beings that are sometimes the causes of their own behaviour in the case of an action that is free, it must be such that it is caused by the agent who performs it, but such that no antecedent conditions were sufficient for his performing just that action. In the case of an action that is both free and rational, it must be such that the agent who performed it did so for some reason, but this reason cannot have been the cause of it. Now, this conception fits what people take themselves to be; namely, beings who act, or who are agents, rather than things that are merely acted upon, and whose behaviour is simply the causal consequence of conditions that they have not wrought... Now this conception of activity, and of an agent who is the cause of it, involves two rather strange metaphysical notions that are never applied elsewhere in nature. The first that of a *self* or *person* – for example, a man – who is not merely a collection of things or events, but a self-moving being. For on this view it is a person, and not merely some part of him or something within him, that is the cause of his own activity (Taylor; 1992:51-53).

Taylor is aware that his conception of causality is extraordinary and different from the usual philosophical conception of cause. Some philosophers expand on Taylor’s notion of agent. For instance, Bandura (2006:116) notes that to be an agent is to influence intentionally one’s functioning and life circumstances. In this view, personal influence is part of the causal structure. People are self-organising, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. In other words, they are not simply onlookers of their behaviour. They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them. Thus, he analysed four core properties of agency and these are; intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness.



Under the property of intentionality, people form intentions that include actions plans and strategies for realising them. According to Bandura (2006:116), most human pursuits involve other participating agents, so there is no absolute agency. Individuals have to accommodate their self-interest if they are to achieve unity of effort within diversity. Collective endeavours require commitment to a shared intention and coordination of interdependent plans of action to realise it. Effective group performance is thus guided by collective intentionality.

Secondly, there is forethought as a property of agency. This involves the temporal extension of agency. Forethought includes more than future-directed plans (2006:116). People set themselves goals and anticipate likely outcomes of prospective actions to guide and motivate their efforts. A future cannot be a cause of current behaviour because it has no material existence (2006:116). But through cognitive representation, visualised futures are brought into the present to act as current guides and motivators of behaviour (2006:116). In this form of anticipatory self-guidance, behaviour is governed by visualised goals and anticipated outcomes, rather than pulled by an unrealised future state. The ability to bring anticipated outcomes to bear on current activities promotes purposeful and foresightful behaviour (2006:116).

The third agentic property is self-reactiveness. According to this property, agents are not only planners and forethinkers. They are also self-regulators. According to Bandura (2006:165), having adopted an intention and an action plan, one cannot simply sit back and wait for the appropriate performances to appear. From this it can be deduced that agency involves not only the deliberative ability to make choices and action plans, but also the ability to construct appropriate courses of action and motivate and regulate their execution.

Self-reflectiveness is fourth agentic property. This property notes that people are not only agents of action. They are also self-examiners of their own functioning. Through functional self-awareness, they reflect on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, and the meaning of their pursuits, and they make corrective adjustments if necessary (Bandura; 2006:165). The metacognitive capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions is the most distinctly human core property of agency. People do not operate as autonomous agents. Nor is their behaviour wholly determined by situational influences. Rather, human functioning is a product of reciprocal interplay of intrapersonal, behavioural, and environmental determinants (Bandura; 2006:165). This triadic interaction includes the exercise of self-influence as part of the causal structure (2006:165). It is not a matter of "free will", which is a throwback to medieval theology, but, in acting as an agent, an individual makes causal contributions to the course of events (2006:165).

Freedom is conceived not just passively as the absence of constraints, but also proactively as the exercise of self-influence in the service of selected goals and desired outcomes. In other words, self-influence is an interacting part of the determining conditions; human agency is not incompatible with the principle of regulative causality (Bandura; 2006:165). Given that individuals are producers as well as products of their life circumstances, they are partial authors of the past conditions that developed them as well as the future courses their lives take. The cultivation of agentic capabilities adds concrete substance to abstract metaphysical discourses about freedom and determinism (2006:165). Thus, our choices are not results of causal chains, but are free, brought about by agents and are undetermined.

Furthermore, Taylor rejects determinism because he finds it easier to doubt this philosophical theory than his beliefs so that he sometimes deliberates about what he will do, and that what he

does is sometimes up to him (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:295). Taylor argues that in order to account for the data that we sometimes deliberate on and that when we deliberate we believe that what we do is up to us, we must conceive of human beings as agents (2002:295). An agent is a being that can sometimes be the cause of its own behaviour, and the behaviour of an agent is properly called an action (2002:295). Further to this, Taylor argues that the kind of causality exercised by an agent differs from all other kinds of known causality in the universe, because in this case alone the cause is a thing (namely, the agent) and not an event – and moreover it is a thing that causes something (namely, an action) without anything else causing it to do so (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:295). Commenting on the special kind of causality in his book *Action and Purpose*, Taylor distinguishes between event and agent causation. He explains:

There must, moreover, not only be this reference to myself in distinguishing my acts from all those things that are not acts, but it must be a reference to myself as an active being. Another perfectly natural way of expressing this notion of my activity is to say that, in acting, I make something happen, I cause it, or bring it about. Now it does seem odd that philosophers should construe this natural way of expressing the matter as really meaning, not that I, but rather some event, process, or state not identical with myself should be the cause of that which is represented as my act. It is plain that, whatever I am, I am never identical with any such event, process, or state as is usually proposed as the "real cause" of my act, such as some intention or state of willing. Hence, if it is really and unmetaphorically true, as I believe it to be, that I sometimes cause something to happen, this would seem to entail that it is false that any event, process, or state not identical with myself should be the real cause of it. But it is not, in fact, hard to see why philosophers should want to insist that these natural ways of expressing the matter really mean something quite different from what they seem to mean; namely, that it has been the firm conviction of most philosophers for generations that in the case of any event that occurs, another event must be at least part of its cause. If, accordingly, it is true that I am the cause of my acts, as it evidently is, then in view of this principle we must suppose that the real cause is some event intimately associated with me — and then, of course, the chase is on to find it or, failing that, at least to give it a name and create a semblance of having found it. The alternative I urge is that I am

sometimes the cause of my own actions, that such an assertion is neither incomplete nor metaphorical and hence has no "real" meaning different from, much less inconsistent with, itself as it stands. In that case, however, we must conclude that the word "cause" in such contexts has not the ordinary meaning of a certain relationship between events, but has rather the older meaning of the efficacy or power of an agent to produce certain results. This idea can be otherwise expressed by saying that an agent is something that originates things, produces them, or brings them about. It might be wished that some clear definition or analysis of this idea of agency could be given, in place of merely synonymous expressions, but we have already seen that this cannot be done, and we have also seen why. To give an analysis of agency or of the sense in which an agent is the cause of his actions would amount to giving an analysis of an act, an analysis which would of necessity presuppose the truth of a metaphysical presupposition that is not only dubious, but probably false. (Taylor; 1966: 111)

From Taylor's argument, it can be summarised that agency theories argue that there are two types of causes in the world. These are event causation and agent causation. The former stresses the view that a prior event necessarily causes a subsequent event; and the latter that there are actions that are brought about by the free action of the individual. The notion of agent-causation, however, seems to capture what we ordinarily mean when we say our actions are free.

Stumpf and Abel (2002:296) note that even though Taylor's conception of agency sounds strange or mysterious, he thinks it is the only theory that accounts for the data with which he began – that he sometimes deliberates and that, when he does, he supposes that what he does is up to him (2002:296). He admits that both pieces of data could be illusions, and that the question of freedom of choice is exceedingly difficult (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:296).

### **1.4.3 Radical Existential Freedom**

The most extreme version of libertarianism has been proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre claims that we are always free, even in situations in which most other libertarians would acknowledge we

are not. According to him, “Man cannot be sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all” (Lawhead; 2000:366). In his work, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argues,

Thus there are no accidents in life; a community event which suddenly bursts forth and involves me in it does not come from the outside. If I am mobilised in a war, this war is my war; it is in my image and I deserve it. I deserve it first because I could always get out of it by suicide or by desertion; these ultimate possibles are those which must always be present for us when there is a question of envisaging a situation. For lack of getting out, I have chosen it...Anyway you look at it, it is a matter of a choice (Sartre; 1956:708-11).

As an atheist, he based his radical view of freedom on the claim that each of us is thrust into existence without anyone or anything determining what our purpose shall be. This view means that for humans, their existence comes before their essence. He further argued that freedom is not something that we have but something that we are. Hence, for him, human beings are condemned to be free.

However, the question arises as to whether this radical view of freedom can be reconciled with the facts of our experience. These facts are some of the givens of one’s situation that they were not free to choose and yet seem to set limits on the course of their life (Lawhead; 2000:366). The fact that an agent did not choose many of the features of their past or present, to be born belonging to a certain race, or their sex is what Sartre called a person’s facticity. According to Sartre, facticities are those features of our past and present that we were not free to choose and yet seem to set limits on the course of our lives (2000:366). However, he argues that in spite of our facticity, freedom prevails in the end, for we continually decide how the facts of our situation fit into our present self-conception and projects (2000:367).

In addition to our facticity, there is what Sartre calls our transcendence. Transcendence is the root of our freedom, for it refers to the fact that we define ourselves by our possibilities and by all the

ways in which each of us is continually creating our own future in terms of our choices, our plans, our dreams and our ambitions. Because of our transcendence, what we have been or done in the past does not dictate our future (Lawhead; 2000:367).

### **1.5 Critical Evaluation of Libertarianism**

At this juncture, after laying down the arguments proffered by libertarians to argue for free will, there is need to look at the strength and weaknesses of the theory. On one hand, libertarianism does the best job of explaining what we experience internally when we deliberate, choose and act (Lawhead; 2000:381). Lawhead (2000:381) poses a question as to whether apart from the libertarian notion of agent causation we can ever say that anyone's beliefs have been arrived at rationally. He further argues that if determinism is true, then the determinists' conclusions are ultimately the product of impersonal causes acting on him or her (2000:381). Likewise, the libertarian's conclusions are ultimately the product of impersonal causes acting on him or her (2000:381). We simply believe that we have been determined to believe and have no power to change that. Libertarianism offers a better perspective than this one on human cognition. On the other hand, libertarianism was heavily criticised by the determinists. According to the determinists, libertarians may be correct to say that when we deliberate we assume that it is up to us, and what we will do, but the assumption is false (Stumpf and Abel;2002:284). Likewise, it may be true that to assign moral responsibility to people is to assume that they are free, but once again the assumption is false (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:284). The determinists argue that they can account for the facts of deliberation and the assigning of moral responsibility by saying that these acts are themselves determined (2002:284).

Another criticism of libertarianism comes from the scientific view of the world, which is based on the conviction that events follow fixed laws and that there is a cause for everything being the way it is (Lawhead; 2000:381). As Lawhead (2000:339) observes:

Throughout history, science has progressed by replacing explanations of events based on voluntary, spontaneous acts of freewill with explanations in terms of deterministic laws. For example, the ancient Greeks believe that the reason why the stone falls to the ground is because it desires to be united by its mother earth (2000:339). Other natural events such as solar eclipses, plagues, thunderstorms... were thought to be caused by the arbitrary will of the gods. Our ability to understand the world took a great leap forward when people came to realise that the causes of these events have nothing to do with the stones or gods desiring or willing anything. Instead we came to view such events as rooted in a deterministic system of natural laws.

If what Lawhead observes is anything to go by, then libertarianism flies in the face of modern science. If so, because nothing can compete with modern science in unveiling the nature of reality, the facts then negate libertarianism.

Another criticism levelled against libertarianism springs from the fact that it holds that human actions are a product of free will, which implies that some events simply happen without any cause to produce them or to explain them. To this effect, the determinists claim that the beliefs in free will require us to suppose that some psychological events simply happen and happen in a certain way, but without any cause that can explain them (Lawhead; 2000:339). While some determinists still find it appropriate to explain human actions in terms of wants, desires, or motives that activate the will, they still would insist that these psychological states must have a causal history that explains them.

The determinists also argue against libertarianism citing that it fails to explain the fact that we can influence other people's behaviour. For the determinists, it is possible to causally affect one

another's behaviour. For them, if human actions and volitions were not the result of causes acting on them, it would be useless to reward or punish people (Lawhead; 2000:339). For the determinists then, in a world that has no deterministic causes, people's behaviour would be completely unpredictable and capricious (Lawhead; 2000:339). However, it is obvious that we can to a large degree, predict and influence how people will behave. This ability implies causal connections between the causes that precede an act of the will and the behaviour that results (2000:339). For the determinists then, the degree to which we can understand a person's psychological state and the causes operating on it is the degree to which we can predict what that person will do. The degree to which we can control the causes acting on a person is the degree to which we can influence what that person will do (Lawhead; 2000:339). Hence, the activities of parenting, educating, rewarding, and punishing all assume determinism.

The most significant empirical objections to agent-causal libertarianism challenge its capacity to accommodate our best natural scientific theories. Different aspects of this type of libertarianism give rise to two such objections (Pereboom; 2001:69). First, given our scientific understanding of the world, how could there exist anything as fabulous as an agent-causal power? (2001:69). It would appear that our natural scientific theories could not yield an account of a power of this sort. Second, given our scientific understanding, how could there be agent-caused decisions that are freely willed in the sense required for moral responsibility? (2001:69) According to Derk Pereboom (2001:69), such decisions, it would seem, would not be constrained by the laws of nature, and therefore could not exist in the natural world.

Another argument against freewill is the scientific argument. According to this view, there is strong empirical evidence for the idea that our actions and decisions are completely caused by non-conscious events that we have no control over. According to Pereboom (2001:38);



The earliest evidence for this came from psychologists, who discovered that many of our actions and decisions are caused by things that we are completely unaware of, we have known for a long time, for instance, that our behaviour can be influenced by things like subliminal messages. Moreover, when our behaviour is influenced by things like this, we construct elaborate stories to explain why we did what we did. We think these explanations are true, but they are not; they are completely false.

From the ongoing discussion of freedom and determinism, it can be seen that libertarianism and determinism seem to be mutually exclusive. This position in philosophy is called incompatibilism. Incompatibilism holds that an action or decision cannot be both free and caused or determined. As Barcalow (1997:150) observes;

On this view, if it was already determined before you were born that you would decide to go to college, then it makes no sense to say that your decision or choice was “free”. How could your decision to go to college be free, if given events that occurred before you were born, it was physically necessary that you would decide to go to college? If determinism is true, given the way the universe was prior to your decision you *had* to decide to go to college. You could not have made any other decision under those circumstances; therefore, your decision was not free.

From the above quotation, it can be argued that human freedom and determinism are incompatible. For the compatibilists, if determinism is true then human freedom is an illusion. Human beings can only be free if determinism is false. In support of this point, Barcalow (1997:150-151) observes that we must therefore choose between human freedom and determinism. Either we must accept the truth of determinism and give up freedom as a mere illusion or accept the reality of human freedom and give up determinism as false. For the incompatibilist then, only decisions that are uncaused can be free; decisions that are caused are not free. Thus, for them a decision can only be free if, given the circumstances of the decision, the agent could have done something else.

An overall analysis of incompatibilism reveals that those philosophers who subscribe to it face a choice of either giving up human freedom as an illusion (hard determinism), or give up determinism as false (libertarianism). In light of this, on the one hand, we have hard determinists reasoning as follows:

1. Determinism is true.
2. If determinism is true, no human decisions or actions are free.
3. Therefore, no human decisions or actions are free (Barcalow; 1997:152).

For the determinists, it is easier to give up human freedom than to give up determinism. They believe in determinism since, for them, every event has a cause. The argument that they advance is that there are no events that are not caused and to reject determinism is to affirm that there are some events with no cause. On the other hand, libertarians take the opposite position and reason as follows:

1. Some decisions that people make are free.
2. If determinism is true, no human decisions or actions are free.
3. Therefore, determinism is false (1997:154).

From the above discussion, one can note that both hard determinists and libertarians are incompatibilists since they both accept the second premise in the argument. Libertarians, as indicated earlier, feel that some decisions are free than that determinism is true. Therefore, they reject determinism as false on the basis that “some” events are not caused. They, however, do not commit to the view that “no” events have causes. In short, the causeless events for the libertarians are mental events, that is, the decisions that people make. However, some philosophers argue that determinism and libertarianism are both true. The philosophers who attempted to reconcile

libertarianism and determinism are called compatibilists. At this juncture the chapter moves on to consider the arguments offered by the compatibilists to support the view that freedom and determinism can co-exist.

## **1.6 Compatibilism**

There are many versions of Compatibilism held by different philosophers. Thus, this section will consider different arguments that were put forward by different scholars of compatibilism. Compatibilism is the view that all our actions are determined by preceding causes, but actions that result from certain kinds of causes are also free (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:282). According to Compatibilists, we do not have to choose between believing in free choice and accepting the scientific principle that every event, including every human action, is the necessary result of its preceding causes (2002:282). Compatibilists maintain that choice and the causal determination of human actions are not mutually exclusive but are compatible (2002:282).

All human actions are caused, and whether an action is free or determined depends on the kind of cause it had (2002:282). However, the mere fact that an action is caused does not, by itself, imply anything about whether the act is free or not. Compatibilists contend that an action resulting from an inner psychological cause (desire or intention) is free, whereas actions that result from an external cause (someone physically forcing me to do something, or threatening to harm me) is not free (Stumpf and Abel; 2002:282). The arguments of compatibilists are often based on claims about the meaning of terms “free”, “acting freely”, and “voluntary” and about how these terms are used in ordinary English (Curd; 1992:358). Many compatibilists insist that liberty of spontaneity is sufficient for freedom. In other words, one acts freely when they do what they want to do, when they act in accordance with their wishes free from coercion, threat and constraints.

Thus, compatibilists accept the claim that every event has a cause and also that at least some human choices are free. However, they reject the claim that if every event has a cause, then no human choices are free (Solomon; 1997:477). Robert Solomon (1997:477) further argues that the compatibilists must then find good reasons for rejecting the claim that if every event has a cause, then no human choices are free which expresses the incompatibility of freedom and determinism. In other words, compatibilists argue that choices are caused, perhaps by our desires or our character traits or even our habitual tendencies but that this causation is compatible with calling those choices “free”. As William Lawhead (2000:383) asserts, “whereas hard determinism and libertarianism take an ‘either-or’ stance on the issue of freedom and determinism, the compatibilist takes a ‘both-and’ position.”

Philosophers such as John Locke, David Hume, Walter Stace, Harry Frankfurt among others championed compatibilism. Following Locke, Hume argues that the apparent conflict between liberty (freedom) and necessity (determinism) is an illusion resulting from confusion of language (Curd; 1992:358). Locke gives his notion of freedom as follows:

So far as a man has a power to think or not to think, to move or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far is a man free. Wherever any performance or forbearance are not equally in a man's power, wherever doing or not doing will not equally follow upon the preference of his mind directing it, there he is not free, though perhaps the action may be voluntary. So that the idea of liberty is the idea of a power in any agent to do or forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind, whereby either of them is preferred to the other; where either of them is not in the power of the agent to be produced by him according to his volition, there he is not at liberty: that agent is under necessity (Locke, 1974 [1690], II, XXI, 8).

Hume also sees liberty as the ability to make one's actions match one's desires. Thus, he argues:

What is meant by liberty when applied to voluntary actions? We cannot surely mean that actions have so little connection with motives, inclinations, and circumstances that one does not follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other, and that one affords no inference by which we can conclude the existence of the other. For these are plain and acknowledged matters of fact. By liberty, then, we can only mean a power of acting or not acting according to the determinations of the will; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may. Now this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to everyone who is not a prisoner and in chains. Here then is no subject of dispute (Hume, 1748, VIII, Part I, 104).

Another philosopher who believed that freedom and determinism are compatible is Walter Stace who gave a forceful defence of compatibilism. He agrees with the hard determinists that every human action is as much determined by previous causes as is any other event in the world (Lawhead; 2000: 387). However, he agrees with the libertarians that without free will there can be no morality. To be morally responsible for an action requires that you freely chose to perform the action on the basis of your motives, desires, and values (2000:387). For Stace, the problem of reconciling freedom and determinism is merely a verbal one that is based on the incorrect definition of freewill. Thus, for Stace, the improper definition of freewill is the one which makes it seem like hard determinists and libertarians think determinism is inconsistent with moral responsibility. He says:

Throughout the modern period, until quite recently, it was assumed, both by the philosophers who denied freewill and by those who defend it, that determinism is inconsistent with freewill. If a man's actions were wholly determined by chains of causes stretching back into the remote past, so that they could be predicted beforehand by a mind which knew all the causes, it was assumed that they could not in that case be free. This implies that a certain definition of actions done from free will was assumed, namely that they are actions not wholly determined by causes or predictable beforehand... free will was defined as meaning indeterminism.

This is the incorrect definition which has led to the denial of free will. As soon as we see what the true definition is we shall find that the question whether the world is deterministic, as Newtonian science implied, or in a measure of indeterministic, as current physics teaches, is wholly irrelevant to the problem (Stace; 1952: 249-258).

Freedom for Stace has to do with acts done voluntarily, and determinism with the causal processes that underlie all behaviour and events (Pojman; 1996:306). These need not be incompatible. For example, Ghandi's fasting to free India was a voluntary or free act, whereas a human being starving in the desert is not doing so voluntarily or as a free act (1996:306). In short, Stace's argument is that even though your actions are determined they still can be free if they result from an act of a person's will and are not externally constrained or compelled. However, this statement assumes that the only kind of force preventing voluntary action is an external one. It can be noted, contrary to Stace's argument, that it is possible that a person's ability to voluntarily perform or not perform an action can be impeded by psychological compulsions. In light of this, Stace's view of freedom from external compulsions is not a sufficient basis for defining a compatibilist notion of voluntary action. This led Harry Frankfurt to develop what he called hierarchical compatibilism as a solution of the problems that Stace' compatibilism faced.

Frankfurt's argument is based on the view that human beings have a hierarchy of different desires, which are, first-order desires and second order desires. The first order desires are directed toward objects or state of affairs. For instance, human beings desire such things as food, shelter, knowledge, friends, pleasure, money, health, and comfort. However, we not only desire certain things or conditions, but we also desire to have or not have our first-order desires. To explain these first order and second order desires, Lawhead (2000:392) gave an example of a person who is

trying to diet, and may have a strong desire for a piece of pie (a first-order desire). At the same time, however, he may wish that he did not have this desire for dessert (Lawhead; 2000:392).

Desires that are concerned with our first order desires are called second order desires. The desire not to be the sort of person who craves fattening foods, for example, would be a second order desire. Merely having second-order desires is not sufficient to explain free actions. We can have several second-order desires that are in conflict. For instance, we might have second-order desires that we do not wish to be effective. A good example is that of St Augustine the philosopher, who struggled to change from being promiscuous playboy to being a pious Christian. During his time of transition he is said to have prayed to the Lord to make him sexually pure, but not just yet. This shows that he had a second-order desire to be free from his first-order lusts, but was not yet willing for that desire to control his will.

Following the above discussion, Frankfurt notes that having free will is not identical to the condition of having circumstantial freedom, and it is more than the liberty to act on one's first – order desires. He defines free will in the following way, “A person's will is free only if he is free to have the will he wants. This means that with regard to any of his first-order desires, he is free either to make that desire his will or to make some other first-order desire his will instead” (2000:392). Expressed in another way, we act freely when we act on our second-order volition. The question of incompatibilism, according to hierarchical compatibilists, is not an issue of whether your behaviour is determined, but whether it is consistent with our second-order volitions or what one deeply wishes his or her will to be.

## 1.7 Critical Evaluation of Compatibilism

Since the compatibilists argue that, determinism and freedom can co-exist, there is need now to look at whether they were successful or not by looking at the theory's strengths and weaknesses. On one hand, by rejecting the claim that some events (or actions) are uncaused, the compatibilist's position is more consistent with the most well-founded principles of physics and the behavioural sciences than that of libertarianism (Lawhead; 2000:396). Also, in building a theory around the notions that some actions are voluntary and some involuntary, that some are free and some are not, the compatibilists are more consistent with the way we ordinarily speak than are the hard determinists (2000:396). According to Lawhead (2000:396), compatibilism provides an effective way of preserving moral responsibility while also explaining why praise, blame and punishment in general can shape, modify, and change people's behaviours.

However, on the other hand, Compatibilism faced criticisms from both the libertarians and the determinists. According to Immanuel Kant (1788:95-96), "compatibilism is a wretched subterfuge with which some persons still let themselves be put off, and so think they have solved, with a petty word-jugglery, the problem of the will." Also, William James (1884:149) criticised for being compatibilism which he argues to be "a quagmire of evasion under which the real issue of fact has been entirely smothered... No matter what the soft determinists mean by 'freedom', there is a problem, an issue of fact and not of words."

Furthermore, Paul Edwards doubts that determinism and freedom are reconciled so easily. In response to Hume, he quotes Baron d'Holbach and Schopenhauer who point out that if determinism is true, then our will also is determined (Curd; 1992:358). What difference can it make if we act in accordance with our will if what we will to do is inexorably determined by prior



events? (Curd; 1992:358). Similarly, if determinism is true, then our characters, which play a significant role in determining how we act, are ultimately shaped by factors that lie completely outside our control (1992:358). It seems as if this kind of freedom that is compatible with determinism is inconsistent with holding people morally responsible for their actions (1992:358).

The incompatibilists criticise the compatibilist account of freedom citing that if determinism is true as the soft determinists maintain, then an action is causally necessitated by a decision, which is causally necessitated by a set of desires, beliefs, preferences, and so on which is causally necessitated by a still earlier set of mental states, and so on back to events that occurred before the agent was born (Barcalow; 1997:158). Thus, given the events that occurred before the agent was born, he had to have the set of mental states that caused the decision that caused the action. For incompatibilists, then, if determinism is true, an agent does not have control over the internal and external forces and influences that shape their personality and character, or over what mental states they will have at any time (1997:158). Thus, incompatibilists hold that if then mental states that cause our actions, decisions, and volitions are not under our control but were predetermined before we were even born, and if given these states we have to decide and act as we do, then it makes no sense to call our actions and decisions free (1997:158).

Another criticism of Compatibilism is levelled against Locke – Hume’s definition of acting freely. William Rowe examines the debate between Locke and, the compatibilist, Thomas Reid, the incompatibilist libertarian (Rowe; 1992:358). Rowe agrees with Reid that the Lockean conception of freedom is vulnerable to “utterly devastating objections” (1992:358).

## 1.8 An Overall Analysis of the Three Views

The problem of freedom and determinism has been one of the most challenging, often discussed philosophical issues since ancient Greek. Concerning determinism, critiques attack the theory's basis, that is, their argument that there is universal causation. To that effect, the theory cannot stand. Also, the Libertarians' arguments for human freedom seem to fly in the face of modern science. The third view of human freedom, which is compatibilism, was criticised by both the libertarians and the hard determinists.

So as a result, this debate leaves more questions lingering than it answers. Thus, the question of whether human beings are captains of their fate or not was not answered in Western philosophy. It is therefore important to interrogate the African thought system on this issue in an attempt to analyse the dominant orientation within the people's culture. After realising the short-falls of the three positions above, the researcher saw it necessary to bring aboard the views of the Africans, who view the human agent as standing in a particular position with all there is both visible and invisible. Thus, there is need to look at the problem of freedom and determinism from the perspectives of Africans who believe in the concept of destiny which is received at creation from a deity. There is need at this juncture to give highlights concerning how freedom and determinism are understood in African philosophy in light of the people's conception of human destiny.

In African philosophy, there appears to be a different understanding of these concepts. The belief in destiny takes centre stage in African philosophy. Kwame Gyekye (1987) observes that the African concept of destiny is enmeshed with philosophical themes such as determinism and freedom of the will. Building on Gyekye's argument, this thesis notes that in order for one to have

a full appreciation of the problem of freewill and determinism in African philosophy, one has to analyse their understanding of human destiny.

For thinkers such as Gyekye (1987), destiny is something that is apportioned the individual by God at creation and, once received from the Supreme Being, becomes unalterable. Kwasi Wiredu (1980) shares the same sentiments with Gyekye that amongst the Akans, it is traditionally believed that each human being comes into the world with a specific unalterable destiny apportioned to him or her by the Supreme God. This belief naturally affects conduct and the way a human being regards himself or herself. This then raises the question of whether the individual is ever a freely choosing entity or one whose behaviour is bound by the destiny fixed at creation. The implications of choosing either alternative are quite serious for human agency. If destiny is handed by God, to what extent is the individual able to alter it and be seen as responsible for their actions? If destiny is handed by God, is the individual a completely free agent who is not constrained by some form of predetermined desire by God to be this or that entity?

On the other hand, thinkers like Gbadegesin (1991) note that destiny even though handed down by God, destiny can be altered. On the one hand, Gyekye and Wiredu's classification of destiny presupposes hard determinism. For them, since destiny is determined by the omnipotent Supreme Being, it obviously cannot be changed, thus, it is unalterable. On the other hand, Gbadegesin is of the view that destiny can be altered, hence, presupposing freewill. The research argues that a careful analysis of the concept of destiny in African thought system reveals that predestination is not analogous to fatalism. Thus, in this regard, destiny can be altered through human effort of hard work, prayer or sacrifice. These disparities between these two camps lead to serious questions in African philosophy. Thus, questions arise as to whether the agent is a determined being or a free being.

The existence of two different views on the concept of destiny amongst Akan of Ghana and Yoruba of Nigeria, created the need for the thesis to find a philosophically compelling and defensible view of destiny in African Philosophy. As a contribution to the debate, the thesis seeks to investigate the extent to which an African agent possesses metaphysical freedom regardless of a destiny apportioned by God at birth and the interconnectedness of the physical and the metaphysical worldviews. For some Africans, the doctrine of destiny is not fatal to the freedom a person has in actions and behaviour (Idowu; 1962, Ambibola (1971), Makinde (1985). This is evidenced by the view that human beings can better the conditions of their lives through prayer and sacrifice (Gbadegesin; 1987). For Gyekye (1987), once destiny is affixed on the agent, it becomes the blueprint of the individual's life. In other words, whatever an agent does, they are not in control and could not have done otherwise. In the next chapters, there will be a full-blown discussion of the Akan and Yoruba conceptions of destiny.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

Drawing from the arguments above, the free will–determinism dilemma can now be understood as a tension between the central thesis of determinism, supported by scientific success, and the idea that persons are free, supported by responsible agents. Arguments were put forward to support either thesis. Also, each thesis has its weaknesses. However, the problem arose as to whether these two can co–exist. This gave birth to compatibilism, which tried to reconcile these two seemingly contrasting views. However, compatibilism also faces serious criticisms from both the libertarians and the determinists as evidenced above. Thus, after a critical analysis of these three views, one is left with more questions than answers. One of the questions that arise is; to what extent is a human being captain of his or her fate? In the next chapter this problem will be looked at from the

interconnectedness of the African understanding of reality, that is, the interactive nature of the visible and invisible worldviews and the impact of this relationship on human freedom.

## **Chapter Two: The principle of Causality in African Philosophy: A Case of Determinism?**

### **2.0 Introduction**

As has been indicated in the preceding chapter, the concept of causation took centre stage in the debate on freedom and determinism. Thus it becomes undeniable that the concept is of paramount importance in the debate. It had been argued by different scholars that there is universal causation in the physical world. Thus for them, every effect that we see can be traced back to a cause. However, the principle of causation in this sense only applied to physical agents. In other words, causality is viewed as a physical order of reality which is perceivable and can be rationalised. First of all, the chapter problematises the principle of cause in African philosophy. It unearths the African beliefs that cause cannot be restricted to mechanistic interpretations, but it should transcend the physical realm to incorporate spiritual agents. In other words, the African concept of causality is agentic in nature.

In this sense, in order to understand the concept of African causality, the idea should be viewed as religious, supernatural, spiritual, mystical and mythical. In order to expose the African views of causality, that nothing happens without a cause, the chapter notes that in traditional African societies there was no room for chance happenings. In the same vein, the chapter notes that the Africans believe in both empirical and supernatural causation. However, even though the Africans subscribe to both empirical and supernatural causation, the latter takes precedence over the former in the explanation of phenomena in the African worldview. Having mentioned the superiority of supernatural causation, the chapter goes on to discuss the hierarchy of beings in the spiritual worldview. After acknowledging the existence of spiritual entities in their hierarchy, the chapter moves on to investigate whether mystical powers can be regarded as causal agents or not. This

chapter serves to discuss that nature of causality and its impact on agency in the African worldview.

## **2.1 African Metaphysics.**

As a forerunner to the discussion on the African concept of causation, it is necessary at this level to first of all demonstrate that there is metaphysical thinking in Africa. This is done because the concept of causation falls under metaphysics which is one of the branches of philosophy hence the need to establish the existence of metaphysical thinking in African philosophy. The African people's understanding of the invisible world has serious effects on the people's notion of causality. Thus, one way of understanding causality from an African perspective then is to understand it in the supernatural sense. However, the first issue that this research addresses under this section is a general understanding of metaphysics. It proceeds to look at whether there is justification for believing in the existence of African metaphysics. However, since my objective is to look at the African understanding of causation, which is a facet of African metaphysics, the research first of all provides an understanding of what metaphysics is all about, then moves on to discuss African metaphysics in particular. It also clears the ground a bit by establishing that there is something called African metaphysics in the first place.

There is need to understand what metaphysics is all about in order to have an understanding of African metaphysics. A discussion of African metaphysics is of paramount importance at this stage since it serves as a forerunner to the problems that the thesis seeks to address. G.O Ozumba, in trying to understand what metaphysics is all about (2004), notes that;

The etymological meaning of metaphysics holds that metaphysics is derived from the Greek words Meta-Ta-Physika meaning “*after physics*” or transcending the physical. Andronicus of Rhodes, the Chronicler of

Aristotle's work on physical nature as metaphysics is concerned with issues bordering on the extra-mental, spiritual, abstract, universal or transcendental discipline. This cannot totally be said to be the understanding metaphysics evidences. Like Immanuel Kant, we see Metaphysics as concerning the totality of reality whether God as in rational theology; or man, nature and the universe as in rational cosmology or mind and its ideas as in rational psychology. However, these are not periscope wholly through a *priori* concepts as some have opined but through the interplay of *a priori* and *a posteriori* concepts or through experience and reason. Metaphysics is a science that seeks ultimate understanding of reality.

Thus, the etymological meaning of metaphysics comes from the Greek word *meta-ta-physica* which means "after the physics" or transcending the physical. It is believed that it is Andronicus of Rhodes who coined the term in an attempt to describe Aristotle's work which dealt with issues bordering on the extra-mental, spiritual, abstract and universal and transcendental disciplines. In light of this, metaphysics is a science that seeks ultimate understanding of reality. It therefore involves a synthesis of all experiences in order to achieve a coherent whole which gives a complete picture of reality. Thus, metaphysics deals with the nature of existence, a study of reality as whole that is concerned with the generalisation of experience for the purpose of identifying fundamental entities. It therefore involves a synthesis of all experiences in order to achieve a coherent whole which gives a complete picture of reality. Ozumba (2014) further argues that,

Metaphysics includes both transcends and particularisms of individual existence to focus on the interrelationships of particulars within the universal. It is therefore a philosophical outlook which tries to reach a more comprehensive, all-embracing, totalistic view of reality without neglecting the unique place of individual things in the holism of reality. So, in talking about reality, we are referring to both disparate and homogenous outlooks. It may be an aspect of reality such as properties, relations, individual beings, etc. it could be the examination of being in a generic sense. What is important in each case is to reach general and fundamental assumption that articulate a rationally acceptable world view as far as such sphere of reality is concerned.



However, some might question if there is such thing as African metaphysics. According to G.O Ozumba (2004), the subject of African Metaphysics is a very broad and far-reaching inquiry. He further notes that there is a problem of how can we meaningfully talk about African Metaphysics? Ozumba (2004) has it that;

African metaphysics should be seen as the African way of perceiving, interpreting and making meaning out of interactions, among beings, and reality in general. It is the totality of the African's perception of reality. African metaphysics will therefore include systematisation of an African perspective as it relates to being and existence. This will embrace the holistic conception of reality with its appurtenance of relations, qualities, characterisations, being and its subtleties universals, particular, ideas, minds, culture, logic, moral, theories and presuppositions. African metaphysics is holistic, interrelated and logical; it underpins their standard and expectations. This is not to give the impression that all Africans share the same standard because most African standard is community based.

To add to Ozumba's response to the question of African metaphysics, I choose to revert to the old debate on whether African philosophy exists or not. There is general consensus amongst African scholars that African philosophy does indeed exist. By the same token, I wish to also extend the argument to cover include the notion that African metaphysics exists. To bolster my argument, I quote P.H Coetzee and A.P Roux (2003:194) who argue that; "There have been many attempts to show that there is one set of ideas which is common to the whole of African continent and which is termed 'African philosophy'. In terms of this approach there must then also be a particular African metaphysics". However, they note that,

In present-day philosophical activity on the continent there is a strong tendency to approach philosophy in a culture specific way, that is, not to try and come up with views which are supposed to apply to all groups on the continent, but rather to describe and discuss the views of specific cultural groups such as the Akan, the

Igbo, the Yoruba or the Zulus. People became wary of the vastness of the continent; what is the case in West-Africa need not be the case in Eastern or Southern Africa (P.H Coetzee and A.P Roux; 2003:194).

Coetzee and Roux (2003:194) further note that the culture-specific approach when dealing with philosophical problems in an African context has much in its favour. To augment their claim, they argue that;

...philosophical thinking in Africa is not fully documented and described, and it is dangerous to generalise before more progress has been made with these tasks. Furthermore, as was pointed earlier on, truth is a social construction. No person and no group can assume that the final word about any problem has been spoken. Any contribution which may help to further our understanding of reality should get a hearing (2003:194).

Wiredu supports the point above and argues for what he called “strategic particularism”. If this is the case, then it seems risky to argue for an ‘African metaphysics’. However, though the evidence above might seem to make it impossible to render an African metaphysics, “generally speaking, metaphysical thinking in Africa has features which make it a particular way of conceptualising reality” (Coetzee and Roux; 2003:194). In line with this, there is no denying that people who believe in supernatural powers of a Supreme Being have a particular way of understanding reality which includes such aspects as causality, personality, responsibility, the nature of matter, and the concept of destiny and so on. Coetzee and Roux (2003:194) further note that:

There is no reason why all peoples on a continent, or even all members of a cultural group, should think the same about metaphysical matters. In so-called Western philosophy there is no prevailing tradition of presenting and practising philosophy on ethnic or geographical lines. Although there is talk of Greek, British, French, German philosophy, the assumption is that these are aspects of a common activity and parts of an ongoing tradition. An ethnic or a geographic classification such as this is then made for very specific reasons which are seldom of true philosophical nature. One of the reasons is that in philosophy we are concerned with general or universal matters. Epistemologists want to account for knowledge as such, not British or

French knowledge. The moral philosopher wants to know about morality in general... In the case of metaphysics, the same principles apply.

Coetzee and Roux observed rightly that the talk about causality, God, personal identity, ontological make up of a person and the concept of destiny and so on are not supposed to apply to Europe or Africa or only to the British. Thus, the conclusions are supposed to be general in application. Even though the starting-point may be particular, because of different cultures, languages and customs, the outcome will be regarded as general. In tandem with Coetzee and Roux, this research holds that a generalised approach which looks at the Akan and Yoruba metaphysical concept of person is therefore not out of order; even if the generalisation is wrong, it can stimulate attempts to correct it. However, Coetzee and Roux caution (2003:195) that;

When we talk of the views of the Akan or the Yoruba this is not to be taken literally as meaning that every member of that group holds these views. As with any group, we are dealing with general or majority trends. There will be people who reject such beliefs or who believe otherwise; intra-cultural debates also take place. In summary, then, we may say that we aim at providing information about metaphysical thinking in Africa and which can serve as representative of metaphysical thinking in Africa.

Having established that there is some metaphysical thinking in Africa, there is need to proceed with caution, mindful of the fact that there are a variety of cultural groups which may not necessarily hold the same views. However, Coetzee and Roux hold that ascribing African metaphysical views to all cultural groups does not pose a problem to them. They argue that;

Metaphysical discourse in Africa must be based on the African perception of reality as determined by a history, geographical circumstances, and such cultural phenomena as religion, thought systems and linguistic conventions entrenched in the African world-view. This implies that most metaphysical discourses on the continent have certain common features. Central to African metaphysics are religious beliefs related to the African conception of God, the universe (Coetzee and Roux; 2003:195-196).

The African metaphysics can be viewed as pragmatic in the sense that if an idea, an explanation, a conception, a belief or folk wisdom worked, it was accepted even though they may not fulfil certain fundamental criteria of objective reality they still dug deeper to unravel through mystical means the basis for such a phenomenon in their reality scheme. Thus, Africans are aware of the result of superficial contemplation of their universe.

This section has managed to clear the ground a bit by establishing that there is metaphysical thinking in the African worldview. However, it is the belief of this researcher that in order to have a fuller appreciation of the principle of cause in African philosophy, there is need to first dispel the views that uphold the belief by some Western philosophers that things can happen by chance.

## **2.2 Chance Happenings**

The reason why the researcher feels that it is necessary to first of all have an understanding of chance occurrences before delving into the debate on African views on causation is because the research considers chance occurrences, and not any other notion in the debate, as the direct opposite of causation, which is the founding principle of determinism. The concept of chance, however, has its roots in Western philosophy. Commenting on the concept of chance, John Dudley (2012:15) notes that;

When looking at the universe in which we live, one is struck by an amazing regularity and precision of the fabric of the cosmos. All of its changes, cycles and processes follow certain paths of regularity that make prediction and planning possible. In fact, most of our human activity is in a sense an imitation of the regularity of nature. Yet, in our day-to-day experience we spontaneously attribute certain events to chance, speaking of good and bad luck. Chance is present in plots of innumerable works of literature, in mathematics and statistics standing behind economy, marketing, and gambling industry. Moreover, natural science, which had always

been searching for regularity in nature, has announced recently that the world is in fact an empire of chance and probability.

This prompted him to question what chance is and whether it is a real absence of determining causes. A misleading term with no content? A name for a surprising event? Which is nonetheless caused necessarily? A name of an unknown cause? A space for God's providence? Or maybe a way to explain human free choice? The question of chance and its nature had been a bone of contention for philosophers since time immemorial. John Dudley (2012:15) in his book, *Aristotle's Concept of Chance: Accidents, Cause, Necessity, and Determinism*, analysed the works of Aristotle whose substances and events can be explained only through *per se* causes, which come from nature or intellect (John Dudley: 2012:15). However, *per se* causes alone are never sufficient. There are innumerable accidental causes involved in the occurrence of every substance and event, which we tend to neglect at large (2012:15). Aristotle classifies among them also chance events, saying that if we tend to perceive them as the most important part of the explanation, it is because we find them relevant to man's goals in life. Thus, although chance can be indeed regarded as a cause, it is never a *per se* cause, but only an accidental one.

In this way, says Dudley, Aristotle explains chance satisfactorily in terms of his hylomorphic theory (2012:15). He adds that in his opinion, the philosopher rightly holds that chance always refers to a teleological context, although as an accident it does not itself have a purpose. Moreover, the way Aristotle contrasts necessity and chance, attributing the 'usual' in nature to hypothetical necessity (necessity in function of an end) rather than to material necessity, may be considered a significant contribution to philosophical and scientific thought (Dudley; 2012:16).

Dudley (2012:16) examines at first the concept of chance as the source of external prosperity, which is a condition of happiness. In this case, chance means nothing more than 'the haphazard',

as there is no *per se* cause of chance as the cause of noble birth, beauty etc. At this point, Dudley introduces a distinction between “hard” and “soft” meaning of chance in Aristotle (2012:16). The latter refers to the metaphysical explanation found. The former is attributed to the material cause, purely inexplicable, for which no metaphysical account is available. In conclusion, Dudley notes that, because Aristotle sees chance events as intrinsically unpredictable, they cannot be objects of science understood as an instrument for predicting the future in order to achieve goals.

An event that is considered to come about as a result of chance is considered to have occurred randomly. Fukuyama (2005:225) explains that, “Scientists use chance, or randomness, to mean that when physical causes can result in any of several outcomes, we cannot predict what the outcome will be in any particular case.” Thus one can note that chance can be understood as the view that the universe is essentially probabilistic in character, or, to put it in more colloquial language, that the world is full of random happenings.

In the preceding chapter, a discussion on determinism unfolds, which points to the view that all events in the world (human action included) are determined. However, with the passage of time, indeterminacy was affirmed. It states that, while these things are fixed in themselves, we are unable to find at the same time the exact position of a particle and its velocity; this means that there is unavoidable indeterminacy in human knowledge, not in things themselves (Cowburn; 2008:74). There are several arguments that are offered in support of chance occurrences in the universe. For instance, John Cowburn (2008:74) notes that most of the movements in living beings are not “lawful”. Even though the movements by human beings may be determined by their natures, they eat when they are hungry, this makes many of their particular movements seem random (2008:74). Furthermore, there appears to be randomness in the reproduction of human beings. In Cowburn’s words;

Nature seems to work more like a machine-gunner, who fires many bullets in the direction of the target, hoping that one of them will hit it, rather than like a sniper, who aims and fires one shot. For instance, pine trees produce seeds which have what one might call wings on them; these are released and carried by winds; they land all over the place and a few of them take root and grow, which was nature's plan... In the sexual intercourse of animals and human beings, millions of spermatozoa are released, all with different genes; a tiny proportion fertilises ova and in each case a new living being is eventually born with genes which are not the result of anyone's choice (Cowburn; 2007:74).

In tandem with Cowburn, Polkinhorne (1989:28) in his work, *Science and Providence*, argues that predictability at the individual level is very untypical of dynamic human behaviour. And to strengthen the argument that chance occurrences exist in the universe, Jacques Monod, in *Chance and Necessity*, has it that;

Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution: this central concept of modern biology is no longer one among other possible or even conceivable hypotheses. It is today the sole conceivable hypothesis, the only one compatible with the observed and tested fact (Monod; 1972:110).

From the above arguments then, it goes without saying that unforeseen results of free acts are usually random events, since the free act does not have to occur, these results do not have to be produced, and no one decides that they will be brought about. In other words, if a person makes free decisions, which without their knowledge produce an effect which the person did not intend, then this is attributed to having occurred by chance. In light of this, Cowburn explains that;

If during a war a gunner fires blindly into an enemy territory and kills a particular person, the event is caused by the gunner's free decision to fire and by the victims' free decision to be at a particular place at a particular time, and hence it is not a predetermined event. But the gunner does not decide to hit a particular person, and the person certainly does not decide to be hit, so that it is a random occurrence (Cowburn; 2007:74).

Monod concurs with Cowburn' view and even suggests that if two people who are far from each other make independent decisions to go to the same place and they happen to meet up there, their meeting is not a predetermined event, and neither is it something that anyone decided to bring about; it, too, happens by chance (Monod; 1972:121-122).

Contrary to the Western acceptance of chance occurrences, in the African worldview, there is no room for chance occurrences. For Africans, everything has a cause. For the Africans, the universe is an ordered universe and everything that happens in it can be explained from both an empirical and spiritual perspective. The question that this research grapples with in this chapter is whether the African exclusion of chance in their worldview presupposes that they subscribe to deterministic views? However, before the research attempts to answer these questions, it is necessary to understand the African concept of cause as posited by African scholars. Different African scholars came up with their understanding of the concept of cause. J.O Sodipo makes an evaluation of the concept of cause and chance amongst the Yoruba people of Nigeria. For him, the traditional African was not particularly concerned with cognitive problems,

“...but with religious and mythical ones. In essence, the African is not after the satisfaction of his emotional needs nor is he interested in the physical questions of causality as in discovering motives and motivating and motivated agents (who are held responsible for an event and why they do it). Even in a game of pure chance, nine Africans out of ten would attribute their luck or misfortune to a god or the gods” (Sodipo cited in Anyanwu; 1981:147-148).

Since the Africans do have an understanding of an orderly universe and are more concerned with ultimate causes, they thus reject the notion of chance. This led Ozumba (2004:28) to argue that the traditional African life is permeated by the understanding that nothing happens without a cause.



For him, this means that the concept of chance does not have a place in the African conception of reality. He further argues that what we call chance is our ignorance of the series of actions and reactions that have given rise to a given event (Ozumba; 2004:28). To further support the view that nothing happens by chance, Appiah argues that:

... what is most striking about the ‘unscientific’ explanations that most precolonial African cultures offer is not just that they appeal to agency but that they are addressed to the question ‘Why?’ understood as asking what the event in question was for. Evans-Pritchard in his account of Zande belief insists that the Azande do not think that ‘unfortunate events’ ever happen by chance; their frequent appeal to witchcraft — in the absence of other acceptable explanations of misfortune — demonstrates their unwillingness to accept the existence of contingency. But to reject the possibility of the contingent is exactly to insist that everything that happens serves some purpose: a view familiar in Christian tradition...or in the deep need people feel...for answers to the question ‘Why do bad things happen to good people?’ Zande witchcraft beliefs depend on an assumption that the universe is in a certain sort of evaluative balance... (Appiah 1992:171–172).

To further support the view that Africans believe that nothing happens by chance, Gyekye (1987:198) argued that the notion of chance is an alternative to the African proclivity for the *why* and *who* questions when the answers to the *how* and *what* questions are deemed unsatisfactory. He went on to further admit that the Africans’ conception of an orderly universe and their concern for ultimate causes lead them to reject the notion of chance. Consequently, in African causal explanations, the notion of chance does not have a significant place.

Following these arguments from different African scholars, it can be argued that the African worldview is purposeful and that there is no room for chance occurrences. And since the Africans do not believe that things can happen by chance, there is no need to dwell much on the concept of chance. That being the case, there is now need at this juncture to consider their understanding of the concept of causality which hinges on the African metaphysical thinking. Since nothing happens

by chance, then everything that happens must have a cause for the Africans. In the same spirit, the research will analyse whether the African understanding of causality is detrimental to human freedom.

### **2.3 Problematising the Principle of Causality in Africa.**

As Sogolo (1993:104) indicates, the problem of causality arises due to the widespread mechanistic view of causality in which when *C* is said to be the cause of *E*, a necessary connection is assumed to exist between *C* and *E* in accordance with certain scientific principles subsumed under a general law. Sogolo further notes that the literature on causality has appreciably expanded since Hume substituted his “constant conjunction” for “necessary connection”, and in the process denying cause and effect the connective power that was thought to exist between them (1993:104).

However, the African understanding of this principle is different from that of the mechanistic view of causality. In African understanding of causation there also exists spiritual entities as agentic forces. In this regard, Sogolo (1993:103) argues that one of the puzzles that face those seeking to understand traditional African belief systems is how, in the explanation of observed events, disembodied and non-extended entities (spirits, witches, ghosts, gods e.t.c, existing beyond the confines of space) could possibly be invoked as causes. This may raise the question of whether it makes sense or not to build ideas of causality on such a non-scientific spiritualistic framework. And how rational is it to hold nonhuman entities as causal agencies?

In a bid to answer the above questions, Gbadegesin quotes Collingwood who identifies three senses of the term cause. In the first sense, Collingwood views causation as “That which is caused is the free and deliberate act of a conscious and responsible agent. Such agents may be nonhuman, provided that they are believed to act in the same conscious ways attributed to human agents”

(Gbadegesin; 1991:105). Thus, causation should be understood to mean affording an agent the motive for doing it and it is synonymous with compelling, inducing, forcing or persuading and so on (Gbadegesin; 1991:5). The second sense,

That which is caused, X, is an event in nature, and it is caused by another event or state of affairs, Y, which can be produced or prevented by a human agent as a means to producing or preventing X. Here, Y, as the cause of X is within the power of the agent to bring about and prevent (1991:105).

Examples for this type of cause are, mosquitoes cause malaria, or the accident was caused by brake failure (1991:1). The third sense says,

That which is caused is an event or state of affairs, X, and its cause is another event or states of affairs, Y, which stands in a one-one relation of causal priority to it such that (a) if Y, then X necessarily follows; and (b) X occurs only if Y occurs. Here causation designates the dependence of events in nature on one another, but not necessarily on humans (1991:105).

For example, climatic change is caused by the movement of the earth; rainfall is caused by the presence of sufficient amount of moisture in the atmosphere (1991:105).

Of particular interest for Gbadegesin are the first and second sense of causality highlighted by Collingwood. Gbadegesin notes that in the first sense both human and nonhumans can be causal agents, provided they are conceived to have motives, capacity for deliberation and choice. And as Collingwood notes, this is probably the original sense of the term; the other senses may have derived from it. Gbadegesin notes that sense two;

...is however the most common usage in the practical sciences. Here, cause also has a tight relation with human conduct in the sense that we identify as 'cause' something that we are able to control, produce or prevent. Here, therefore, we may talk of the relativity of the cause. What causes X from the point of view of A is what is under the control of A and A's identifying that thing as a cause is the first step towards controlling

it. To speak of cause is to speak of what we can (that is, have power to) control at will. In this sense then, cause refers to an event or state of things which it is in our power to produce or prevent and by producing or preventing which we can produce or prevent that whose cause it is said to be.

Following the discussion above, to say *A* is the cause of *B* simply implies that one can control or prevent *A* to bring out a desired effect *B*. Back to the example of mosquitoes as the cause of malaria, it simply means that it is within the power of the individual to control or prevent malaria by controlling mosquitoes. In essence, what people call cause in this sense then is what they are capable of producing or preventing at will with respect to that state of affairs. This is the way cause is understood in practical sciences such as medicine and mechanical engineering. In medicine, cause must be something which a human being who identifies it is capable of controlling to produce an event (cure, healing) or prevent an event (disease, illness) (Gbadegesin; 1991:107).

According to Gbadegesin, Colingwood sums up his account of this sense of cause with some suggestions as to its foundation which he traces to two different ideas about the relation between humans and nature:

First, there is the anthropocentric idea that human beings look at nature from their own point of view as practical agents, anxious to find out how they can manipulate nature to achieve their own ends. Second, there is the anthropomorphic idea that is the manipulation of another person, because natural things are alive in much the same way in which humans are alive, and have therefore to be similarly handled (1991:107).

Gbadegesin (1991:107) notes that Collingwood traces the first idea to what the educated European people nowadays think about their relation to nature; and the second to what they used to think

about that relation. In this light, he argues that the second sense is still very much alive in African philosophy. So for him, this understanding of causality is rational and justified. Traditional Africans believe in both the empirical (natural) idea of causation and the idea of supernatural causation. In tandem with Gbadegesin, both Sogolo and Gyekye do agree on the view that the Africans believe in both empirical and supernatural causation. However, for these scholars, empirical causation is not of utmost importance in the African worldview. What is considered of utmost importance by the Africans is spiritual causation. Now that the African understanding of causality has been justified as rational, there is need to explore these views in detail.

### **2.3.1 Empirical Causation**

According to Gyekye (1987:77), the Akan thinkers maintain a doctrine of universal causation. He supports this claim by citing the Akan proverb which states that; “Whenever the palm tree tilts, it is because of what the earth has told it” (1987:77). In the concept of causation amongst the Akan people, Gyekye focuses on the events that are considered to be unexpected and extraordinary events that do not occur according to the course of nature (1987:77). For Gyekye, the Akans are not concerned about finding explanations for ordinary or regular occurrences in nature (1987:77). Ordinary or regular events are presumed by them to be part of the order of nature established by the omnipotent creator, *Onyame*; they are part of *Onyame*’s arrangement. Thus, they cite the proverb, “The order *Onyame* has established, no living human can alter” (Gyekye; 1987:77).

In order to show that the Akan have empirical knowledge of natural events, Gyekye argues that the answers to questions pertaining to *what* caused the flooding of the river, *why* the year’s harvest is poor and *how* the bushfire in the farm occurred are answered empirically by the Akans. Thus, the uninterrupted rainfall of the past four days would be the cause of the flooding of the river, the

year's poor harvest could be explained by lack of sufficient rainfall and the burning of a large forest for charcoal caused the bushfire (1987:77). With this, Gyekye argues that causal explanations for such natural occurrences are thus empirical, scientific, and non-supernaturalistic (1987:77). In tandem with Gyekye, Sogolo (cited in Coetzee and Roux; 2002:166) following Horton (1970), distinguished between what he termed primary and secondary levels of causality. For him, secondary causality is what the term is generally understood to mean by the Westerners, that is, that which brings about an event or a change. By simply understanding these causes as secondary, Sogolo drives home the view that they are not of primary concern to the Africans.

Thus, for the Africans this type of causation is not of paramount importance in explaining phenomena between certain events. What is of paramount importance for the Africans are the primary causes. This is also supported by Gbadegesin as seen above when he argued that there is the anthropomorphic idea that the manipulation of another person, because natural things are alive in much the same way in which humans are alive, and have therefore to be similarly handled (1991:107). Contrary to Sogolo and Gbadegesin, Horton (as cited in E. C Eze;1998:183) argues that it is a misinterpretation to assert that traditional African religious thought is more interested in the supernatural causes of things than it is in their natural causes. However, it is a general agreement amongst most African scholars that supernatural causation is considered to be of utmost importance in explaining phenomena in the African worldview. It is also the submission of this thesis that spiritual causation is of paramount importance in the explanation of phenomena in both traditional and contemporary Africa. This is evidenced, even in today's world, when a person dies and medical practitioners explain that the cause of death is cancer. This explanation is not enough for the Africans who will look for reasons beyond the doctor's explanation. Thus, even after the

scientific explanation, the Africans still consult medicine men or diviners to try and ascertain the cause of death.

### **2.3.2 Supernatural Causation**

In the Yoruba and Akan Worldviews, the universe is made up of two planes of existence, which are, the visible and the invisible worlds. However, Gyekye (1987:69) notes that the Akans believe that at least part of nature or the physical world is animated, and that human beings too are partly spiritual. This led him to conclude that Akan ontology is essentially and primarily spiritual (1987:69). For Gyekye (1987:69), the Akan universe is a spiritual universe, one in which supernatural beings play significant roles in thought and action of the people. However, this does not imply that the physical worldview is less real. The invisible world as noted by many African scholars, is not separate from the visible world. Mbiti (1969:75) notes that the spiritual universe is a unit with the physical and these two intermingle and dovetail into each other so that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw a distinction or separate them. In line with Mbiti, Gyekye (1987:69) notes that there is no distinction between the sensible (perceivable) world and the non-sensible (non-perceivable) world in the sense of the latter being less real and the former being unreal, as in other metaphysical systems.

In the same spirit, Gbadegesin (1991:108) notes that Kwasi Wiredu, speaking of the Akan people of Ghana, has it that the distinction between the natural and the supernatural does not exist for them. In order to support his view, Wiredu cites Busia who has it that in the Akan worldview, there is an “apparent absence of a conceptual cleavage between the natural and the supernatural” (Gbadegesin; 1991:108). For Gbadegesin then, this should be understood to mean that “there is no unbridgeable division between the two in the conceptual scheme of the people. It is to suggest that

there is no total split which could prevent moving from one realm to the other. It is to suggest that what is referred to as the supernatural is, in fact conceivable, as an extension of the natural; that is, as the natural viewed from another perspective". In order for him to further explain his views of the interconnectedness of the visible world and the invisible world, Gbadegesin urges us to;

Consider the familiar scenario of claims about the power of charms, amulets, and incarnations. It is believed that the medicineman who has access to such powers can act at a distance to affect the fortunes of others who are less knowledgeable. But the power still belongs to someone existing in nature. He probably makes use of ingredients from nature even though the incantations he uses seem to make reference to forces unseen. Yet these forces, though unseen, are part of the forces in nature. But the power he uses is regarded as extraordinary because it seems to falsify the known laws of nature and it is not everyone that has access to knowledge of it. This is what people mean when they refer to such powers as supernatural: that they exceed normal or expected capability of human beings (Gbadegesin; 1991:110).

Therefore, the African understanding of their cosmology leads them to understand the principle of causality to be agentive. Causality in this sense is understood from the other-worldly perspective. In this light, causality is understood as religious, supernatural, spiritual, mystical and mythical. Thus, Sogolo argues that there are what he termed primary causes. For him;

Primary causes...are those predisposing factors not directly explicable in physical terms. Some of these take the form of supernatural entities such as deities, spirits, witches; others are stress-induced either as a result of the victim's contravention of communal morality or his strained relationship with other persons within his community (Sogolo 1994:215).

The African understanding of supernatural causation is not divorced from their understanding of the hierarchy of beings. In his book *Bantu Philosophy*, Placide Tempels has it that the concept of separate beings, of substances which find themselves side by side, entirely independent, one of another, is foreign to the Bantu thought (Tempels; 1959:28). Thus, Tempels (1959:28) saw the



created being as preserving a bond with another, an intimate ontological relationship. He further argues that the Bantu have an interaction of being with being, that is, force with force (1959:28).

The central argument in Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* is the Bantu's conception of life, which is founded on the cardinal value, of life force or vital force. Tempels (1959:32) notes that, "The vital force is the invisible reality of everything that exists, but is supreme in man. And man can reinforce his vital force by means of the forces of other beings of creation." In other words, Tempels notes that, for the Bantu, force is a necessary element in "being" and the concept "force" is inseparable from the definition of "being". In other words, without the element of force, "being cannot be conceived". Tempels further argues that, force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force (Kaphagawani as cited in Wiredu; 2004:335). The Bantu talk in terms of either gaining, reinforcing, losing or diminishing this force. Therefore, for the Bantu, all beings of the universe possess their proper vital force: human, animal, vegetable or inanimate. From this it can be deduce that every creature has been endowed by God with its own force of life, its own power to sustain life. Thus, because of the common divine origin of this power, all creatures are connected with each other in the sense that each one influences the other for good or for bad.

Furthermore, in the created force, Tempels notes that the Bantu see a causal action emanating from the nature of the created force and influencing other forces (1959:28). To reinforce his argument of the interaction of forces, Tempels (1959:28) argues that the child, even the adult, remains always for the Bantu a man, a force, in a causal dependence and ontological subordination to the forces which are his father and mother. He further argues that the Bantu universe is not constituted by a multitude of independent forces placed in juxtaposition from being to being, but all creatures are found in a relationship according to the laws of the hierarchy (1959:29).

Temples argues that this hierarchy of beings has God, Spirit and Creator at the apex (1959:29). God is understood as having force and power. He gives existence, power of survival and of increase, to other forces. A critical examination of the literature on African metaphysics reveals that most African people believe in the existence of a Supreme Being who created the universe out of nothing and who is absolute ground for all being. In describing the place of the Supreme Being in the hierarchy of beings, Ioegbu (1995:366) has it that,

We shall regard as effect, all reality outside the Supreme Being, who himself is never caused by another. For he is the supreme cause of all else, including the gods and spirits. These effects can, either concurrently or separately, also be causes of things. In this case they will be regarded as both cause and effect in different perspectives.

Following God are the divinities. The Yoruba people associate the divinities with natural phenomena and objects as well as with human activities and experiences. Gbadegesin (1991:88) also notes that the divinities act with the authority of the Supreme Being though sometimes they are rebellious. However, there is no general consensus amongst scholars as to how the divinities come into being. On the one hand we have Mbiti (1969:75) who argues that the divinities were created by God in the ontological category of the spirits. On the other hand, Idowu (1973:169) argues that divinities are not created, but are brought into being in the nature of things with regard to the divine ordering of the universe. Whichever way they come into being, the divinities are said to act as servants of God and intermediaries between him and other creatures. In other words, the divinities are brought into being to serve the will of the Supreme Being. For Idowu (1973:170), the divinities serve as functionaries in the theoretical government of the universe. Mitchell (1977:26) notes that the African people believe that the divinities receive their power from God, the Supreme Being and are his emissaries on earth.

Following the divinities in descending order are the spirits. These spirits may be understood to comprise the ancestors and the living dead. Spirits, as Mbiti (1969:78) notes, are those spiritual beings beneath the status of divinities but above the status of men. Idowu (1973:173) notes that Africans believe in, recognise and accept the fact of the existence of spirits, who may use material objects as temporary residences and manifestations of their presents and actions.

In the hierarchy of beings in African culture, the ancestors are the most immediate members of the spirit world to the living human community. The general belief is that the dead continue their existence as “shades or spirits and that they possess the power to affect the living, particularly when newly dead or if the dead person were an especially powerful person while alive” (Mitchell; 1977:27). Alexis Kagame (cited in Mitchell; 1977:27) expressed this in an epigram: “The living man is happier than the departed because he is alive. But the departed are more powerful.” For the Africans, the ancestors, especially the immediate ones, really live and manifest themselves in this world in various ways. The family includes both the living and the spirits of the dead. Idowu (cited in Mitchell; 1977:28) explains the nature and meaning of the relationship between the ancestors as follows;

The deceased are truly members of the families on earth; but they are no longer of the same fleshly order as those who are still actually living in the flesh on earth...Because they have crossed the borderland between this world and the super-sensible world, entering and living in the latter, they have become freed from the restrictions imposed by the physical world. They can now come to abide with their folk on earth invisibly, to aid or hinder them...To some extent, they are intermediaries between Deity or the divinities and their own children; this is a continuation of their earthly function whereby they combined the headships of the families or communities with the office of family or community priests or priestesses.

Idowu further goes on to argue that the living father or mother has the power to bless or curse the undertakings of their children. The ancestors, however, maintain the cycle of continuity of human

existence made among their descendants. It is the burial rites which usher the deceased into the land of the ancestors. Without these rites, a person is banished to some form of intermediate world between the spiritual and the physical world (Metuh 1981:90).

Thus, the ancestors are the intermediaries that lie between the living human community and the Supreme Being. Thus, there is no need for the Supreme Being to intervene directly in human affairs. Instead, it is the ancestors who take on the role of being guardians of the moral and social order. According to Ray (1976:147), the ancestors are a society's projection of its authority system onto the supernatural sphere. The ancestors are associated with the law of the land/earth since they are buried in the earth. Krige and Krige (1954:62) argue that the African person believes that no harm can come to him so long as the ancestors are guiding him.

In line with the spirits is what Mbiti termed the living-dead. These are the departed for up to five generations (Mbiti; 1969:83). The living-dead appear to be the oldest members of the household inquiring about family affairs and may even warn of impending danger or rebuke those who have failed to follow their special instructions. They are the guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities. Offence in these matters is ultimately an offence against the forefathers who, in that capacity, act as the invisible police of the families and communities (Mbiti; 1969:83). Mbiti (1969:84) further noted that the living dead were also feared by their relatives or offenders. Thus, he argues that if they have been improperly buried or were offended before they died, the living dead would take revenge. This would be in the form of misfortune, especially illness, or disturbing frequent appearances of the living-dead (1969:84).

Human beings are believed by the Africans to be at the centre of the universe. In other words, creation is centred on human beings. The human generation living on earth is the centre of the

universe, which includes the world of the dead. The living maintain a relationship with the dead through the mediums. As Mbiti (1991:44) argues, humans occupy the centre of the universe, such that the invisible and visible parts of the universe are at his or her disposal through physical, mystical and religious means. Human beings becomes only the beneficiary user and never the master of the universe (Mbiti; 1991:44, Kamalu; 1998:158). So because of that, he or she has to live in harmony with the universe obeying the laws of natural, moral and mystical order (1991:44).

According to Mbiti (1991:44), if these are unduly disturbed, it is humans who suffers most. However, other scholars view the relationship between the physical and the spiritual world as that of interdependence. For instance, Uchedu (as cited in Asouzu; 2004:160) argues that there is always some form of interdependence between these two worlds, a beneficial reciprocity. For him, the principle of reciprocity demands that the ancestors be honoured and offered regular sacrifice, and be fed with some crumbs each time the living take their meal. It also imposes on the ancestors the obligation of prospering the lineage, protecting its members, and standing with them as a unit against the machinations of wicked men and malignant spirits (Asouzu; 2004:160). He further argues that the same principle requires that all spirits and deities whose help is invoked during a time of crisis and who stand firm throughout be rewarded with appropriate sacrifices (2004:160).

For Temples, the forces in the hierarchy influence one another. To this effect, Masolo (1994:48) notes that Temples' argument on the influence of forces on one another is based on three general laws of interaction. First, a person (living or deceased) can directly reinforce or diminish the being of another person. Secondly, the human vital force can directly influence inferior force-beings (animal, vegetable or mineral) in their being (1994:48). Thirdly, a rational being can influence another rational being by communicating his force to an inferior force-being (Masolo; 1994:48).

For Tempels, nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement (1959:29).

In support of the hierarchy of beings, Anyanwu (1981:149) argues that in the African view, whatever force a human being acquires is given to him by a superior being who already possesses this force, just as any diminution of his force is the result of some evil intentioned agent capable of destroying one's force. Hence it can be argued that the African conception of causality is essentially religious.

He thus argues that, for traditional Africans;

Force is not communicated or reduced by some form of physical causality, because force does not belong to the physical order. It is metaphysical. It is therefore not accessible to scientific or empirical verification. It belongs to the order of invisible entities which cannot be known but believed in; which cannot be rationally proved, but only revealed by tradition which cannot be coaxed into action by exercising a direct causal influence on them, but only by symbolic and ritual (quasi-sacramental) form of causality (Anyanwu; 1981:150).

Gyekye (1987:68) argues that the hierarchical character of the Akan has the Supreme Being at the apex, and our phenomenal world at the bottom of this hierarchy. Also, Segun Gbadegesin notes the existence of this hierarchy of beings amongst his people – the Yoruba. He thus argued that at the apex is *Oludumare*, followed by the divinities, and then the ancestors (1991:88). Mawere (2011:18), like the others, argued that in the hierarchy of beings, God is at the pinnacle followed by the ancestors in their perking order of seniority and down to the living beings – humans still in their biological bodies.

In summation, the hierarchy of being reveals that the African ontology is a pluralistic ontology which recognises, besides the Supreme Being, other categories of being as well. These include;

lesser spirits (variously referred to as spirits, deities, nature gods, divinities), ancestors (that is ancestral spirit), humans and the physical world of the natural objects and phenomena. Following the arguments above, one can note that in the hierarchy of beings, the entity with the higher force can control the entity with lower force. And since humans and the physical world are the lower forces, it is then believed that activities and occurrences in the physical world are causally explained by reference to supernatural powers. These powers are held to be the ultimate source of action and change in the world.

#### **2.4 Belief in Mystical Powers as Causal Agents**

Before embarking on the belief in mystical powers in African worldview, a general explanation of what mysticism entails is pertinent. Mysticism can generally be understood as a spiritual quest for hidden truth or wisdom, oriented at a union with the divine or sacred. There are several definitions of mysticism.

The belief in mystical power filling the universe is common throughout Africa. In the words of Mbiti (1969:197), “The whole psychic atmosphere of African village life filled with belief in this mystical power. African peoples know that the universe has a power, a force or whatever else one may call it, in addition ...” to the living-dead, spirits and the Supreme Being. These forces or powers are believed to affect human behaviour in many important ways. In traditional Africa there is the belief that ancestors can help or hinder a person’s progress in life; that the deities and spirits are able to cause sickness, that it is possible for people to see the future, and for others to cause the death of someone without physically attacking them in any way. These forces, however, are not scientific, that is, modern physicists and biologists or chemists do not recognise them as real. For the Africans, then, these forces reside in spiritual beings like the gods, spirits, and ancestors.

In short, mystical powers such as magic and sorcery and witchcraft affect everyone for better or for worse. Commenting on witchcraft and sorcery, Middletown (1963:1) states that:

It is no exaggeration to say that one cannot gain any fundamental grasp of the attitudes which people have towards one another nor can one understand many aspects of their behaviour in a wide range of social situations without a fairly extensive knowledge of their ideas regarding good, evil and causation, and their associated beliefs in witches and sorcerers.

For Godwin Sogolo (1993:98), in African societies, witches are thought to be able to perform extraordinary acts, acts thought to be beyond the capacities of ordinary human beings. According to Idowu (1973:175), the African concept of witchcraft consists in the belief that the spirits of living human beings can be sent out of the body on errands of doing havoc to other persons in body, mind or estate; that witches have guilds or operate singly, and that the spirits sent out of the human body in this way can act either invisibly or through a lower creature or a bird. Mitchell, however made a distinction between witchcraft and sorcery. He asserts that Africans believe that the basic difference between sorcerers and witches is the way in which they harness mystical powers to achieve their evil ends and the intention they have toward their victims (Mitchell; 1977:66). Sorcerers have to manipulate material objects and perform rituals in order to harm their victims, whereas witches simply use their innate power to accomplish the same end. Sorcerers always deliberately intend to harm their victims, whereas witches do not always consciously realise the harm that they cause – their power is to some extent beyond their personal control (1977:66). It is not true that sorcerers are always men and witches women, although this tends to be the case.

Sorcerers are able to work harmful magic against others. Mitchell notes that when sorcery is worked against a particular person, the sorcerer needs to have some contact with the intended



victim through his or her nail clippings or a lock of hair or even with the scraped-up dust of the person's footprints. Sorcery is for hire, and people who have enemies or rivals can pay for expert sorcerers to perform the necessary harmful magic.

Further to this, Gyekye (1987:78) notes that amongst the Akans there are those occurrences which they regard as extraordinary, which are held to fall outside the course of nature and so are taken to be exceptions to the laws of nature. He thus states that Africans quite appreciate the notion of causality but understood and interpreted it from a mystical standpoint.

The consequences of this was that purely scientific or empirical causal explanations and which the users of our cultures were somehow aware, were often not regarded as profound enough to offer complete satisfaction. This led them to give up, but too soon, on the search for empirical causal explanations even of causal relations between natural phenomena or events and to resort to supernatural causation...Empirical causation, which asks what- and why questions. Agentive causation led to the postulation of spirits and mystical powers as causal agents so that a particular metaphysics was at the basis of this sort of agentive causation (Gyekye; 1997:28).

In order to demonstrate that the Africans seek mystical explanations on issues to do with otherwise events that could otherwise be explained empirically, Mbiti wrote:

African peoples...feel and believe that all the various ills, misfortunes, accidents, tragedies...which they encounter or experience, are caused by the use of (this) mystical power..It is here that we may understand, for example, that a bereaved mother whose child has died from Malaria will not be satisfied with the scientific explanation...She will wish to know why the mosquito stung her child and not somebody else's child...Everything is caused by someone directly or through the use of mystical power ( Mbiti; 1983:191).

Writing on the Akan causal theory, Halaine Minkus (1984:141) notes that if a person steps on a snake and is bitten, the occurrence may be ascribed to his carelessness and perhaps dismissed without ulterior reason. However, if he dies from the snake bite it is more than likely that either

his destiny or else witchcraft, sorcery or some other cause will be proposed to explain why such a thing should have happened (1984:141). In view of this, it can be argued that for everything that happens in the African worldview there is a mythological, mystical or spiritual cause. According to Mbiti (1969:191), in traditional life the *who* questions and answers are more important and meaningful than the *how* questions and answers. However, this does not rule out the fact that they understand that there are scientific causes, but for them scientific explanations are not profound enough to offer adequate explanations.

However, some scholars find the African understanding of the concept of causation unsatisfactory. For instance, Chris O. Akpan (2011:727) argues that the tendency towards supernaturalism in African causality has been severely criticised by many scholars. Kwame Gyekye (cited in Akpan;2011:727) commenting on why science in Africa has not developed well makes the point that though the traditional African culture appreciates the notion of causality very well, the Africans tend to, more or less, understand causality in terms of spirit and mystical forces. Such tendencies, he argues, have failed to promote a purely scientific or empirical causal explanation.

The consequence is that we have failed to attain knowledge of the external world which would have helped in our scientific development. In the same vein, professor Asouzu (as cited in Akpan; 2011:727) argues that African traditional philosophy (thought) does not consciously separate religion and myth from scientific research. Therefore, the mythological-metaphysical approach could be a serious hindrance to scientific progress. He further notes that ultimate causality framed within the religio-mythical context and attributed to “personified natural forces erects an artificial barrier, abinitio, between what is empirically demonstrable and what is considered humanely impenetrable areas” (2011:727).

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the African concept of causality affords us to look at the relationship between the humans and the invisible world. Akpan (2011:725) notes that the African world is viewed as a unitary sphere though composed of multifarious individual beings. It is a world where everything interpenetrates, where the physical and spiritual coalesce. It is simply a world of amazing unity and interaction among all things. In view of this, Unah (as cited in Akpan; 2011:725) holds that the African world is one of extra-ordinary harmony, one of synthetic unity and compatibility among all things.

Akpan (2011:725) further notes that in this type of world, events are determined by the will of spiritual beings, the operation of automatic forces, and the self-willed actions of men and other animals, which follow in orderly and comprehensible sequence. The traditional African is usually influenced by this conception of the world in his explanation or prediction of events. He may refer to the Supreme Being, the spirits, deities, ancestors or evil forces as the cause of certain events. He may also point to the individual as the cause of his own problem. In other words, the traditional African believes in both the empirical (natural) idea of causation and the idea of supernatural causation.

Mitchell (1977:63) notes that when a young man gets hit by a tree which he is cutting, Africans still seek other explanations of the cause. Put in another way, the question is, *who* caused the tree to fall on *that* young man? This is a search for mystical, rather than physical causation. In this case it is the search for the spiritual force which may have worked on the young man's mind to distract him, thereby causing him to be careless. Mitchell (1977:64) further notes that, there are a number of different mystical forces which may be blamed for misfortunes like this one. He divided these into three categories.

The first category is that of forces which are activated by human mistakes and failures. It can be argued here that traditional African life in close-knit communities involves people in numerous obligations toward one another and toward the ancestors, gods, and spirits (1977:64). These obligations are sanctified by tradition. For example, the child owes respect to his parents, the younger brother to the older brother, the ordinary person to the chief, the junior wife to the senior wife, the son to the deceased father, the worshipper of a particular deity to that deity, and so on (1977:64). Mitchell (1977:64) further argues that;

When these obligations are fulfilled and the forces are in balance, a community is healthy. If an obligation is not fulfilled, either through deliberate neglect or insult or through a simple act of forgiveness, a possible cause of misfortune is created. The offended part may manipulate mystical forces through magic, as in the case of a person laying a curse on a kinsman, or may use inherent power, as in the case of an ancestral caused sickness.

Secondly, Mitchell (1977:64) argues that, there are forces which represent arbitrary chance. Under this category, he notes that some African peoples number among their divinities one which is especially associated with misfortune and the uncertainties which mark daily life. The Yoruba god *Eshu* is such a divinity. *Eshu* is basically the trickster deity. He has a great deal of power and is highly respected (1977:65). He is believed by some to be a messenger of the gods; others believe that even the Supreme Being is subordinate to *Eshu* in certain matters. *Eshu* is well known for creating mischief and likes to spoil things for no reason. However, Mitchell (1977:65) notes that even though *Eshu* is a source of evil, he is definitely not evil incarnate. He further argues that if a person is on *Eshu*'s good side, it is believed that *Eshu* will protect that person.

The third category is that of forces which are fundamentally evil and malicious. To this effect Mitchell (1977:66) argues that the closest thing in African cultures to sources of fundamental evil

are sorcerers and witches. Whereas Africans believe that all humans and even all the divinities (especially the trickster divinity) act in a malicious way at times, true sorcerers and witches are always malicious. They cause sickness and death to their victims for no valid reason; they are believed to act out of pure, unjustified malice.

Of the three mystical forces discussed by Mitchell, the first and the third are of paramount importance. The fact that in African traditional societies we find forces which are evil and malicious, who are capable of causing havoc to other beings raises a number of issues around human freedom agency in African philosophy. One can therefore wonder if individuals can be said to be free in the presence of these evil and malicious beings.

## **2.5 A Critical Evaluation of Causation in the African Worldview**

From the ongoing debate it appears on the surface that the African conception of causation points to a determined universe. A closer examination of the relationship between humans and the spirits shows that the latter can cause harm to the former. Thus, the latter may cause madness, epilepsy and sickness to the latter. As Gbadegesin (1991:85) notes, the beings that inhabits the invisible world have the powers to falsify the laws of nature. He argues that, they can change their nature at will, affect others physically even from a distance and thus change their destinies (1991:85). In other cases, as Mbiti notes, these spirits may possess people. He explains that, during the height of spirit possession, the individual in effect loses his own personality and acts in the content of the “personality of the spirit possessing him” (Mbiti; 1975:82). The spirit may choose to drive the person away making him to live in the forest.

Considering the views above that some people with certain expertise may manipulate these spirits to cause harm to others, for instance, spirit of witchcraft, to what extent then can humans be

understood as controllers of their fate? In the presence of these malignant spirits, to what extent then can we say humans can control their fate? In this section, the researcher endeavours to advance arguments which nullify the view that the African belief in supernatural causation is tantamount to believing in a determined world. First, this is done by looking at the difference between events and actions. Secondly, I also observe in this section that even in the face of supernatural causation, an individual still can do something about their situation.

It seems at first glance that the Africans hold a strong deterministic conception of the world, that is, the belief that events are determined by the wills of spiritual beings and that nothing happens by chance. Of worth to note here is the word “events”. The point this chapter is making is that human actions cannot be classified as events in the way the determinists do. According to Jonathan Dancy and Constantine Sandis (2015:33), “A central task in the philosophy of action is that of spelling out the differences between events in general and those events that fall squarely into the category of human action.” Further to this, they note that actions consist of moving something. This understanding of action as moving something warrants the need to distinguish between actions and events. However, the researcher does not pretend that by advocating for the view that actions are not events it is bringing something new to the debate of freedom and determinism. But it is my conviction that by bringing these ideas together and organising them properly in relation to each other, the general belief that all events (human actions included) are caused may fall away.

To shed more light on the view that the Africans do not consider acts brought about by agents as events, the researcher quotes Gyekye (1987:120) who argues that;

The argument in Western philosophy pertaining to human freewill and responsibility is this: If every event is caused, as determinism holds, then human action and behaviour too are caused, and hence we cannot be held morally responsible for those actions. There is a suppressed premise in the argument, which is that,

human actions are (a species of) events. This premise, is, in my view not wholly correct. There is a sense in which human actions cannot be considered as events.

Gyekye further explains that events are mere happenings or occurrences which do not have their origin in human design and motivation. He gave several examples of what would qualify as events. Amongst these are the flooding of the river, the erosion of the sea, a tremor of the earth and many others. However, human events for him originate in human thought, deliberation and desires. These cannot be regarded as events. He gives the example of the flooding river and the warring among ethnic groups in Africa in an attempt to support his view that actions are not events. For him then, the flooding of the river is just an event, it just occurred. However, the warring of ethnic groups in Africa, for Gyekye (1987:120), is not an event, for it did not just occur, but it was an action brought about as a result of human deliberation, intention, decision, and desire; it was planned and executed by people.

In light of this, Gyekye notes rightly that the African conception of causation should be understood as confined to events, natural and nonhuman, that are beyond the control or the power of people, to the exclusion of human actions. The research further agrees with Gyekye when he argues that the concept of causation or determinism is irrelevant as far as human actions and behaviour are concerned in Akan thought and by extension African thought system.

Another argument that debunks the view that African agents are determined springs from the fact that even in the face of mystical powers an agent can still do something about his fate. Shorter (1978:49) supports this position when he argues that the existence of mystical powers does not mean that humans felt themselves unable to dominate their environment, in the grip of ghosts and demons under the spell of the awe-inspiring phenomena of nature, as prey to imaginary magical forces or cruel and capricious spirits. As a group, the spirits have more power than humans. Yet in

some ways humans are better off, and the right human specialists can manipulate or control the spirits as they wish (1978:79). However, Mitchell (1977:67) underscored the view that there are divine healers who are capable of working retaliative magic against that of sorcery. Even in cases of spirit possession, the element of free choice is available to the individual who can choose to visit traditional doctors or diviners. However, when spirit possession is noted, the relatives of the possessed person may seek the help of traditional doctors and diviners. These are believed to be capable of exorcising the spirit from the person. It is, therefore, the belief of this research that even in the face of the mystical powers and spiritual causation, an individual's action still remains free.

In this view then, the African agent possesses metaphysical freedom which allows the self the capacity to make free and undetermined choices within the bounds of its external limitations. In light of this, it can be observed that, there is a difference between being influenced by previous causes and being totally determined by them. Influences may create certain tendencies, but their outcome is neither inevitable nor perfectly predictable. Thus, the research argues that the metaphysical world controls the conditions of the material world (events) surrounding the individual, leaving out the individual's will (action) undetermined. Here we find some relevant points which may help in building the case for the view that it is possible to alter your destiny. In other terms, if some individual can play around with the course of your life whether for better or for worse, then it only goes to point out that destiny though received or handed down from a Supreme Being can be altered for good or for worse.

Having noted that the African concept of causation is not tantamount to determinism, in the coming chapters the concept of destiny will be looked at from the vantage point of the Akan of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria, who view a human agent as standing in a particular relationship with all



there is both visible and invisible. There will be an examination of the people's understanding of destiny from the perspectives of two African ethnic groups, which are, the Akan and the Yoruba.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion focused on the concept of causation as understood by different African scholars. This causation, however, is not limited to mechanical causes but extends to spiritual causation. It has also been argued that the Africans themselves do not dismiss the existence of empirical causes. They do understand and appreciate empirical causation, but to them this is not profound or sufficient enough to offer adequate explanations. That being the case, the Africans tend to be worried about those extra-ordinary things that defy the course of nature. Philosophers such as Sogolo tend to classify these as primary causes.

The belief that supernatural, non-embodied entities act as causal agents pervades the African understanding of the concept of causation. Thus, by consulting mystical powers such as witchcraft and sorcery, one can harm an enemy. It has also been noted that even though these mystical powers have the ability to cause harm in the life of the targeted enemy, the enemy can still defy these odds by appealing to good magic or consulting individuals who have the expertise to restore the power of life through prayers sacrifices, offerings and other means. Thus, this indicates that the individual is not determined by the will of these spiritual entities. He or she has genuine alternatives to choose from and hence can change his or her misfortune. This has led the researcher to come to the conviction that Africans do believe in causation, which is non-empirical but spiritual and which supports the view that individuals are free to be held accountable for their actions.

## **Chapter Three: The Akan Worldview**

### **3.0 Introduction**

In a bid to ascertain the extent to which an African agent is free or determined, this chapter focuses on the African understanding of reality, which in short, is their philosophy. This is done by way of looking at the Akan way of viewing reality. An examination of the Akan worldview is done in this chapter in order to understand the philosophical elements involved in the way the people understand reality. It is the conviction of this researcher that at the centre of the Akan beliefs is religion, which permeates all the facets of their lives.

This research, however, does not pretend to cover the sum total of their core ideas about the universe, but looks at those ideas which are of essence to the central question of the research. At the very beginning of the chapter, an attempt is made to define the Akan people and their location. It goes further to look at the concept of “worldview” in general and then the Akan worldview in particular. To this end, it focuses on the issues pertaining to human existence, that is, the Akan metaphysical conception of person. Ideas by such acclaimed African scholars as Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu are presented and the discussion unravels divergent views between these two scholars where they pertain the metaphysical concept of person or the ontological makeup of a person in the Akan worldview. In the final analysis, the chapter looks at the role that *okra* plays in the Akan understanding of human destiny.

### **3.1 Africa**

Under this section, the researcher is going to give a general understanding of Africa which harbours the two countries that inform this research, which are, Ghana and Nigeria respectively. It is the researcher’s belief that there is no one Africa, but many, made up of various interlacing and

conflicting groups such as tribes, nations, countries and linguistic groups. However, there are certain issues about these different tribes that unify them. However, “African” in this research is taken to denote peoples and their philosophies, cultures, and practices originally identified with the geographical region, the continent of Africa, irrespective of whether such peoples live currently on the continent or abroad.

According to Bernice Quampah et.al (2016:855), “the geographical delineation of Africa as a continent gives a uniqueness of peoples inhabiting or originating from this continent that can be referred to as Africa. The experiences of peoples defined as Africans form the basis of African specific cultural values and systems”. To further support this view, Quampah et.al (2016:855) cite Nkulu-N’Sengha (2005) who has it that given the specificity of their location in the world and their experiences in human history, African peoples have specific ways of understanding and explaining the world and the complexity of the human condition. In other words, this means that Africa has a unique way of interpreting reality to the other cultures outside Africa.

According to Nicole Mullen (2004:6), Africa is the second largest continent in the world after Asia. It is an extremely diverse place with many different cultural groups and landscapes. There are tropical forests, grasslands, plains, and deserts. In his article *African knowledges and Sciences: Exploring the ways of knowing of Sub-Saharan Africa*, David Miller notes that, “Africa has a diversity of ecosystems, ranging from extensive mountain areas, savannah and dry land areas to lowlands, coastal plains and tropical rainforests (<https://vetechnetworks>). There are 54 countries in Africa, over 800 million people, and over 1 000 different languages spoken (Mullen; 2004:6).

There are many different cultures, and many differences within cultures in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, there is a commonality in this diversity, that is, traditionally, Africans generally place

community and ancestry at the centre of existence. As Quampah et.al (2016:855) note, “Every phenomenon, including humans, that bears the adjective ‘African’ shares in this specific way of knowing.”

However, Miller argues that historic developments, demographic and ecological differences, as well as economic opportunities, colonial impact and religious missionary activities, to mention but a few factors, have resulted in a diversity of lifestyles, values and religions (<https://vtechworks>). In addition to this, Miller notes that in traditional Africa religions have common elements, but there is also a great variation in rituals and traditional institutions. For Miller,

The first anatomically modern human emerged in the southern part of Africa. The first African people hunted a wide range of animals, and learned the use of fire to control vegetation....The introduction of iron tools made way for the development of sophisticated settlements in West Africa and the construction of monumental centres and phenomenal civilisations such as Great Zimbabwe. Bantu-speaking people moved from West Africa to Eastern and Southern Africa, claiming regions that are more fertile and integrating or displacing earlier occupants from the eighth century onwards, Arab trading penetrated sub-Saharan Africa, bringing oil, lamps, pottery and cowry shells in exchange for ivory, ebony, gold, as well as slaves...Several Kingdoms with important cultures emerged. Among these were Ghana... (<https://vtechworks>).

From the discussion above, it follows that Africa is made up of different tribes, nations, countries, and linguistic groups. However, the research focuses on the ethnic groups of two countries in West Africa, that is, the Akan of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria respectively. This chapter, therefore, discusses the Akan (Ghana) worldview, that is, how the people understand reality. In the next chapter, focus shall be on how the Yoruba people of Nigeria understand reality. It is the conception of human destiny of these two ethnic groups that informs this research. The understanding of the concept of destiny will be looked at from the vantage point of these two ethnic groups and a careful generalisation for these two to be representatives of ‘African’ will be made. The researcher is not

oblivious of the fact that this can invite criticism related to over generalising. As noted by Igbafen (2014:124), this brings to the fore the question of the desirability or otherwise of the appropriation of the unanimist prefix 'African' to draw generalisation about obvious by diverse peoples in terms of worldview or culture. He further noted that there are bound to be objection(s) to the use of the appellation 'African' to make generalisations; for more than three thousand ethnic groups of people with obvious differences in their thoughts, mode of production and world-views (2014:125).

Notwithstanding the perceived variations in African cultures, works on African history, anthropology, archaeology, religion and philosophy are replete with notorious facts of sufficient and significant similarities and relative unanimity in the thought systems of Africans (Igbafen; 2014:125). This view has been supported as well by Otubanjo (1989:15), who argues that there are unifying elements in the beliefs and ideas of the innumerable social groups in Africa to enable them to be identified as being one genre.

That being the case, this research sees it fit to engage in a deep understanding of Ghana, where the country is located and some background information on the people of Ghana. This is done in a bid to understand the Akan people who constitute the largest ethnic group in Ghana, since the research is informed by the Akan people's worldview.

### **3.2 Ghana**

Ghana is one of the African countries located along the coastline of the Gulf of Guinea. Steven Salm and Toyin Falola (2002:2) note that Burkina Faso is to the north of Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire is to the west, and Togo is to the east. The southern coast lies 465 miles north of the Equator and the Greenwich Meridian passes through the port city of Tema, sixteen miles east of the national capital,

Accra (Salm and Falola; 2002:2). The Republic of Ghana is home to 18.5 million people and its population continues to grow at the rate of 2.5 percent annually (2002:2). It extends 420 miles northwards from the ocean, spans 334 miles of coastline, and has a total area of 92,100 square miles, about the size of Oregon (2002:2). Salm and Falola (2002:3) further note that, Ghana consists of flat terrain and gently rolling hills, with more than half of the country less than 660 feet above sea level.

One of the most prominent features of the social structure of Ghana is its ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity. Awedoba (1994:40) notes that;

It may be difficult to state with certainty the exact number of ethnic groups in Ghana. However, according to population statistics, the people can be divided into eight major ethnic groups and other small tribes. These groups are the Akan, the Ewe, the Ga-Adangme, the Guan, the Gurma, the Grusi, the Mande-Busanga and the Mole-Dagbani. It should, however, be noted that each of these major groups has several sub-groups, marked by differences in language. Of these eight groups, Akan has the largest population consisting of 49.1% of the population. The Akan is composed of two main linguistic groups, that is, the Twi and Mfantse. The second largest group is the Ewe which comprises 12.7% of the population. It can also be subdivided into various subgroups which are marked by differences in language, social and political life, though being unified by a considerable cultural uniformity. The Ga-Adangme group is the third and constitutes 8% of the population. The Guan is the fourth group which forms 4.4% of the population and has been absorbed into Akan linguistic groups, though they maintain some aspects of their culture such as the patrilineal inheritance system. The Mole-Dagbani has a population of 16.5% followed by the Gurma with a population of 3.9%, the Grusi 2.8%, Mande-Busanga 1.1%, the other tribes 1.5%. These groups should be understood as having a different language and sub-cultural distinctions, however, cultural commonalities among them are strong.

Culturally, Ghana encompasses long-standing interactions between the past and the present, the traditional and the modern. In support of this view, Salm and Falola (2002:3) note that Ghana has a dynamic culture that reflects the duality inherent in the attempt to blend rich cultural institutions

and customs with continuing adaptation to the political, economic, and social exigencies of the modern world.

### **3.2.1 The Akan People of Ghana**

In order to understand the Akan people there is need to look at where these people are located in the world. It is one of the biggest Ethnic groups in West Africa today. They are made up of two main groups, that is, the Twi and the Fante (Salm and Falola; 2002:6). The Fante came first, settling predominantly in the area around what is now the Cape Coast, probably sometime in the thirteenth century. The Twi inhabited much of the central region, and the forest country to the south, between the Volta and Tano Rivers. Some Akan migrated east and created the Baule community in the late thirteenth century, long before the Portuguese first arrived in 1471. Because of their position on the coast, the Fante were the first to form relationships with the Europeans and some, especially the Fante elite, adopted and adapted aspects of European culture. It is fairly common today, for example, to find prominent Fante families with European surnames.

It is generally believed that the Akan people migrated to their current location from the Sahara desert and Sahel region of Africa into the forested region around the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Akwamu. Akuapem.com), and many Akans tell their history as having started in Eastern region of Africa as this is where the ethnogenesis of the Akan as we have it today happened (Atlas of the Human Journey; 2010). This makes them the largest ethnic group in both Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The Akan refer to the language of the Akan ethno-linguistic and the Akan language which was and is most widely spoken and used in indigenous language on the Ashantiland Peninsula (Guerini. Federia; 2006:100). The Akan language is spoken as the predominant language in the Western, Central, Ashanti, Eastern, Brong Ahafo regions of the Ashantiland Peninsula (2006:100). A form

of Akan Ndyuka is also spoken in South America, notably Suriname, French Guiana, Guyana, with the Akan language coming to these South American and Caribbean places through the trans-Atlantic trade. Akan names and folktales are still used in these South American and Caribbean countries (main example is Jamaica and its great influence by Akan culture and Twi loanwords) (2006:100). The Akan speak Kwa languages which are part of the larger Niger-Congo family. As noted in the “Atlas of the human Journey”, the greater Akan people (macro-ethnic group) speak Kwa languages. The proto-Kwa language is believed to have come from East/Central Africa, before settling in the Sahel. The people who became known as the Akan migrated from the Sahel to coastal West Africa ([www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads](http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads)).

The kingdom of Bonoman was firmly established in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by the Akan people. Between the 12th and 13th centuries, a gold boom in the area brought wealth to numerous Akans (Africa: a Voyage of Discovery with Basil Davison; 1984 documentary). Bonoman was a trading state between the Akan and neighbouring people especially those from Djenné ([www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads](http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads)). During different phases of the Bonoman Empire, groups of Akans migrated out of the area to create numerous states based predominantly on gold mining and trading of cash crops (James Currey; 1997:294). This brought wealth to numerous Akan states like Akwamu Empire (1550-1650) and ultimately led to the rise of the most well-known Akan empire, the Empire of Ashanti (1700-1900), the most dominant of the Akan states (Africa: a Voyage of Discovery with Basil Davidson; 1984 Documentary).

From a number of political groupings there arose several powerful states. The Akan states of Ashanti, the Akwamu, the Akyem, the Akuapem, the Denkyira, the Abron, the Aowin, the Ahanta, the Anyi, the Baoule, the Chokosi, the Fante, the Kwahu, the Sefwi, the Ahafo, the Assin, the Evalue, the Wassala, the Adjukru, the Akye, the Alladian, the Attie, the M'Bato, the Abidji, the



Avikam, the Avatime the Ebrie, the Ehotile, the Nzema, the Abbe, the Aboure, the Coromantins, the Ndyuka people and other peoples of both modern day Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire or of origin in these countries ([www.saylor.org/site/wp - content uploads](http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads)). Although these states spread over a large geographic area of Ghana, the various Akan subgroups share main cultural traits.

Historically, the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the period when the Akan people dominated gold mining in the region and from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards they were amongst the most powerful groups in West Africa. The Akan goldfields were the highly auriferous area in the forest country in the region, along with the Bambuk goldfield, and the Bure goldfield (Levtzion. Nehemia; 1973:155). The wealth in gold attracted European traders in the form of the Portuguese then the Dutch and finally the British who had keen interest in the Akan gold (1973:155). Later on the Akan states started waging war on neighbouring states in order for them to capture people and sell them as slaves to the Portuguese, who subsequently sold the enslaved people along with guns to Akan states in exchange for Akan gold (<http://www.modernghana.com>). The Akan gold was used to purchase slaves in order to help clear the dense forests within Ashanti (<http://www.modernghana.com>).

The Akans went from buyers of slaves to selling slaves as the dynamics in the Gold Coast and the New World changed. Thus, the Akan people played a role in supplying Europeans with indentured servants, who were later enslaved for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By the early 1900s, all Akan lands in Africa were colonised or protectorates of the French and English. Akan people, especially the Ashanti people, fought against European colonists to maintain autonomy including many Anglo-Ashanti wars: the war of the Golden Stool, and other similar battles. On the 6th of March 1957, Akan lands in the Gold Coast rejected British rule, by the efforts of Kwame Nkrumah, and were joined with British Togoland to form the independent nation of Ghana. The Ivory Coast became independent on 7 August 1960 ([www.saylor.org/site/wp - content uploads](http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads)).

### 3.3 What Entails a Worldview?

In order to understand the Akan worldview, there is need to appreciate what entails a ‘worldview’. Different scholars define the term in different ways. Dewitt (2004:2) defines a worldview as “a system of beliefs that are interconnected in something like the way the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are interconnected. Thus, a worldview is not merely a collection of separate, independent, unrelated beliefs, but is instead an intertwined, interrelated, interconnected system of beliefs.” Miller (2001:38) argues that a worldview is “a set of assumptions held consciously or unconsciously in faith about the basic makeup of the world and how the world works.” Geisler and Bocchino (2001:43, 55) define a worldview as;

...a set of beliefs, a model that attempts to explain all of reality and not just some aspect of it...Moreover, a worldview is a philosophical system that attempts to explain how the facts of reality relate and fit together...In other words, a worldview shapes or colours the way we think and furnishes the interpretive condition for understanding and explaining the facts of our experience.

Furthermore, philosophers such as Diana Axelsen (1979:184) define a worldview as:

(a) a position concerning the nature of ultimate reality (ontology); (b) a statement concerning the nature of knowledge and what constitutes personhood (e.g., Are persons substances or processes? Are they individuals or manifestations of a single cosmic process or both? What is the relation between physical and psychological properties of persons, if both are acknowledged to exist? (c) a view about the nature of human history; (d) an identification of the fundamental values which individuals ought to pursue: and (e) an identification of cultural norms and a specification of their relationship to individual norms.

It can be inferred from the above definitions that, apart from explaining reality and a people’s purpose in life, a worldview has serious effects on a people’s values, attitudes, opinions as well as their thoughts. Another way of understanding a people’s worldview is to view it as enmeshed in a

people's culture, thus, the two cannot be divorced. To substantiate the claim that worldviews are not divorced from culture, Kraft (1999:385) argues that;

Worldview, the deep level of culture, is the culturally structured set of assumptions (including values and commitments or allegiances) underlying how people perceive and respond to reality. Worldview is not separate from culture. It is included in culture as the deepest level presuppositions upon which people base their lives.

Furthermore, Ethnologist Edward Sapir views a people's worldview as having an impact on how an individual views himself in relation to the group they belong to, to the outsiders and to his or her environment.

The unconscious patterning of behaviour in society...the way a people characteristically look outward on the universe. They are patterns of thought, attitudes towards life, conceptions of time, a mental picture of what ought to be a people's understanding of their relationship to unseen things and to the order of things, and their view of self and others (Mandelbaum;1958: 548).

If this is the case, then it follows with necessity that worldview is the cornerstone of a people's conduct. However, the researcher is well aware that worldviews are subject to change. Several factors such as advancement in knowledge, current experiences as well as contact with other cultures have the power to affect a people's worldview.

Another aspect of a people's worldview is their religion. Just like a worldview cannot be divorced from a people's culture, the same can be extended to religion which cannot be divorced from a people's worldview. Thus, a people's worldview is further understood as religious at its core. In other words, religion is understood as motivating human behaviour. Hence, there is a close connection between a people's worldview and their religion. To support the view that there is an intricate relationship between religion and a people's worldview, the researcher borrows from

Ninian Smart (1893:3) who argues that, “The heart of the modern study of religion is the analysis and comparison of worldviews.” In a bid to understand what motivates people, Smart (1983:1) states that;

The reason is simple: human beings do things for the most part because it pays them to do so, or because they fear to do otherwise, or because they believe in doing them. The modern study of religion is about the last of these motives: the systems of belief which, through symbols and actions, mobilise the feelings and wills of human beings. In addition to examining traditional faiths, the modern study of religion also looks at secular symbols and ideologies...which often rival religion and yet in an important sense are themselves religious. Thus, the modern study of religion helps to illuminate worldviews, both traditional and secular, which are the engines of social and moral continuity and change; and therefore, it explores beliefs and feelings, and tries to understand what exists inside the heads of people.

From the argument above, it is clear that in order to understand a people’s worldview, there is need to have an appreciation of that people’s religion. Though defined and understood in different ways by different scholars, this research utilises Kraft’s (1999) definition of worldview. In this regard, Kraft’s definition suffices as the appropriate working definition for discussing the worldview of the Akan people of Ghana. The reason for my choice of Kraft’s definition is that it argues that a people’s worldview cannot be separated from their culture. To this effect, the Akan people have cultural beliefs and practices that are not written but are passed on from generation to generation through oral tradition. Thus, in light of this, in order to understand the Akan worldview, the research looks at the people’s religio-cultural views.

### **3.3.1 The Akan Worldview**

An analysis of the Akan worldview in this section helps delineate the philosophical elements in the way the people view reality. It is of paramount importance because a people’s beliefs are

determined by their worldview. These sets of beliefs in turn influence the individual's behaviour. A closer look at the Akan people reveals that their worldview is a result of a methodical consideration of phenomena and experiences that their ancestors handed down to them. Thus, their worldview is shaped by a variety of religious and secular beliefs. The Akan worldview encompasses the way in which they explain their personal condition and their relationship with the physical and the spiritual world around them. Salm and Falola (2002:34) note that the Ghanaians, and by extension the Akan people, believe that life is a process of renewal that begins at birth and continues after death. In their words;

When children are born, there is a one-week period when they are not given names because it is believed that they are caught in-between the land of the living and the spirit world, and could return to the latter world at any point. After surviving this first week, the child is named and welcomed into the family and the community. Puberty celebrates a child's transition into adulthood, and marriage marks a time of increased responsibilities, including the task of bringing children into the world (Salm and Falola; 2002:34).

Further to this, the Akans are said to view death as a transition to another life, not necessarily just the end of an earthly one. Thus, the spirit of the deceased is believed to live on and is said to play an active role in human life (Salm and Falola; 2002:35). Salm and Falola (2002:35) further note that when a person dies amongst the Akan people, others seek to understand the cause of death. The people celebrate a natural death in old age, however, an untimely death is attributed to witchcraft (2002:35). They also believe that immoral conduct or failure to appease the ancestors can also lead to premature death (2002:35). Thus, where there are suspicious circumstances, certain actions may be taken to determine responsibility, thus the Akan ritual (*funusoa*) is done which involves carrying the corpse around town, until the spirit directs the carriers to the house of the killer (2002:35).

Further to this, Salm and Falola (2002:35) note that the foundation of the Akan worldview lies in the belief that a Supreme God created the world, and that God is the source of all good and evil things. Their worldview is shaped by the belief in two separate but connected worlds, which are, the world of the spirit and the world of the living. The spirit world contains a hierarchy of powers that includes the Supreme God, lesser gods, ancestors, witches and so on. Further to this, they believe that individuals are a combination of four components that stress the importance of a Supreme God, the spiritual world, and the father and the mother. Hence, their belief in a person as having the following metaphysical components: *okra*, *sunsum*, *ntoro* and *mogya* respectively.

It may be argued that the Akan worldview is based on ideas which are unproven; however, these ideas are thought by its believers to be true and can be demonstrated in real life through the people's culture. This leads one to argue that the Akan indigenous cultural pattern is influenced by worldviews which serve as reservoirs of knowledge. For him, these are stored in myths, proverbs and folklores.

### **3.3.2 Akan Cultural and Religious Values**

At this juncture, there is need to consider the Akan culture and religion as they inform their worldview. Gyekye (1997:107) defines the word culture as referring to "...patterns of thought and ways of acting and behaving that have been created, fostered, and nurtured by a people over time and by which their lives are guided and, perhaps, conditioned." From this definition, Akan culture can be understood as the shared patterns of thought and ways of acting and behaving that have been created, fostered, and nurtured by the people of Akan, and which guide the lives of individuals, groups, and institutions.

Though the Akan culture has been greatly influenced by colonisation, the people share traits that reflect a particular aspect of indigenous culture. People emphasise closely knit kinship systems that affect interpersonal relationships, legal rights to property, and social roles and obligations. However, critics always ask whether it is possible to have a common Akan culture considering the fact that the group is composed of different cultural-linguistic groups.

The varieties of traditional cultures in Akan representing the various linguistic groups which make up the group differ in some respects. However, some deep underlying affinities which run through these cultures justify speaking of Akan culture. It is the conviction of this researcher that a common culture ought not to be understood as complete uniformity, but the very fact that various sub-cultures have managed for a long time to co-exist as Akan group shows that they share values. Speaking of Ghanaians, Hagan (2004:229) has it that the reason why Ghana has managed to hold together for more than fifty years as a united country even in the face of various ethnic groups is because “all the subcultures within it embrace, to some extent, an overarching culture of shared values, collective symbols, norms, rules, attitudes and behavior patterns...” In light of this, a common Akan culture must therefore include an understanding of the changing relationship between the traditional and contemporary elements within it. There must be an effort to embrace elements that have been applicable only at certain stages but have eventually receded into oblivion or have reverted to their status as elements restricted to particular sub-cultural groups.

Kofi Antubam (1963:27-29) offers a list of common features in Akan culture. In his list he includes the idea of the existence of one Great God as an integral member of society; the belief in the perpetual existence of life, in which there is a cycle of pregnancy, life, death and a period of waiting in a universal pool of spiritual existence with a subsequent state of reincarnation, by which it is

possible to change one's lot for better or for worse; the belief in life after death as a vital source of hope; the belief in the sanctity of man as opposed to woman in society; the belief in the idea that man is born free from sin and the idea that he remains so until he is involved in some polluting circumstance in life (as opposed to the Jewish and Christian idea of man born with original sin which he is said to have inherited from his ancestors Adam and Eve); and the idea of the beauty of thought, speech, action and appearance as a basic and necessary prerequisite for appointment to the high office of state (1963:27-29). Further to these, he added the ability to produce a child as a necessary factor for the continuance of marriage; the importance of marriage as a criterion for social status; the peculiar conception that it is improper and obscene to say thanks soon after one has been offered food by a neighbour; the idea of the left hand being symbolically female and obscene and the right being male and socially proper; the conception of society in terms of seven clans; the principle of age as a vital criterion of wisdom; and spontaneity in self-expression (Antubam;1963:27-29).

However, Antubam's list invites criticism from scholars such as Mends and Wiredu. Mends proposes a shorter list which captures basic elements of Akan culture. His list includes the importance that is attached to group life; the importance of kinship as represented in the institutional form of the extended family system irrespective of the differences of descent systems; chiefship and its symbolic significance; the pervasiveness of and stress on ceremony and ritual in many aspects of social life; the idea of beauty of speech, thought, action and appearance as a prerequisite for appointment to high office; the tendency to stress, in all forms of art, the quality of significance as a criterion of beauty and virtue (Mends as cited in Wiredu;1980: 9 and 10).



However, it is easy to find some loopholes in Mends' list since he does not take into account issues of metaphysics and religion; he does not explain issues of belief and worldview. A people's worldview and beliefs constitute an important part of their cultural expressions. It is, therefore, necessary to mention issues of worldview and beliefs in the discussions of a people's culture. This might have prompted Wiredu to offer another list which has some aspects from Antubam and Mends. In his list, he includes;

...kindness to strangers; reverence for ancestors and other departed relatives who are believed to be able to affect the living; the belief in the existence and influence of lesser gods as agents of the one Supreme God; belief in witchcraft and a variety of spirits, fetishes and powers, both good and bad; the belief that human beings are born into the world with an unalterable destiny bestowed in advance by God; and the tendency to stress, not just in forms of art but in sundry other practices, the quality of significance. Other items are, the institution of polygamy and the high esteem for large families; the emphasis on the beauty and correctness of speech as a condition not only for high office of state but also for general social respectability; the influence of myths, totemism and taboos in thought and action; the attachment of a religious significance to the office of a chief, with reverence for and complete obedience to his authority, except where that is undermined by his own wickedness or malpractice; the high premium placed on consensus in group endeavour and a great capacity for reconciliation after even the bitterest conflict or dissension; and the education of children through informal day-to-day upbringing rather than through formal institutions (Wiredu;1980:11).

A closer look at the list provided by Wiredu above reflects observable characteristics of Akan culture. Max Assimeng (1999:43) notes that the following elements provided by Wiredu are still observable in the people's culture; reverence for ancestors and other departed relatives who are believed to be able to affect the living; the belief in the existence of lesser deities as agents of the one supreme God; the belief in witchcraft and a variety of spirits, fetishes and powers, both good and bad; and the belief that human beings are born into the world with an unalterable destiny

bestowed in advance by God. These beliefs are related to traditional metaphysics and religion, and have become the wellsprings that irrigate a contemporary popular culture which is largely underpinned by the traditional understanding of the world as full of spirits and as essentially sacred.

Another aspect of Akan culture which plays a significant role in this research is the fact that the people's culture is one of the traditional matrilineal cultures of Africa. In their understanding of matrilineality, some basic concepts of Akan philosophy and inheritance come out. A person is thus made up of the following constituent parts:

- *abusia (mogya)*- what an Akan inherits from his mother
- *ntoro* – what an Akan gets from his father, but one does not belong to *Ntoro*; instead one belongs to one's *Abusia*
- *Sunsum* - What an Akan develops from interaction with the world
- *Kra* – What an Akan gets from *Onyame* (God)

These constituent parts will be discussed later on as the chapter unfolds. Many but not all of the Akan still practise their traditional matrilineal customs, living in their traditional extended family households. Pobee (1979:44) notes that the only exception to this form of inheritance is the Akuapem of Larteh and Mampong. Thus, although the Akwapim's are Akan, they inherit from the father's side. The traditional Akan economic and political organisation is based on matrilineal *lineages*, which are the basis of inheritance and succession (Kofi. Abrefa. Busia; 1970:477). A *lineage* is defined as all those related by matrilineal descent from a particular ancestress (1970:47). Several lineages are grouped into a political unit headed by a council of elders, each of whom is the elected head of a lineage – which itself may include multiple extended-family households (1970:477).

Public offices are thus vested in the lineage, as are land tenure and other lineage properties. In other words, lineage property is inherited only by matrilineal kin (Busia; 1970:477). Each lineage controls the lineage land farmed by its members, functions together in the veneration of its ancestors, supervises marriages of its members, and settles internal disputes among its members (1970:477).

The political units are likewise grouped into eight larger groups called *abusua*: Aduana, Agona, Asakyiri, Asenie, Asona, Bretuo, Ekuona and Oyoko (1970:477). The members of each such *abusua* are united by their belief that they are all descended from the same ancient ancestress – so marriage between members of the same group (or *abusua*) is forbidden (1970:477). One inherits, or is a lifelong member of, the lineage, the political unit and the *abusua* of one's mother, regardless of one's gender or marriage (1970:477). Members and their spouses thus belong to different *abusuas*, with mother and children living and working in one household, but their husband or father living and working in a different household (1970:477).

In the Akan culture, a man is strongly related to his mother's brother but only weakly related to his father's brother. This must be viewed in the context of a polygamous society in which the mother-child bond is likely to be much stronger than the father-child bond. As a result, in inheritance, a man's nephew (his sister's son) will have priority over his own son. Uncle-nephew relationships therefore assume a dominant position (<http://ashanti.com>). Furthermore, there are principles governing inheritance, generation and age – that is to say, men come before women and seniors before juniors (<http://ashanti.com>). When a woman's brothers are available, a consideration of generational seniority stipulates that the line of brothers be exhausted before the right to inherit lineage property passes down to the next senior genealogical generation of sisters' sons

(<http://ashanti.com>). Finally, it is when all possible male heirs have been exhausted that the females may inherit (<http://ashanti.com>). Certain other aspects of the Akan culture are determined patrilineally rather than matrilineally. There are twelve patrilineal *Ntoro* (spirit) groups, and everyone belongs to his or her father's *Ntoro* group, but not to his family lineage and *abusua*. Each *Ntoro* group has its own surnames, taboos, ritual purifications and forms of etiquette. A person thus inherits one's *Ntoro* from one's father, but does not belong to his family.

The research further observes that there is a close connection between the Akan culture and their religion. In Douglas' words,

Traditional African society remains a culture guided by religious norms: The first thing to realise is the close bond that exists between religion and social life. The African religions impregnate the whole life of the community. They are the beginning and the end of everything. Reduced to essentials, their world view, their vision of the world, is a unifying factor, because it does not imply any clear-cut difference between the profane and sacred, between matter and spirit. In its view the living and the dead, the visible cosmos and the invisible world merely constitute one and the same universe, and the antinomies of good and evil, life and death, which spring from antagonisms inherent in existing beings do not vitiate the unity of this world-vision (Douglas;2005:163).

There is need at this moment to make some general observations about the relationship between religion and culture in African tradition. In an attempt to understand Africa's cultural heritage, John Mbiti includes religion. He advanced the argument that religion is not only the dominant part – it is also the richest component of African culture (1999:10). In support of Mbiti, Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1979:116) notes that the traditional values and knowledge systems are permeated by religion and they continue to serve African societies in diverse ways, despite the influence of Islam, Christianity, modernisation and urbanisation.

It is the belief of this researcher following Mbiti that on the one hand, it is not difficult to single out and identify core religious features in African religions. However, it is, on the other hand, very difficult or impossible to extricate Africa's cultural heritage from its religious beliefs and practices. For example, it is difficult to extricate the cultural aspect from the religious aspect of the people's belief in ancestral spirits and the role they play as custodians of morality for the living. In other words, even if the practice might have been cultural, the fact that it has been handed down to the present generation can render it religious. It then can be argued without contradiction that indigenous beliefs and practices, culture and knowledge systems are intricately interconnected factors that are difficult to separate. A wide range of literature ranging from Geoffrey Parrinder, Idowu and Mbiti and several others that followed, views the character and nature of the indigenous belief systems as having identifiable key features such as the belief in the Creator (Supreme Being), divinities, ancestors and spirits.

The Creator is, however, believed to create and leave the human beings to do their business and does not get involved in their daily needs except in critical situations. The Supreme Being is believed by the people as not being involved in human affairs, because he delegates roles to the divinities, ancestors and spiritual powers. Thus, the role of divinities, ancestors and spirits ranges from request for rain, good harvest and animal and human fertility. In this regard, human beings, when in need of assistance, be it in need of a good harvest, may call upon these invisible forces. Thus, delegated with different tasks, with some being linked, the divinities, ancestors and spiritual powers are both benevolent and malevolent in their relationship and discharge of duties to humans. The interactions between the spiritual beings and the human beings produce a wide range of practices and resources amongst the former. In short then, what is considered as the indigenous cultural heritage and knowledge systems of the African people are the legacy of Africa and her

people's religio-cultural, socio-political, environmental and economic past, present and future, supported by its notion of the unbroken cycle of life and worldview.

Further sifting through the Akan reservoirs of knowledge, as highlighted earlier on, it is evident that the people view the world as comprising of two realms, that is, the physical (inhabited by living and inanimate things) and the spiritual realm (inhabited by supernatural entities). It is the belief of the Akan people that the latter have control over the affairs of the former. In the words of Antony Ephirim-Donkor (2010:1);

When the Akan think about the cosmos, they have in mind a single world that is composed of two parallel worlds, one spiritual and the other corporeal. However, in the African scheme of thought, this is actually not the case, because, the spiritual reigns supreme in all matters, spiritual and corporeal. The corporeal world is merely a reflection of the spiritual, the original and real world of humans, because everything corporeal originated in the spiritual.

To support this view, Molefi. K. Asante and Abu. S. Abarry (1996:453) argue that, "Perhaps no idea or set of ideas has been more important in the history of African people than the concept of spiritual intervention in human. According to them, this agency of the spiritual is found throughout the sources of the African tradition as the basis for justice, harmony, and peace (Asante and Abarry; 1996:453). In other words, the ideas of religion kept the societies close to the fundamental principles of harmony between, humans and the environment, and humans and the spirit world. Hence, Mbiti's observation that African religion informs every facet of the people's life. He argues:

Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so it is not easy or possible to isolate it [from

other aspects of African society and culture]. A study of these religious systems is, therefore a study of the peoples themselves in all the complexities of traditional and modern life (Mbiti; 1990:1).

Furthermore, Asante and Abarry (1996:453) note that in the African tradition, the rituals surrounding the deities, the ceremonies of the priests, and the appropriation necessary to call deities together in support of human needs are based on the belief that nothing in the earth or heaven is without spirit. In addition to this, Asante and Abarry (1996:453) argue that, “African civilisations have posited a world of the unborn, the living, and the dead as a common society. Those unborn and those who have died become ancestors and are weighty presences in African societies. In support of the interconnectedness of the African worldview, Antony Ephirim -Donkor (2010:3-4) observes that;

In the traditional Akan community almost every communal event is connected with religion...[and] wellbeing in life is guaranteed by a congenial moral relationship between human and the spirit entities of their community. It is believed that when left on their own to provide for the spiritual, physical and psycho-social resources that they need for mastering their environment, humans are found to be limited and inadequate. Therefore there is constant need for a moral relationship that is both interdependent and interconnected.

Following from the above argument, Ameh (2013:44) notes that for human beings to enjoy the good things of life (such as fertility, bumper harvest, good health etc.); and avoid all the negative things of life (including sudden deaths, incurable diseases, recurring accidents and so on), they have to be able to comprehend the diverse constituents of both the spiritual and the physical aspects of the universe and how to relate to each negative thing of life (including sudden deaths, incurable diseases, recurring accidents etc), they have to be able to comprehend the diverse constituents of both the spiritual and the physical aspects of the universe and how to relate to each. In their religious views, the Akan people reveal that they believe in the existence of both malevolent and benevolent

spirits, the former being capable of inflicting humanity with bad luck and the latter is associated with good luck.

Drawing from Asante and Abarry's argument, it becomes impossible for a person to be part of a society and at the same time be disconnected from the totality of the religious ideas of that community. In light of this, it is clear that this interconnectedness of the individual, the community and religion is of paramount importance, since each part is critical to the whole. In short, the unborn, living, and dead operate in one sphere in the traditional worldview, separated from, yet at the same time dependent upon the gods. From these arguments, one can note that harmony with the divinities becomes a prerequisite not only for spiritual protection from evil forces but also for physical enjoyment of success, good health, fertility and longevity.

One may ask, how then does looking at the Akan worldview help in addressing the core issues of the thesis? It is the researcher's belief that Africans, and by extension the Akan people, believe that an individual receives a preordained destiny at creation. The challenge comes when the same Africans believe that an individual ought to be held morally accountable for his or her action. The paradox here is that when someone receives a life that is already preordained, to what extent are they responsible for the choices they make (that is if they make choices in the first place) since their course of life seems to have been granted right at creation? The whole business of looking at this most important question about life from a philosophical perspective is to attempt to form rationally justified true African worldview(s). In this case, the thesis examines assumptions, asks questions of justification, clarifies and analyses concepts related to the concept of destiny. In the same spirit, the thesis seeks to organise all the necessary facts that lead to the belief in destiny into a rational system.



To buttress the point above, Kwame Gyekye (1997:13) notes that, “It is therefore, the task of philosophy to subject our lives – our ideas, beliefs, actions, values, and goals – to serious critical examination if we should be what we want to be and know what things are most worthwhile for our lives.” In the Akan worldview there are a lot of important issues that they grapple with. One such issue which is of paramount importance is the metaphysical conception of a person which I believe has some bearing on their understanding of human destiny. As part and parcel of the beliefs of the Akan people, the following section deals with such questions as: what is a person? And what is the nature of a person? Attempting to answer these questions will help in the understanding of the concept of destiny since for the Akans one of the components that make up a person is the bearer of destiny.

### **3.4 The Akan Metaphysical Concept of Person**

Under this section, the chapter focuses on the Akan metaphysical understanding of “person”. This is done in order to reveal the ontological status of the individual. It is of paramount importance to look at the constituent parts of person in a bid to understand the concept of destiny in African philosophy. It is believed by the Akans that one of the constituent parts of a person (*okra*) is the bearer of destiny. This then justifies the need to look at the metaphysical conception of person since *okra* is an essential feature of the Akan conception of destiny. In this section, I grapple with the following questions; what is a person in accordance with the Akan standards? Is a person composed of two substances as to imply dualism? Is he composed of one substance as to imply monism? Or is he a plurality of substances?

These questions are of paramount importance for this research because the metaphysical conception of the individual by the Akan feeds directly into the concept of destiny. How then does

an understanding of the metaphysical constituent parts of the person feed into the Akan concept of destiny? It is the belief of this researcher that one of the constituent parts of the person (*okra*) is the bearer of an individual's destiny. Thus understanding the nature of *okra* becomes necessary for a better understanding of the concept of destiny. If this is the case, then the African concept of destiny cannot be adequately discussed without discussing the Akan metaphysical view of person, that is, how do the Akans view a person and what constitutes personhood in African philosophy. It is the belief of the researcher that the Akan concept of destiny is dependent on the metaphysical account of person. Hence, the concept cannot be understood in isolation of the metaphysical conception of person.

Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (leading scholars on the descriptive concept of person amongst the Akan people) gave conflicting accounts of the constituents of a human being amongst the Akan people. In Wiredu's view a person is composed of the following elements, the body (which is physical), *okra* (received from the Supreme Being and is the bearer of destiny), *mogya* (blood receive from the mother) and finally *sunsum* (which is received from the father). He states that, a person is composed of;

...*nipadua* (a body) and a combination of the following entities conceived as spiritual substances (i) *okra* (soul approximately), that whose departure from a man means death, (ii) *sunsum*, that which gives to a man's character (iii) *ntoro*, something passed on from the father which is the basis of inherited characteristics and, finally (iv) *mogya*, something passed on from the mother which determines a man's clan identity and which at death becomes the *suman* (ghost) (K Wiredu; 1980:47).

To him, what constitutes the parts of a person include: body (*Nipadua*), a life giving entity (*Okra*), that which gives a person's personality its force (*Sunsum*), blood (*Mogya*) and that which is responsible for one's personality cast (*Ntoro*). Olusegun Steven Samuel (2011:161) notes that the

three major elements in a person, in Wiredu's view, are the *Nipadua*, *Okra* and *Sunsum*, although *Mogya* and *Ntoro* are often mentioned in the discourse of personhood. If this is the case, then Wiredu submits to the view that a person is composed of three elements. According to him, "Descriptively, then, the highlights of the Akan conception of a person are the life principle (*okra*), the 'blood' (*mogya*) and the distinctive personality called *sunsum*" (Wiredu; 1996:128).

In support of Wiredu's view of the tripartite elements of person, Kwame Antony Appiah (2004:28) argues that the Asante people are of the view that;

A person consists of a body (*nipadua*) made from the blood of the mother (*mogya*); an individual spirit, the *sunsm*, which is the main bearer of one's personality; and a third entity, the *Okra*. The *Sunsum* derives from the father at conception. The *Okra*, a sort of life force, departs the body only at the person's last breath; is sometimes, as with Greeks and Hebrews, identified with breath; and is often said to be sent to a person at birth, as the bearer of one *nkrabea*, or destiny from *Nyame*. The *Sunsum*, unlike the *Okra*, may leave the body during life and does so, for example, in sleep dreams being thought to be the perceptions of person's *Sunsum* on its night peregrinations...

The *Okra*, for Wiredu, is the most significant part of a person (Samuel; 2011:161). He defines *okra* as "that whose presence in the body means life and whose absence means death and which also receives the individual's destiny from God" (Gyekye; 1987:86). He however, cautions that it is wrong to translate *okra* to mean soul (1987:86). He describes it as a quasi-physical entity which has para-physical qualities. What this means is that the "okra" is neither physical nor spiritual, but both in quality (2011:161). How then did Wiredu come up with three constituent parts of a person in the Akan worldview? For him, "there is a greater affinity between the *okra* and the *sunsum*, for they are both quasi-physical" (1996:128). He further argues that, the only difference between the *okra* and *sunsum* is that the former survives death and then becomes an ancestor, whereas the latter

perishes when the body dies (Wiredu; 1996:128). The point that Wiredu is driving home here is that even *sunsum* is quasi-physical just like *okra*. To support his view of quasi-physicalism, Wiredu quotes Abraham who has it that *sunsum* is “that second man who is a *dramatis persona* in dreams” a temporary duplication of a person which *actually* sallies forth from a sleeping person to indulge in all the goings-on of the dream state (1996:128). Wiredu then further states that the difference in ontological character between the *okra* and the *sunsum* on the one hand, and the *mogya* and the bodily frame as a whole, on the other, is only one degree of materiality, the bodily frame being fully material and the other constituents only partially material as indicated before (1996:128). And for Wiredu, since both the *okra* and the *sunsum* are spatial in conception, they satisfy the embodiment condition. He then cautions that;

One thing, in any case should be absolutely clear: Neither the *okra* nor *sunsum* can be identified with the immaterial soul familiar in some influential Western philosophical and religious thinking...This Western concept of the soul is routinely used interchangeably with the concept of mind while the concepts of *okra* and *sunsum* are categorically different from the Akan concept of mind (*adwene*)...Thus Descartes can speak indifferently of the soul or the mind and appear to make sense. In Akan to identify either the *okra* or the *sunsum* with *adwene* would be the sheerest gibberish (Wiredu; 1996:129).

However, there are a number of things in Wiredu’s account of the constituent parts of a person that did not sit well with his contemporary Gyekye. Firstly, the view that *okra* cannot be equated to soul was something that Gyekye vehemently argues against. Secondly, the fact that *okra* is quasi-physical created a problem in Gyekye’s view. Thirdly, the fact that *sunsum* is quasi-physical and comes from the father was at variance with Gyekye who believes that it is received from a Supreme Being. Gyekye notes that, the reason why Wiredu did not want to equate *okra* with soul is mainly that whereas “the soul is supposed in Western philosophy to be a purely immaterial entity that somehow inhabits the body, the *okra* by contrast, is quasi-physical” (Wiredu, cited in Gyekye;

1987:86). What then does it mean for *okra* to be defined as quasi-physical? According to Kwame (2004:345), quasi-physicalism is the philosophy that considers as existent objects belonging to a category between the realm of the obviously physical, that is, those objects that obey the known laws of physics, and the realm of the so-called spiritual or completely immaterial. Wiredu believes that the *okra* cannot be regarded as spiritual due to several reasons. Firstly, it was because it falls between the physical and the ‘so-called spiritual’ realms and is closer to the physical (Wiredu; 1983:120). Secondly, *okra* is believed to accept offerings. Thirdly, it is capable of rendering itself visible to medicine men. Fourthly, the medicine men use physical or partially physical means to the *okra*. Finally, the *okra* is thought of as a person’s double (1983:120).

Contrary to Wiredu’s account of *okra*, Gyekye thinks that it is appropriate to equate *okra* to the concept of the soul in other metaphysical systems. He believed that Wiredu’s conception of *okra* as ‘quasi-physical’ (which according to Gyekye would mean seemingly physical – almost physical) has dire consequences to the African belief in the disembodied survival or life after death (1987:86). Elsewhere, Gyekye notes that traditional African Religions hold in common the belief that the soul is an immaterial part of the human being that survives death and that humans, in an afterlife, will give an account to God for their lives in the world (Gyekye; 1996:13). To then speak of *okra* as quasi-physical as Wiredu does would imply that when the body dies, it also perishes with the body.

For Gyekye (1987:85), quoted, though mistaken anthropological accounts of the Akan conceptions of a human being view *okra* as quasi-physical. He does not believe in the accounts that present the tripartite conception of a human being by the Akans. He thus argued for a unified dualist view of the Akan conception of person. He thus laboured to show that *okra* and *Sunsum* belong to the spiritual component of the human being. Gyekye maintains that the Akan *okra* is the same as

Descartes' soul. In order to show that *sunsum* is just as spiritual as *okra* though not the same, Gyekye argues that;

The conception of *okra* as constituting the individual's life, the life force, is linked very closely with another concept, *honhom*. *Honhom* means "breath"; it is the noun form of *home*, to breathe. When a person is dead, it is said "His breath is gone" (*ne honhom ko*) or "His soul has withdrawn from his body" (*ne' kra afi ne ho*). These two sentences, one with *honhom* as subject and the other with *okra*, do, in fact, say the same thing; they express the same thought, the death-of-the-person. The departure of the soul from the body means the death of the person, and so does the cessation of breath. Yet this does not mean that the *honhom* (breath) is identical with the *okra* (soul). It is the *okra* that "causes" the breathing. Thus, the *honhom* is the tangible manifestation or evidence of the presence of *okra*. [In some dialects of the Akan language, however, *honhom* has come to be used interchangeably with *sunsum* (spirit)...] (Gyekye; 1987:88).

Here Gyekye's argument seems to be that there is a relationship between *sunsum* and *okra*, that is, where there is *sunsum* there is *okra*. Also another point that he makes is that the two are in a cause and effect kind of relationship. In other words, they are not identical. He however, dismisses anthropological and sociological views that hold *sunsum* as (a) derived from the father, (b) as not divine and (c) as perishable with the disintegration of the *honam* (the material component of a person) (1987:89). His objection of the third view that *sunsum* perishes with the body is based on the fact that if this is the case, then it follows that *sunsum* has the same qualities as those of the body; it is material or physical (1987:89). Gyekye notes that philosophical, sociological and anthropological accounts of the nature of person give the impression of a tripartite conception of a human being in Akan philosophy, that is, *okra* (soul) which is immaterial, *sunsum* (spirit) which is material and *Honam* (body) material (1987:89). For Gyekye, this characterisation is erroneous. For him, *sunsum* is neither material nor mortal. Gyekye thus cites several reasons which make it absurd to consider *sunsum* as belonging to the physical aspect of a human being. The most

compelling one is his agreement with his predecessors who held the view that *sunsum* constitutes, or rather determines the personality and character of a person (Gyekye; 1987:90). In order to support this view, Gyekye quotes Busia and Danquah. According to Busia, *sunsum* “is what moulds the child’s personality and disposition. It is that which determines his character and individuality.” Danquah is quoted as saying, “But we now know the notion which corresponds to the Akan ‘*sunsum*’ namely, not ‘spirit’ as such, but personality which covers the relation of the ‘body’ to the ‘soul’ (*Okra*) (1987:92).

He further notes that ‘personality’ involves the idea of a set of characteristics as evidenced in a person’s behaviour – thoughts, feelings, actions etc. With this in mind, Gyekye (1987:90) concluded that if the *sunsum* is that which constitutes the basis of an individual’s personality, then it cannot be a physical thing, for qualities like courage, jealousy, gentleness, forcefulness, and dignity are psychological, not sensible or physical. Apart from it being the basis of personality, the *sunsum* is held by Gyekye as the co-performer of some of the functions of the *okra* (soul) – undoubtedly held as a spiritual entity and as the subject of the psychical activity of dreaming; the *sunsum* must be something spiritual (immaterial) (1987:94). According to Gyekye (1987:93), the Akan believe that the *sunsum* can leave the human body when one is asleep. This however, would render it absurd to hold that it is physical since it is impossible for a physical thing to leave the body during a person’s sleep. *Sunsum*, thus is believed by Gyekye to be non-physical and originates from the Supreme Being. This contradicts Wiredu’s understanding of *sunsum* which he believed to be personality which originates from the father and hence not spiritual.

In his final analysis, a human being has the following constituents; *Okra* (soul) and *Sunsum* (spirit) (these two are spiritual or immaterial) and *Honam* (body) (which is material or physical). Although the debate on the nature of *Okra* is an endless battle between these giant African scholars, it is not

the business of this research to explore the debate on whether *okra* is equivalent to the soul or not. In this debate my contribution will be compromised due to my limited understanding of the Akan language. However, I can make a few quick comments on the characterisation of *okra* by Gyekye and Wiredu. It is my belief that Wiredu's characterisation of *okra* as quasi-physical makes more sense than that of Gyekye. As indicated earlier on, Gyekye highlighted that *okra* is understood by the Akans as immaterial just like Descartes' soul. One of his reasons of rejecting Wiredu's characterisation of *okra* as quasi-physical is outlined below:

I understand the term "quasi-physical" to mean "seemingly physical", "almost physical". Such descriptions of the *okra* (soul) in Akan thought runs counter to the belief of most Akan people in disembodied survival or life after death. For a crucial aspect of Akan metaphysics is the existence of the world of spirits (*asamando*), a world inhabited by the departed souls of the ancestors. The conception or interpretation of the *okra* as a quasi-physical object having parapsychical properties would mean the total or "near total" (whatever that means) extinction of the *okra* (soul) upon the death of the person. And if this were the case, it would be senseless to talk of the departed souls continuing to exist in the world of spirits (*asamando*).

From the argument above, it is clear that Gyekye is worried about Wiredu's characterisation of *okra* as para-physical because this runs counter to the Akan popular belief in life after death. This research agrees with Gyekye that it is common belief amongst the Africans that there is a continued existence after death. However, this is as far as I agree with Gyekye. One objection that I can raise even if we grant that there is continued existence after death, is that, does it happen because a person has a soul? Is it not possible that it happens because of any other element which is not the soul? To support this query, the research quotes John Mbiti (1969:159) who says;

For peoples who has it that the hereafter is in another world or a distant place, food and weapons may be buried with the dead body to sustain and protect the person in the journey between the two worlds or places. For the majority of peoples, however, the next world is in fact geographically 'here', being separate from this



only by virtue of being invisible to human beings. The Chagga hold that the journey takes nine days from this to the next world, and the soul has to be admitted by older spirits. To make the journey less demanding the *corpse* is anointed with fat 'given' milk in the mouth and wrapped with hide, to provide it with food and protect it from the scorching desert sun (*my emphasis*).

If Mbiti's view is anything to go by, then it follows that *okra* can be qualified as quasi-physical since the corpse (which means a dead body) is provided with food, milk and fat in preparation for its journey. A spiritual being has no need for food or milk and fat. Only a physical or quasi-physical being would need those things. In other words, whatever being which continues to exist after death is not immaterial like Gyekye would assert. So it is still possible for Wiredu to maintain that *okra* is quasi-physical and maintain that there is continued existence after death in the Akan worldview. In short, the contradiction that Gyekye sees in Wiredu is non-existent in my view.

Furthermore, Gyekye's characterisation of the *okra* as an equivalent of the soul leads us straight to the problems Descartes ran into. Descartes had earlier on argued that substance is made up of two constituents, that is, the mind and the body. He described the mind as purely immaterial and the body as physical. However, the problem came when he tried to account for how the immaterial and the material interact. By arguing that *okra* is equivalent to the soul, Gyekye falls into the same pitfall that his predecessor Descartes fell into years earlier on. Wiredu, as indicated earlier on, is of the view that *okra* is a quasi-physical entity and with this characterisation of *okra*, he avoids the mind and body problem. In his book *Personhood in African Philosophy*, Bernard Matolino (2014) analyses the debate between Gyekye and Wiredu on the characterisation of *okra*. He believes that, there are good reasons to think that Gyekye's reading of Akan metaphysics on personhood is erroneous. He believes that Wiredu rightly characterises *okra* as quasi-physical. The suggestion by Matolino is that Wiredu's reference to a quasi-physical entity, rather than a non-physical one

as Gyekye does, distances him from Cartesian Dualism and its associated philosophical problems. This is also echoed in his submission that in Gbadegesin's Yoruba account of personhood, mental occurrences are grounded in some physical, rather than non-physical, entity (Matolino; 2014:87).

To summarise the discussion of the metaphysical concept of person in the Akan worldview, one can note that a person is believed to be made up of the following constituent parts: *okra*, *sunsum*, *ntoro*, and *mogya*. For the Akans, *sunsum* appears to be a spiritual substance responsible for *suban*, character, genius, temper and quality (Asante and Abarry; 1996:453). In addition, they understand *sunsum* as moral in its operation, not automatic, and is educable. Whereas the *okra* is that which makes a person breathe and so is the principle of life, the *sunsum* is not, and is thought to leave a man during sleep (1996:453). It is that second man who is a *dramatis persona* in dreams (1996:453). For the Akans, a man's *sunsum* is also that spirit of a man which may be attacked by witchcraft (1996:453). The *sunsum* as the basis of character is said to be strong or wicked or good (1996:453). It is through the power of the *sunsum* that a person can be a witch or a wizard (Asante and Abarry; 1996:453). The Akans also believes the *ntoro* does not at death depart with the *okra*, but goes down to a man's children or, failing these, to his nephews and nieces by his brother (Asante and Abarry; 1996:453). The father's *ntoro* takes the place of the child's *ntoro* until the child attains puberty and it is the co-operation of the father's *ntoro* with the mother's blood in the sense of kinship which is believed to form the foetus and mould it into the form of a human being (Asante and Abarry; 1996:453). Finally, the Akans distinguished the *mogya* which is a type of spiritual factor and is the basis of the *abusua* or clan (1996:453). It is the *mogya* which at the death of a person becomes the *saman* (ghost) (1996:453). Elsewhere Molefi. K. Asante and Ama Mazama (2009:69) note that, when an individual dies, the Akan people believe that the *honam* and *mogya* join *Asase Yaa* (Mother earth) while the *kra*, *honhom* and *sunsum* return to *Nyame*. It is the

*sunsum* that transitions to the *Asamando* (the ancestral world or the land of the spirits) and awaits nomination to the status of *Nsamanfo* (community of ancestors). Asante and Mazama (2009:69) further note that, once the *sunsum* has made its transition, depending on the degree to which the individual lived a righteous life his or her *sunsum* may be sent back to the earthly realm to fulfil his or her *nkrabea* (destiny) via the *honam* of a newborn.

Generally for the Akans, an individual consists of certain material and spiritual elements. Asante and Mazama (2009:69) further note that it is *Nyame* who bestows these material and spiritual elements on people at conception and birth. Having established that there is a general consensus amongst African scholars that a person is made up of the body (material) and spirit (immaterial), the research now focuses on the *okra* which is believed by the Akan people to be the bearer of human destiny.

### **3.4.1 The Role of *Okra* in the Akan Concept of Destiny.**

*Okra*, as indicated earlier on, is believed to be an individual's bearer of destiny. For the Akans, the *okra* is the guiding spirit of humans, the bearer and instrument of destiny, that in a human which antecedently to the incarnation takes his leave of God. The *okra* is also that whose departure from the living person means death, and marks the completion of his destiny. It returns to God to justify its earthly existence. So important is this to the extent that there is an Akan saying to the effect that all men are children of God, and no human being is a child of the earth. For the Akans, *okra* can only be ascribed to human beings. The Akans believe that the *okra* is capable of appearing time after time on earth in different bodies, and it is the crucial factor in personal identity. This is what encourages the Akan to talk of a person's real self. The *okra*, by being the bearer of destiny, lends its name to signal bad luck, both being thought in a way to be deserved, or at least unavoidable

and perhaps even fitting. Thus, for the Akans, when either takes place, one says it is a person's *okra*. They believe that the *okra* of a person can be interrogated by priests while it is still in the mother's womb. This, again, is an impious attempt to scrutinise and perhaps divert what God has laid down beforehand. The Akans call the destiny of a person his *nkrabea* which often appears as an encumbrance to him, for though the *okra* is the basis of his personal identity, the living individual does not identify himself or herself with his *okra*, and of a person whose *okra* does not, so to say, bring him or her good luck, it is said that he or she has *okrabiri* (a black *okra*). It is also believed that an individual whose *okra* is pink always eats berries and tender fruits and wears embroidered linen. By contrast, if a person's *okra* is black, that is an abomination; application brings him no gain. Trouble searches him or her out.

Wiredu notes that the Akan people believe that *okra* is the entity that gives life to a body and is also an actual particle of the Supreme Being (Wiredu; 1996:126). Wiredu, thus explains in a dramatic way, the Akan beliefs on how one receives *okra* from the Supreme Being and departs to earth. He notes;

...in the making of an individual, God (the Akan cosmic architect, not the Christian *ex-nihilo* creator) apportions a part of himself in the form of an *okra* for dispatch to the earth to be born of man and woman. Before the departure there is a ceremony at which *okra*, alone before God, takes leave of his or her maker. (In fact, the Akan word for destiny, which is *nkrabea*, means, literally, manner of taking leave). (Wiredu; 1996:127). The high point of the proceeding is the announcement of destiny. God reveals to the *okra* what career awaits her or him on earth and how it shall be brought to a conclusion. Thereupon, the *okra* descends to the incarnated into human society to fulfil that blueprint (Wiredu; 1996:127).

He further argues that it is the presence of *okra* that differentiates a live from a dead body. He also adds that the difference between one person's *okra* and that of another person is found in their destinies. He explains;

...in respect of this divine constituent all persons are exactly alike, they all are deserving, in equal measure, of a certain dignity and respect – a notion which motivates a strong ideology of human rights. However, in all other respects every individual is different from every other; they differ not only in terms of spatio-temporal specifics but also in terms of moral, psychological, and social circumstances, which, in combination with humanly imponderable contingences, produce achievements and failures, fortunes and misfortunes, and shape individual lives in myriad ways. We might, in light of this thought, sum up one aspect of Akan thinking on human personhood by saying that destiny is the principle of individuation of the *okra* (plural of *okra*), the divine specks that constitute the principle of life in the human frame (Wiredu; 1996:126).

Further to this, Wiredu notes the Akan believe that it is only the Supreme Being who knows everything that will ever happen to an individual. He states;

...a given *okra* is, by definition, the *okra* of a person envisaged in a determinate life-story, which the Creator knows in full completeness *abinitio* but we, humans, can only learn by empirical instalments as the individual concerned plays out his or her destiny on this earth day by day. There is here an analogy with Leibniz's individual concept of a person, which in the mind of God, "includes once for all everything which can ever happen to him" (Wiredu; 1996:127).

In tandem with Wiredu, Gyekye (1987:85) notes that the *okra* is said to be that which constitutes the innermost self, the essence, of the individual person. For Gyekye (1987:85), *okra* is the individual's life, for which reason it is usually referred to as the living soul, a tautology which he sees as significant. In other words, *okra* is identical with life. How then do the Akans understand *okra* in relation to destiny? For Gyekye (1987:85), the Akan people believe that "the *okra* is the

embodiment and transmitter of the individual's destiny (fate: *nkrabea*)". Like Wiredu, Gyekye (1987:85) notes that the Akan explain *okra* as a spark of the Supreme Being (Onyame).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The above discussion centred on the Akan worldview, where first of all there was an attempt to define who the people in question are, where they come from. Focus was mainly on their understanding of reality which has a bearing on the concept of destiny. As the chapter progressed, an analysis of a 'worldview' in general was considered important for it helped in understanding the rationale behind certain beliefs by the Akan people. It is noted that there are quite a number of definitions to the concept of worldview depending on which discipline one is understanding the concept from. However, from these definitions a number of issues can be picked. It is noted that a people's worldview influences people's values, attitudes, opinions as well as their mindsets. However, the chapter went on to argue that a people's worldview cannot be divorced from their culture and religion as well. After establishing the link between a people's worldview and culture and worldview and religion, the chapter explored the Akan understanding of worldview. The Akan understanding of reality is such that the world is made up of two realms, that is, the physical and the spiritual. It has been seen that those in the physical realm are at the mercy of those in the spiritual realm. And for one to live a good life he or she must be in good books with all there is, that is both human beings and spiritual entities.

The discussion then looked at African metaphysics in a bid to understand the ontological make up of a person in the Akan world. A discussion of Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu unfolds as they present different views of the number of constituent parts of a person in the Akan worldview. However, a point worthy of note is that, though they hold these divergent views, both philosophers

have a common understanding that an individual is made of both spiritual and physical components. It is believed in this research that the metaphysical concept of person amongst the Akan people feeds directly into the concept of destiny, since *okra*, one of the constituent parts of a person is the bearer of destiny. It is the conviction of this researcher that in order to have a full appreciation of the concept of destiny (which is the major concern of the thesis), there is need to understand the ontological make up of a person in Akan metaphysics. In the end the discussion then looked at the role that *okra* plays in the Akan understanding of the concept of destiny.

## Chapter Four: The Yoruba Worldview

### 4.0 Introduction

As a forerunner to the discussion on the Yoruba worldview, a general overview of Nigeria, the country of origin of the people in question, is pertinent. The Yoruba are the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria. It is worth of note that as a former British colony, Nigeria adopted English as its official language, however, maintaining some of its indigenous languages such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba which are commonly spoken in the country. The Yoruba are believed in this research to share a common language, identical culture and a myth of common origin. The research notes that where it pertains the accounts of the people's origins, there are varying accounts although these accounts have something in common. *Oduduwa* and *Ife* feature prominently in the accounts of the origins of the group.

After ascertaining the origins of the group, the research explores the religious and cultural beliefs of the people. These beliefs are believed to have been passed from one generation to another in the form of historical and mythical legends, fables, poetry and folktales. Since much of the religious and cultural views of the Yoruba are mainly expressed in mythical legends, the research tries to justify its reliance on myths to understand the Yoruba worldview. This is done by rebuking the view that myths are irrational and un-philosophical. The researcher argues that philosophy is born out of myths, thus, they can be understood as having something of philosophical worth.

The chapter then considers the Yoruba myths of creation, that is, both of the universe and the human beings in detail. It discusses the Yoruba metaphysical concept of a person. A person is believed by the Yoruba to be composed of three elements, which are, *emi*, *ara*, *ori*, though some scholars add *okan* and *ese* to these three. Of these three elements, *ori* is discussed at length since



it is believed by the people to be the bearer of human destiny. Thus, this prompted the researcher to consider the role that *ori* plays in the Yoruba understanding of human destiny. The researcher then tries to look at the points of convergence and divergence between the Akan and Yoruba conceptions of metaphysical constituent parts of a person.

#### **4.1 General Overview of Nigeria**

In order to understand the Yoruba people, there is need to understand their country of origin, Nigeria. Nigeria is a country in West Africa with Abuja as the capital city since 1991. The country has a land mass “covering 356 668 sq miles...roughly the size of California and three times the size of the United Kingdom” (Falola and Heaton; 2008:2). The Republic of Niger borders it to the north, Cameroon to the east, Benin to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south (2004:7). The Niger River runs through the country. Nigeria has a coastline made up of sandy beaches, behind which lies a belt of mangrove swamps and lagoons (2004:7). North of the coastal lowlands is a broad hilly region, with a rain forest in the south, and savanna in the north. Behind the hills is the great plateau of Nigeria, a region of plains covered largely with savanna. This area becomes scrubland in the north (2004:7).

Nigeria’s population is multi-ethnic with more than two hundred and fifty groups having a variety of customs, religions, traditions, and languages. In terms of the geographical locations and proportions of major ethnicities, the Hausas located in the Northern Savannah account for roughly twenty-one percent of the population, the Yoruba located in the south western part of the country make twenty percent, and the Igbo of the south east 17 percent (Falola and Heaton; 2008: 4). Mullen (2004:7) notes that about half of the population living in the north are Muslim; another forty percent, in the south, are Christians and the remaining population follows traditional beliefs.

Major cities in the north with Hausa or Fulani background include Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Maiduguri, and Bauchi (Falola and Heaton; 2008:4). Yoruba cities in the south west include Lagos, Ibadan, Ife, Oshogbo, Abeokuta, and Oyo while the Ibo have major cities like Asaba, Owerri, Enugu, Onitsha and Umuahia (2008:4).

As a former British colony, the country gained its independence on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1960. It became a republic in 1963 and assumed the full name Federal Republic of Nigeria. The country is divided into thirty-six states and a federal territory (Abuja) while the capital is also Abuja, though Lagos was the capital from 1914, after the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria by the British, until 1991 (2008:4).

Although English was adopted as the official language, there were moves to develop an official language(s) out of the indigenous ones in order to create and foster a truly Nigerian identity. The issue of language(s) and the need to adopt one or more official language(s) was a sensitive one due to ethnic rivalry and its effects on politics. In light of this challenge, Simpson and Oyetade (2007: 183) note that it was concluded that “it would be wiser and indeed safer to err on the side of caution rather than experiment with open grooming and promotion of the major three languages while there was strong public opposition to such a move and serious instability caused by poor inter-ethnic relations.” Mullen (2004:7), however, notes that Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are commonly spoken.

#### **4.2 Who are the Yoruba People?**

The Yoruba are an ethno-linguistic group or ethnic nation in Africa; the people share a common language, identical culture and a myth of common origin. Linguistically, the Yoruba belong to the Kwa group of West African languages, related to Igala, Edo, Igbo, Igbira, Idoma, among others

(Eades; 1980:4). The glotto-chronological evidence suggests that these languages separated between 2 000 to 10 000 years ago (Armstrong, 1964 in Eades, 1980: 4). The different dialects of Yoruba in Nigeria form three main families: the northwest Yoruba spoken in Oyo (including those subgroups in Benin which claim links with Oyo, for instance, Sabe), Ibadan and northern Egba area; the south-eastern Yoruba spoken in Ondo, Ikale and Ijebu areas; central Yoruba spoken by the Ife, Ijesa and Ekiti (Eades; 1980:4).

Approximately, their population is about twenty-two million throughout the West African region and the Diaspora with Nigeria accounting for over 80% of the number. They are located principally in southwest Nigeria and the mid-latitudes of Benin (partitioned by the boundary) as well as specific locations in Togo (principally in the Atakpame area of the Plateaux Region) (1980:4). In Ghana, they are located in the large cities of Accra and Kumasi where they are largely migrant traders as they are in Cote d'Ivoire (1980:4). They are also found in Sierra Leone where their history is quite unique. The bulk of the Yoruba in Sierra Leone were recaptive slaves rescued from slave ships in the mid-Atlantic as well as emancipated slaves from the Americas following the abolition of the slave trade in the early 19th century (1980:4). Elsewhere in the sub-region (Burkina Faso, Niger, Equatorial Guinea), the Yoruba population is largely composed of migrant traders. The Yoruba homeland is located in the south-western part of present day Nigeria, including the states of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, south-eastern part of Kwara, western part of Kogi and a small section of northwest Edo; in Benin Republic, the Yoruba are found principally in the Ketu and Sabe Prefectures (Mulle; 2004:7). In pre-colonial times, the territory occupied by the Yoruba stretched from present day Ondo State in Nigeria to the frontier with the Kingdom of Dahomey (2004:7).

Having said this, it is worth noting that there are contending accounts of the origins of the Yoruba people. Adeyemi notes that there are two traditions on the origins of the Yoruba people. The first claimed that ancient Ile-Ife was founded by God, Olodumare, who sent a celestial band from the heavens to earth through the infernal chains (Adeyemi; 2012:46). At the head of this band were Orunmila (a.k.a. Agbomiregun), *Oduduwa*, and a number of others (Adeyemi; 2012:46). From the heavens, this band of people was given a cock and a sack of cloth containing sand, iron, and palm kernel (2012:46). The group could however not land on earth as it was filled with primordial waters. At the behest of Orunmila, they poured the content of the sack on the waters and the cock was let loose to scatter the sand on the face of the waters (2012:46). The spot, Ile-Ife, was the first home of humans and it was from this spot that other humans migrated to other parts of the world (2012:46). *Oduduwa* was the political and administrative head of this community of people while Orunmila, the founder of Ifa, was their spiritual leader (2012:46). Stories such as the above are not peculiar to Yorubaland, as the Bayajidda myth with emphasis on Daura is the equivalent of *Oduduwa* and Ile-Ife myth among the Hausa-Fulani (2012:46). Similar stories about mythical personages and locations also exist among other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The second tradition holds that the Yoruba migrated to their present location from somewhere in Arabia. Fadipe (as cited in Adeyemi; 2012:47), quoting Captain Clapperton, who adduced Sultan Belo of Sokoto as his source, notes that:

...the inhabitants of this province (Yarba), it is supposed, originated from the remnant of the children of Canaan, who were of the tribe of Nimrod. The cause of their establishment in the west of Africa, was, as it is stated, in consequence of their being driven by Yarrooba, son of Kahtan, out of Arabia to the Western coast between Egypt and Abyssinia. From that spot they advanced into the interior of Africa till they reached Yarba, where they fixed their residence. On their way they left in every place they stopped a tribe of their own people. Thus, it is supposed that all the tribes of the Soudan who inhabit the mountains originated from

them, as also are the inhabitants of Yaory. Upon the whole the people of Yarba are nearly of the same description as those of Noofee (Nupe).

However, Adeyemi (2012:47) further discovered that a number of archaeological evidence from Ile-Ife testify to the long existence of the city; however little or nothing in the evidence corroborates any of these grand stories. Although a number of traditions and re-enactments exist in Ile-Ife today celebrating both accounts, besides oral tradition, no evidence supports the dropping of human beings from the sky and the story could as well be an attempt by the aboriginal Yoruba to give their origin some mythical interpretation.

Furthermore, Adeyemi (2012:47) argued that the second account, which sounds possible, also lacks credibility, as no evidence exists anywhere in Arabia of such a migration or a people. This point is made stronger by the fact that writing developed in Arabia a long time ago and an event of such magnitude could not have escaped the attention of Arabian writers of the period (2012:47). As far as this study is concerned, the two accounts are considered as metaphorical ways through which Yoruba people explain important things, which may not necessarily be historical facts. Or, can we believe any of these accounts just as we know (and believe) that Nigeria became independent from British Imperialism in 1960?

Despite the views above, Adeyemi (2012:47-48) notes that it was from Ile-Ife that other Yoruba groups and cities, led by different men (princes) who created dynasties for themselves where they went, were believed to have dispersed. Falola and Genova (2006:30) argues that the Yoruba identity is inexorably linked to the historical connection of the different Yoruba peoples and groups to Ile-Ife both as the city where the Yoruba originated from and also as the city where their political dynasties obtained their rights to rule. He went on to caution that although both historical and

linguistic evidence on the Yoruba offer very bold interpretations, their conclusions are nevertheless conjectural (Falola and Genova; 2006:30).

From the above, it can be noted that the Yoruba are believed to be immigrants who settled at Ile-Ife. Further to this, there is also the evidence of the origin of the Yoruba in other places other than Southwestern Nigeria and anywhere in Africa. There is also the existence of explanations on how places that are appointed as Yorubaland today are populated, how settlements were formed and dynasties established, and how the Yoruba identity was established. However, in these accounts there are several common features, for instance, *Oduduwa* and *Ife* feature prominently in the accounts of the origin of the group. Thus, the researcher is of the conviction that *Oduduwa* was the founder of the Yoruba and *Ife* was the first Yoruba settlement. Thus, Adediran (1994:59-74) notes that it is from *Ife* that the group began to disperse in different waves of migration to find the several Yoruba kingdoms. Akinjogbin and Ayandele (1980:125) note that the political leadership all over Yorubaland, depended on dynastic linkage with Ife. Thus, the type of kinship institution established by *Oduduwa* was replicated all over Yorubaland through dynastic migrations of the sons and grandsons of *Oduduwa* (1980:125).

### **4.3 Yoruba Worldview**

In an attempt to understand the Yoruba people's worldview, this section looks at the people's religious and cultural values. Though the traditional Yoruba culture and experiences were not written down, they are known through their being passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. In this regard, historical and mythical legends, fables, poetry and, folktales are of paramount importance.

It is the conviction of this researcher that the Yoruba culture and religion are intertwined to such an extent that it is difficult or impossible to segregate the word religion from culture since religion is defined as a collection of cultural system. Amponsah (2010:597) defines culture as a collective name for all behaviour patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols; it is a name for distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects and so on. Understood this way, culture becomes the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts.

The Yoruba people have a variety of art among them, with most of the objects being placed on shrines to honour the gods and ancestors ([www.distantrain.com](http://www.distantrain.com)). They make sculptures, masks, pottery, weaving, beadwork and many others. The research now explores some these cultural artifacts and the people responsible for making them as well as their purposes. According to Mullen (2004:15), the Yoruba men started making sculptures out of terra cotta clay in the 12<sup>th</sup> through 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. He further notes that the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries marked the beginning of bronze sculptures and these sculptures may represent gods or kings (Mullen; 2004:15). Later on, the creation of more abstract wooden sculptures became their major art. The Yoruba people, like many African cultures, choose to create sculptures of humans in an abstract form rather than a realistic one (2004:15).

In addition of being sculptors, Yoruba men are also responsible for leather and beadwork. Such animal skins as those of goats, sheep, and antelope are used to make such things as bags, cushions

and sandals (2004:17). Beads are then used to decorate crowns, hats, bags, and other items worn by kings and *babalawo* (2004:17). Another important aspect of the Yoruba culture is that of woodcarving. Men are responsible for carving and they use knives and *adzes* to carve wood (2004:19). Thus, divination trays and many other sacred objects are carved out of wood (2004:19). In pottery, Yoruba women are the potters and they make a variety of pottery ranging from pots for cooking, eating to pots for storage (Mullen; 2004:16). Above these, they also make some unique pots which are meant for the Yoruba deities.

Ambibola (2005), as cited in Odejebi Cecilia Omobola (2014:585), notes that, this cultural heritage of the Yoruba, as of all Nigerians and indeed of all Africans, includes the belief in the existence of one Supreme Being. This belief, however, introduces us to the religious views of the Yoruba people. Following Oladipo (2003:202), traditional Yoruba religion is understood in this research as an attitude that explains human experience and is also interpreted as a coherent system of beliefs. It therefore follows that, the concepts of the Yoruba cosmology becomes key to the research. These include the concept of Supreme Being, the concept of the spirits and the way human beings relate to them. Traditional Yoruba religion can be understood as a set of beliefs in a Supreme Being and spirits. Landau (1999:14) notes that in the Yoruba religion “the human and natural world have always been inseparably infused together.” This, however, makes the sacred to be conceived as one of the components of the Yoruba’s everyday lives and activities. It is the belief of this research that the substance of Yoruba culture is situated in the metaphysical belief in supernatural beings such as *Olodumare*, the *Orisas*, and *Oku orun*. Thus, traditional Yoruba beliefs, as indicated in the myths of creation, just like the Akan, see the world as composed of two connected realms. In light of this, Mullen (2004:21) notes,



The visible world of the living is called *Aye*, and the spiritual world of the *Orisas*, the ancestors and spirits, is called *Orun*. *Ase* is the life force that is given to everything by the Creator of the universe. *Ase* is in everything: plants, animals, people, prayers, songs, rocks, and rivers. Existence is dependent upon *Ase* because *Ase* is the power to make things happen and change.

A deeper understanding of the Yoruba views of the cosmos is by and large found in their mythical legends. As Adebola Babatunde Ekanola (2006:42) notes:

Many of the scholars who have written on the Yoruba concept of human personality seem to accept one version or the other of the mythical account of the creation of human beings as descriptive of what actually happens before each person is birthed. Some African philosophers have even used the creation myth as a primary premise from which many conclusions on the nature and meaning of human life are derived.

Since much of what we know about the Yoruba creation is documented in their myths. Could these myths offer us something of philosophical worthy? Philosophy as a discipline is the reflection of mankind on the ideas and institutions guiding their existence. Staniland (1979:3) defines philosophy as the criticism of the ideas we live by. Thus, it is the criticism of the ideas and material inventions that a particular society originates for administering itself. Philosophising, however, in the experience of traditional Africa takes the character of critical reflection of the African understanding of reality and worldview.

However, myths have always been criticised as pre-philosophic, irrational and devoid of authenticity. Furthermore, according to a common view, there is a radical separation between *mythos* and *logos*, between myth and philosophy. Myth is associated with the mysterious and illogical, and philosophy with the rational and logical (Apostel; 1981:10). In addition to this, Apostel (1981:10) notes that myths are part of a way of life and state precedence and models for human actions, but they do not seek to explain them on a rational basis. Myths use images,

philosophy, concepts. Philosophy asks generalised questions, relies on systematic reasoning, and rejects the supernatural explanations of the world, but mythological societies; are unsystematic and deal with the sacred. In light of this, there is need for this research to first of all justify the need to rely on these myths to understand the Yoruba people's world view. In the same view, there is also need to justify the fact that in myths we can derive some philosophical elements.

#### **4.4 Myths and African Philosophy.**

This section aims at defending the view that myths aid us in constructing reality and portray an African understanding of the world. Also, they act as ways of transmitting and preserving valued African knowledge. Mythology as it exists in the ancient literatures of Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Africa focuses on providing answers to questions that have to do with the origin of these societies. The word "myth" has its roots in the Greek word *mythos* which means implausible story. According to Burland (1974:15);

A myth is a truth in an irrational form. It tells a story, using pictures and thoughts in its own contexts; encapsulated truths, all the more palatable because of their disguises so it is useless to seek a scientific aspect of their unreality. They are apparently factual but when approached closely they turn into butterfly – fairies. Yet they remain obstinately alive in a most unsympathetic environment.

Almost every culture in the world has these myths that explain their origins and the final destination of their lives. These stretch back from the time before writing, when they were passed orally from generation to generation. Generally, myths deal with questions to do with the nature of the world, and human experience and this makes them all-encompassing. Due to the fact that they are all-encompassing, myths clarify many aspects of a people's culture.

According to Aristotle, “Human beings originally began philosophy, as they do now, because of wonder...This is why the myth-lover is also a philosopher in his way, since myth is composed of wonders” (Aristotle; 1995[*Metaphysics* 982b]). Following Aristotle, it follows that there is a close connection between mythology and philosophy. Lauri Honko (1948:49 as cited in Jacob K Olupona and Rowland Abiodun; 2016:17) defines a myth as “a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the gods as a result of which the world, nature and culture were created together with all parts thereof and given their order, which still obtains”. Thus, Honko believes that he has supplied a definition which is built of four criteria, that is, form, content, function and context. For him, form is explained in terms of myth as sacred and symbolic narrative. Its content implicates the articulation of figures and deeds as verbalised in a narrative or poetic medium. The functions of the myth are predicated in its ontological view of the world as it describes aspects of life and the universe. And the context of myth is ritualistic, wherein events once possible and operative can be exerted anew. In tandem with Honko, Harold Scheub (2002:185 as cited in Olupona and Abiodun; 2016:17) has it that;

The ancient myth has to do with the supernatural, with gods and with transcendental wisdom, with mystical behaviour, and awesome activities...Regularly, ritualistically, through the theatrical re-enactment of the myths, we visit the ancient times...the contexts for our lives. What we do occurs within the context of the ancient myths. Nothing is new; we only routinely re-enact the ancient myths, moving in the paths of our gods.

Since time immemorial, philosophers have pondered on the meaning and truth of myths, that is, the extraordinary accounts of gods, primordial heroes and animals. Like Aristotle, these philosophers believed that human wonder and speculation about the nature of things can express themselves in several ways, one of which is through myths. What probed these philosophers to embark on this inquiry was the need to find out whether or not there were truths about the human

condition enclosed in stories of the origin of the cosmos and humanity, of animals and culture, of sex and death. Myths, for instance, explain how the world came into being, how humans and animals came into being; how certain customs, gestures begin as well as how the spiritual and physical world interacts.

In other words, myths are outcomes of human creation which aid humans to come to terms with both the truth and reality of his existence as well as uncover truth about his origin and destination after his life in the physical world. In this regard, African myths, Yoruba and Akan in particular, are an expression of the people's values; they identify moral standards as well as encompass profound philosophical reflections. Myths can be classified into three major categories, which are, cosmic myths, myths of gods, and hero myths. According to Tyler (2007:44), cosmic myths seek to explain the origin of the world, universal catastrophes such as fire, flood, and the afterlife. Myths of gods focus on the activities of the gods in what is referred to in many mythologies as the pantheon of the gods (2007:44). An example of the myths of god in the Yoruba Mythology is that of the god *Eshu*, who tricked *Olodumare* the supreme god into abandoning the earth to dwell in heaven. Tyler (2007:44) further notes that nearly all cultures have produced myths about heroes. Some heroes such as the Greek Achilles, have one mortal and one divine parent (2007:44). Others are fully human but are blessed with godlike strength or beauty; for example, the Hebrew prophet Moses (2007:44). Many myths about heroes concern significant phases of the hero's birth, a journey or quest, and the return home (2007:44).

Anyanwu (1987:241) cites, Houndtonji who has it that "man cannot live without myths". The reason is that people are beings that cannot bear to live with certain questions unanswered, that is why he or she sits down to formulate myths to make those questions answerable. Thus, the argument that myths are unphilosophical can be rebutted by the argument that in African myths,

the actions of the gods and heroes often presuppose a keen analysis of given circumstances and are based on rational decisions (Kirk; 1974:60). Abanuka (1994:45) notes that myths tell of the super human experiences of the community, they expose the fact that humans' misfortunes on earth as well as his hardships are attributed to disobedience to the divine commands and moral codes of the deities at some point in his life. Generally, African myths contain three kinds of stories, that is, stories of the origins of the universe and human kind, explanatory stories and didactic stories. As Jaja (2012:10) further explains;

...each of these stories is meant to explain a particular phenomenon. Myth is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery but living chronicles in the minds of Africans. They contain and express the history, the culture and the inner experience of the African himself. Africans use myths to explain how things came to be through the efforts of a supernatural being. It is concrete and expresses life better than abstract thought can do.

Following the above discussion, Jones Jaja (1995:28) has it that myths, folklore and proverbs therefore become the major sources of African philosophy. Elsewhere, Jaja (1994:125) notes that some thinkers have rightly observed that myths are pre-philosophic in nature; that philosophy started where myths stopped, which presupposes that philosophy has its roots in myths. Thus, from the arguments above, it therefore follows that there are some philosophical elements in the Yoruba (and by extension the African) myths worth of our consideration. It is the conviction of the research that the view that myths are irrational and un-philosophical must be rebutted. Now that the way is clear, the research proceeds to look at the African myths of the creation of the universe, humans, predestination and human destiny. At this juncture, the research focuses on the Yoruba myths of creation of both the universe and human beings.

#### 4.3.1 Yoruba Myths of Creation viz the Ontological Make up of Person.

The Yoruba also believe in the existence of the Creator or Supreme Being, *Olorun* or *Oludumare*, who is responsible for creating the universe (Mullen; 2004:21). The people have a myth which explains how *Oludumare* created the universe. For the sake of comprehensive analysis it is appropriate at this stage to produce the myth in detail. Mullen (2004:22) notes that the Yoruba people's creation myth runs as follows:

*Olorun* lived in the sky with all the other gods. He told *Orisanla*, the god of whiteness, to create the earth for him. *Olorun* gave *Orisanla* some soil, a chain, a five-toed chicken, and a snail shell and sent him on his way. When *Orisanla* got to the gates of heaven he noticed some other gods having a party. He stopped to chat with the other gods for a bit and drank some of their palm wine. *Orisanla* became quite drunk from the palm wine and fell asleep. *Orisanla's* younger brother *Odua* came by and noticed his brother fast asleep. He took all the things that *Olorun* had given him and went to the edge of heaven with Chameleon. He then released the chicken and the chicken scratched out the earth, expanding it in many directions until the ends of the earth were made. Chameleon then stepped upon the earth to make sure that it was stable. *Odua* followed and settled at a place called *Idio*. *Orisanla* soon woke and realised what happened. From that time on *Orisanla* put a taboo on palm wine. Even today those who worship *Orisanla* are forbidden from drinking palm wine. *Orisanla* came down to claim the earth but his brother, *Odua* demanded that he was to be the owner of the earth since he had created it. The two brothers continued fighting until *Olorun* heard them and called them to report to him. *Olorun* granted *Odua* the right to own the earth and rule over it. *Olorun* then told *Orisanla* that he would become the creator of mankind. In order to keep peace amongst the two brothers *Olorun* sent them back to earth with *Sango*, the God of Thunder; *Ifa* the God of Divination; and *Eleshije*, the God of Medicine. *Odua* dropped the chain and climbed down, throwing some of the soil onto the water. He then released the chicken and the chicken scratched out the earth, expanding it in many directions until the ends of the earth were made. Chameleon then stepped upon the earth to make sure that it was stable. *Odua* followed and settled at a place called *Idio*. *Orisanla* soon woke and realised what happened. From that time on *Orisanla* put a taboo on palm wine. Even today those who worship *Orisanla* are forbidden from drinking palm wine.

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The Yoruba believe that this is how the earth came to be. After creating the earth, *Oludumare* proceeds to create human beings. Where it pertains to the creation of human beings, the Yoruba believe that it is *Obatala* (*Orisa-nla*) (the arch divinity) who was charged with the responsibility of sculpting *eniyan* (the human being) and the designing of the body only. It was the duty of *Oludumare* to breathe *emi* (life force) into the body created by *Obatala*. A number of Yoruba scholars articulate this creation story. For instance, Makinde (2007:103-104) has it that the physical element of a person is collectively known as *Ara* (body), a creation of *Orisa Nla* (the Yoruba God of creation) who is charged by *Oludumare* (God of Heaven) with the responsibility of moulding human beings out of clay. These bodies were moulded in different shapes, some of which are characterised by their beauty and some by their ugliness and deformity (103-104). In addition to this, Abimbola (1971:69-85) has it that *Orisa Nla* is responsible for moulding the beautiful and the ugly, the tall and the short, the albino, the cripple and the deformed. For Gbadegesin (1998:153), *eniyan* is made by the combined effort of *Oludumare*, the supreme deity, and some subordinates. The body is constructed by *Orisa Nla*, the arch-divinity. The Supreme deity then supplies *Emi* which activates the life-less body (1998:153). The *eniyan* then proceeds to *Ajala-Mopin- Irunmole* to *o nmo ipin* (the divinity who moulds *ipin*). *Ipin* is that portion of *oro*, the “God-matter” apportioned to each *Ori* by *Ajala-Mopin*, *ipin* is destiny. It is in the shop of *Ajala*

that the person (*eniyan*) selects for himself his *ipin* (portion), commonly referred to as *Ori-inu* (innerhead). It is here that the Yorubas draw a distinction between the mind and the body. At this juncture, there is need to look at the metaphysical components of a person in the Yoruba worldview.

The Yoruba concept of *eniyan* (person) is tripartite in nature. Thus, according to Hallen and Sodopo (1986:105) a human being has three constituent parts, that is, the *ara* (body), *emi* (vital principle), and *ori* (destiny). In his analysis of the Yoruba concept of person, Oladipo (1992:14-22) rightly and carefully pointed out that the water tight distinction that exists between body, a material entity and mind, an immaterial entity as it is the case with Cartesian dualism, does not exist in the Yoruba concept of human person (Oladipo; 1992:14-22). Oladipo (1992:14-22) is of the opinion that there is no way any organ can be solely taken to determine human personality in Yoruba thought because *opolo* (brain), "*okan*" (physical heart), *ifun* (intestine) which are all parts of the body (a material entity) also have some mental and psychic functions to perform. He concludes that one way of interpreting the attribution of psychic function to almost all the internal organs of a person by the Yoruba is to construe it as a demonstration of the realisation that a person is an integrated physicochemical system whose conscious activities are products of the harmonious interaction between the various elements of subsystems (Oladipo; 1992:14-22). However, not all Yoruba scholars subscribe to the view that a person is composed of three elements. Segun Gbadegesin, for instance, is of the opinion that a person is made up of four constituent parts and these for him are *ara*, *okan*, *emi* and *ori*. A number of Yoruba scholars have written extensively on the metaphysical components of person. These scholars include Bolaji Idowu (in his book *Oludumare: God in Yoruba Belief*), Awolalu and Dopamu (in their book *West African Traditional Religion*) and Akin M. Makinde (in his article *An African Concept of Human Personality: The*



*Yoruba Example*), Segun Gbadegesin's chapter *Eniyan: The Yoruba Concept of a Person* in the book *The African Philosophy Reader*, among others. These scholars, however, differ in some respects in their accounts of the metaphysical make-up of the person. Unlike Hallen and Sodipo, Idowu, and Wambe Abimbola who categorise *okan* as part of *ara*, Gbadegesin sees a distinction between the two. However, though there are some differences, there is a common understanding that there are three principal components that constitute a person, which are, *ara, emi and ori*.

The first element is *ara*. *Ara* for the Yoruba refers to all the tangible elements that make a person both externally and internally, such as the brain, intestine, heart and so on, and not just the body frame which houses other constituents of a person (Balogun; 1997:333). Oladipo (1992:15-16), singled out the most important physical components of a person for the Yoruba. These are; *opolo* (the brain), *okan* (the heart) and *Ifun* (the intestines).

Both *Opolo* and *Okan* are regarded by the Yoruba as having some connections with human conscious activities - thinking, feeling, etc. *Opolo* is regarded by them as having connections with sanity and intelligence. Thus when a person is sane, they say "*Opolo re kop e*" (his brain is not complete or not in order)...*Okan*, (physical heart) which, apart from being closely connected with blood, is also regarded as the seat of emotion and psychic energy. A person who is courageous is said to "have a heart" (Oladipo; 1992:16).

Gbadegesin (1991; 28) added that *ara* is described in physical terms, that is, heavy or light, strong or weak, hot or cold and so on.

The second element is the *emi* (the life giving element). According to Oladipo (1992:19), the Yoruba believe that *emi* is an immaterial element that provides the animating force or energy without which a person cannot be said to be living at all, talk less of being conscious. To add to this, Idowu (1962:179) argued that "*emi*... is that which gives life to the whole body... its presence in, or absence from, the body is known only by the fact that a person is alive or dead...and it is

*Olodumare* alone who puts *emi* into humans, thus giving him life and being.” In tandem with Idowu, Awolalu and Dopamu (1979:181), note that *emi* is the vital principle, the seat of life, and *Olodumare* is the giver of this life, thus the Supreme Being (*Olodumare*) is called *Elemi*. Speaking of *emi*, Abimbola (1971:69-85) has it that, “*Oludumare* is believed to be responsible for the creation of *emi* after *Orisa Nla* has moulded all the physical elements...indeed, it could be said that the act of creation by *Olodumare* lies in the process of putting *emi* into the finished work of *Orisa Nla*. *Emi* is therefore...a fraction of the divine breath which *Olodumare* puts into every individual in order to make him or her a proper human being.” Furthermore, the Yoruba believe that *emi* is the basis of existence; it is responsible for giving life to the person and its absence or presence in a person makes the difference between death and life respectively. It is believed to be the divine element in humans which links him or her directly to God. As Oladipo (1992:19) notes, according to the Yoruba worldview, it is *Oludumare* (the Supreme Being) who breathes it into the bodies formed by *Orisa Nla* (primordial divinity) to make them living human beings. *Emi* is closely associated with the breath and the whole mechanism of breathing which is its most expressive manifestation.

To these three elements, Gbadegesin added *okan* as the fourth element. According to him, in the Yoruba language, *okan* appears to have a dual character (Gbadegesin; 1991:29). On the one hand, it is acknowledged as the physical organ responsible for the circulation of blood and it can be thus identified (1991:29). On the hand, it is also conceived as the source of emotional and psychic reactions (1991:21). However, from the Yoruba language, *okan* is recognised as a material component of the body. He poses two fundamental questions; so is it just that the *okan* is a material component whose activities have consequences for the psychic and emotional, and thinking states of a person and is therefore responsible for them? Or is it that beyond the physical and visible *okan*

there is something invisible and perhaps non-physical which is responsible for all forms of conscious identity? To these questions, Gbadegesin suggests that something of the latter is involved. He says;

The Yoruba word *okan* translates as heart. Following the former suggestion, it would mean that the pumping and circulation of blood by the physical heart is construed as so crucial that its results are connected with the state of a person's thoughts and emotions at any point in time, and that, therefore, between *apolo* (brain) and *okan* (heart), conceived in physical terms, we may account for the mental activities and emotional states of persons... (Gbadegesin; 1991:30-31).

Unlike Gbadegesin who adds *okan* to the tripartite nature of person, Kola Abimbola's fourth element is the *ese* (leg) which also has a dualistic character. For Abimbola (2006:73), *ese* literally translated means physical leg but within the context of human personality, it means strife, hard work and struggle. According to Abimbola, "*Ese*" introduces the principle of individual effort, strife or struggle before the potentialities encapsulated on one's "*ori*" (inner head) can be actualised. Abimbola (2006:73) strongly believes that "*ese*" (leg) is a vital part of human personality both in the physical and spiritual senses. In addition to Kola Abimbola's argument, Wande Abimbola in his earlier works argued that *ori* (inner head) can be regarded as a major determinant of human personality in Yoruba thought. He believes that once a person has chosen destiny by the selection of an *ori*, (inner head) ultimately the *ori* (inner head) determines his personality in the world.

The third of the tripartite constituent part of the person amongst the Yoruba is the *ori*. After the Supreme Being breathes life into the body that *Orisa Nla* has built, the person now proceeds to the house of Ajala (the potter of all *Ori-inu*). In light of this, Abimbola (1971:70) notes that,

...while *Orisa Nla* is the maker of *Ara* and *Olodumare* is responsible for the creation of *emi*...*Ajala*, “The potter who makes heads” in heaven is responsible for the creation of *Ori* (the inner head). After *Orisa Nla* has moulded human being, he passes the lifeless body to *Oludumare*, who by giving them *emi*, gives them their...vital life force. The human being so created then moves to the house of *Ajala* who gives them *Ori*.

Gbadegesin holds the same understanding of *Ori* with Abimbola. However, they differ where the latter believes that *Ori* is given by *Ajala* and Gbadegesin is of the view that one chooses his or her *Ori*. Gbadegesin (1998:155) argues;

The creative process of the human being is a combined effort of the Supreme Being and some subordinates, (*Orisa Nla* and *Ajala*), and *Ajala* is the potter of *Ori*. The idea is that after *emi* has been put in place, the newly created human being proceeds to the next stage – the house of *Ajala* – for the choice of an *Ori*.

Though the literature on the nature in which one gets his or her *Ori* in the house of *Ajala* varies from one scholar to the other, that is, whether it is imposed on the individual or chosen by the individual, there is a point of convergence in the literature, that *Ori* is the bearer of a human’s destiny. More about *Ori* will be said in the next section, where the research focuses on the role *Ori* plays in the Yoruba concept of human destiny.

In addition to their belief in a Supreme Being who is responsible for creating the universe and human beings, the Yoruba people also believe in the existence of spirits. These spirits have special attributes and can strongly affect human lives. These are called *Orishas* and *Orisas* and are intermediaries between God and human beings. The *Orishas* are classified as major, minor, environmental and ancestral spirits (Olowola; 1985:43). Olowola further notes that the major *Orishas* are worshipped everywhere in Yorubaland and the most popular is *Ifa* which is associated with the cult of divination (Olowola; 1985:43). Also the minor *Orishas* are human beings who have become divinities and are not worshipped nationally but are still known in Yorubaland.

As part of their beliefs in spirits, the Yoruba people also hold that there are environmental spirits which are believed to be living in mountains, rivers, trees, stones or even in animals especially birds and snakes) (Laura Strong, [www.mythicarts.com](http://www.mythicarts.com)). In addition, Strong notes that, these spirits are believed to be abstract entities that can assume human shapes or inhabit objects, which in turn are regarded as having mysterious powers and can become the emblems of spirits ([www.mythicarts.com](http://www.mythicarts.com)). Further to this, the objects that are believed to be inhabited by the spirits can be used in the making of medicine ([www.mythicarts.com](http://www.mythicarts.com)).

Another category of the Yoruba spirits are the ancestral spirits. The ancestor spirits are of paramount importance to the Yoruba people. The people's belief in ancestral spirits strongly indicates their belief in the idea of an after-life. As Fortes (1987:35) notes, the experience of the after-life depends on the way the person has lived and "the biggest benefit for those who have led a good life is the chance to be remembered by the living" because to be remembered, in traditional Yoruba religion, means to be kept alive. These ancestors play a major role in the lives of the Yoruba. McClelland (1982:33) indicates that the ancestors "stand for a high moral code of behaviour and seem to impose sanctions". The ancestors are believed to influence the activities in the world of the living. Thus, Imasogie (1985:41) observes that the Yorubas "are conscious of them always and invoke them in every session of domestic worship, at public services and festivals". The spirit of the ancestors is believed to return from the afterlife to bless their relatives and assist in solving their problems.

Thus, like the Akan people, the Yoruba believe that there are both malevolent and benevolent spirits. In this regard, they understand life as something mysterious, ruled by good and evil forces and each individual as having a destiny to fulfil. However, divination becomes necessary to protect the people from evil spirits and witches. Thus, Imasogie (1985:67) notes that through divination,

the diviners can decipher the symbolic code of the past, the present and the future, as well “as uncover the human and the spiritual causes of events and the possible solutions to the problems of life”. For the Yorubas, the best-known modes of divination consist of concave-shaped nuts strung on a string, on the divination basket, and on the divination board with sixteen palm nuts (1985:67). A sacrifice follows every divination and protective charms or amulets can be given to people to protect themselves from witches and evil forces (1985:67).

After noting the Yoruba understanding of reality, the research now moves to investigate the role played by one of the elements of a person, *Ori*, in the conception of human destiny. *Ori* is believed by scholars to be the element responsible for the actuality and worth of humans in the material world.

#### **4.4.1 The Role of *Ori* in Human Destiny**

It has been noted from the foregoing discussion that the Yoruba believe that *ori* derives from *Oludumare*, the Supreme Being. It is an immaterial entity, also known as an ‘inner-head’ and is intractably connected with human destiny. It is, thus, believed to be the element responsible for a person’s personality and represents human destiny. According to Gbadegesin (2004:314);

It refers to the physical head, which is considered vital to the physical status of a person. It is, for instance, the seat of the brain. But when a typical Yoruba talks about *ori*, she is, more often than not, referring to a non-physical component of her person. For there is a widely received conception of an *Ori* as the bearer of a person’s destiny as well as the determinant of one’s personality.

In the same vein, Idowu (1962:170) notes that for the Yoruba, *ori* is believed to be not only the bearer of destiny but also to be the essence of human personality which rules, control and guides the life and activities of the person. For him, every event of human beings in the world is solely

determined by his or her earlier choice of *ori* (inner head), thus, the temptation of thinking *Ori* is the sole determinant of human personality is very obvious. Oyeshile (2006:157) notes that because *ori* derives from *Oludumare*, then an individual is bound to *Oludumare* and without him, the human being cannot have his or her being or existence. It is believed that the choice of *Ori* is determined by what one wants to achieve in this lifetime. This *Ori-inu* or *ipin* is the individual's chosen destiny. However, there are some variances in this myth amongst the Yoruba people. Some believe that a person gets his *Ori* from *Ajala* and then goes to *Oludumare* and tells it to him and then it is sealed upon the person. Others believe that humans obtain their destiny in one of the following ways; by kneeling down and choosing it, *a-kun-le-yan* (that which one kneels to choose), by kneeling to receive, *a-kun-le-gba* (that which one kneels to receive), or by having his destiny apportioned to him *a-yan-mo* (that which is apportioned to one). However, much is going to be said about how one receives his *Ori* in the following chapters as the research examines the sources of destiny in African philosophy.

As indicated earlier on, after *Obatala (Orisa-nla)* makes the body, it proceeds to the house of *Ajala* to receive or choose the *ori*. This account seems to have problems as noted by Gbadegesin. Gbadegesin (1991:42) has it that,

...if the *ara* is physical body, how can it be available before birth to choose *ori*? Or if the pre-natal *ori* is not the physical body, is it quasi-physical? Is the *emi* that is involved in this combination of *ara* and *emi* spiritual and physical? First, the frame here is pre-natal. These are activities going on in the spirit world where the divinities and prospective human beings are construed of as engaging in all kinds of relationships and exchanges. In that world, anything is conceivable! Indeed, it will be recalled that a divinity (*orisa-nla*) is postulated as responsible for moulding the human body. So it could be the physical body that is involved. Also there are images of physical activities presented: the newly formed *ara* with its associated deity-given *emi* moves to the 'house' of *Ajala*, the 'potter of heads' who is responsible for the *ori*.

Gbadegesin (1991:39) further argues that the above is a combination of conceptualisation and imagination that is brought into play. He continues to explain that;

On the one hand, there is a conception of a spirit world in which anything can happen. On the other hand, some of those things that can happen there are imagined on the bases of what is experienced in the physical world and are therefore endowed with its attributes. We may choose to impose the idea of a quasi-physical *ara* on this basis, and we may perhaps succeed in making the account look more coherent to us. However, we should note that such a reconstruction may fail to do justice to the ideas as understood in the language (Gbadegesin; 1991:39).

It is worth noting here that what is of paramount importance to this research is the fact that, all Yoruba scholars agree on the view that *Ori* is important in the discussion of human destiny. There are various positions on the concept of *Ori* from the Yoruba literature. Scholars as Abimbola hold a different view of how one gets *Ori*. Most scholars believe that it is the role of the Supreme Being to put *ori* into a person. In his discussion of the theme of *Ori* in *Ese Ifa*, Ambibola holds a view that does not mention God in the individual's acquisition of *ori*. His argument reveals that individuals choose their *ori* in heaven from Ajala, thus removing the Supreme Being from the equation. However, it can be argued that the removal of the Supreme Being from the equation does not reflect a correct picture of the Yoruba belief in how one receives *ori*. Most, if not all, Yoruba scholars hold the view that the people believe that *Ori* originated from the Supreme Being to choose or receive human destiny.

From their understanding of *ori*, the Yoruba hold a dual conception of destiny. Following the discussion above, the Yoruba believe that, on one hand, destiny is the course of an individual's life that is unalterable, and on the other hand, due to some circumstances in the individual's life and due to some factors, can be altered. *Ori* then becomes the orbit of an individual's destiny. In



other words, destiny becomes the function of *ori*. Some Yoruba scholars hold that the Yoruba people's understanding of *ori* is tantamount to predestination. In this case, *ori*, understood to imply predestination, means that anything that happens to the individual here on earth has been predestined even before he or she descends to earth. This takes us to the debate on the sources of destiny which becomes the business of the following chapters.

#### **4.5 An Overall Analysis of the Akan and Yoruba Ontological Make up of Person viz Destiny.**

From the discussion of the Akan and Yoruba ontological make up of person in line with the concept of destiny, some similarity and differences can be drawn from these two African ethnic groups. What is uniform in these ethnic groups is the fact that a human being is composed of physical and spiritual components. The spiritual element is considered by both the Yoruba and the Akan as the life giving principle. As indicated earlier on, the life principle is seen by both groups as the entity whose presence in the body means life and its absence means death. For the Akan, this life principle is the *okra* and for the Yoruba it is the *emi*. Both ethnic groups believe that the life principle is given by the Supreme Being. Thus, for the Akan and the Yoruba, before one is born to man and woman, he or she goes before God to take leave of him. It is at this meeting with Supreme Being that the individual is apportioned with his or her destiny. However, there is a difference between these two groups. Where the Akan consider *okra*, the life-giving constituent, as responsible for being the bearer of human destiny, the Yoruba believe that it is the *ori-inu* that receives the apportioned destiny not the *emi* (life principle). In support of this observation, Gbadegesin (1991:42) has it that;

The major difference between is in the Akan conception of *okra* which is also regarded as the active life principle supplied by the deity, but which is also the bearer of destiny. It will be recalled that in the Yoruba

conception *emi*, which is equivalent of Akan *okra*, is not the bearer of destiny. Something else, *ori* is postulated for that.

In his attempt to compare and contrast the Akan and Yoruba concept of person, Gbadegesin (1991:42) analyses the disagreement between Gyekye and Wiredu on whether *okra* should be understood as spiritual or quasi-physical. For Gbadegesin, Gyekye's analysis of *okra* as spiritual is in sync with the Yoruba's understanding of the life giving principle as immaterial. He observes that in the Yoruba conception, "*emi* as the activating principle brings the body to conscious existence and (as in the case of the *okra*) its departure from the human being is death" (Gbadegesin; 1991:43). Further to this, Gbadegesin (1991:44) notes that "...the characterisation of the *okra* as the bearer of destiny, it would appear that it (and not *sunsum*) should be regarded as the component on which 'one's health, worldly power, position, influence, success etc. would depend'. This is how *Ori* (as bearer of destiny) is conceived in Yoruba thought". He adds that, "if *sunsum* is 'that which thinks, desires, feels then it performs functions similar to that attributed to *okan* by the Yoruba" (Gbadegesin;1991:44). However, for the Yoruba, *okan* is not the determinant of health, worldly power, position and so on. In summary, Gbadegesin (1991:44) observes that;

1. *Okra* seems the equivalent of *Emi*, but while *okra* is postulated as the bearer of destiny, *emi* is not.
2. *Sunsum* (as that which thinks, feels etc.) seems an equivalent of Yoruba *okan*, but while *sunsum* is postulated as the determinant of power, success, wealth, *okan* is not.
3. *Okra* (in Akan) is postulated as responsible for activities for which the Yoruba postulates two parts (*Emi* and *Ori*).

Following the above arguments, it seems as if the concept of person in Akan and Yoruba has some equivalents. However, differences only arise where it pertains to the roles assigned to these constituent parts in both the Akan and the Yoruba conceptions.

## 4.6 Conclusion

The foregoing chapter first gave a general overview of Nigeria as a country since it is the country of origin for the Yoruba people. Nigeria is situated in West Africa. The Yoruba are the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria. As a former British colony, Nigeria adopted English as its official language. Though English is the official language, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are commonly spoken. The Yoruba people share a common language, identical culture and a myth of common origin. There are however different accounts of the origins of the Yoruba. However, it has been noted that in these accounts there are several common features, for instance, *Oduduwa* and *Ife* feature prominently in the accounts of the origin of the group.

After a discussion on the origins of the people, the chapter looked at the religio-cultural beliefs of the people which inform their worldview. These beliefs are believed to have been passed from one generation to another in the form of historical and mythical legends, fables, poetry and folktales. Since many of the religious and cultural views of the Yoruba are mainly expressed in mythical legends, the chapter then justified the use of myths in this research and to show that there are elements of philosophical worth in these myths. Through a careful analysis of the relationship between myths and philosophy, the researcher managed to rebut the view that myths are irrational and un-philosophical.

After clearing the ground, the researcher proceeded to look at the Yoruba myths of creation, both of the universe and the human beings in detail. The Yoruba metaphysical concept of a person was discussed and it was revealed that a person is composed of three elements, which are, the *emi*, *ara*, and *ori*. However, to these three, other scholars add *okan* to become the fourth element. Others add *ese* instead of *okan* as the fourth element. However, what is of paramount importance to this

research is the fact that all scholars who wrote on the Yoruba concept of a person agree on the view that a person is a combination of physical and non-physical constituent parts. The researcher revealed that it is *ori* which is the bearer of an individual's destiny. Thus this prompted the researcher to consider the role that *ori* plays in the Yoruba concept of destiny. In the same vein the researcher considered the source of *ori*, with some accounts attributing it to be chosen from *Ajala* and others holding that it is received from *Oludumare*. The chapter concluded by giving a comparative analysis of the Yoruba and Akan metaphysical concepts of person, noting points of convergence and divergence.

## **Chapter Five: The African Concept of Destiny**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter looks at how the African people as presented by Kwame Gyekye, Kwasi Wiredu and Segun Gbadegesin understand the concept of destiny. The chapter discusses the concept of destiny by looking at the two African ethnic groups, which are, the Akan people of Ghana and the Yoruba people of Nigeria. However, the research does not ignore the fact that there are thousands of cultures in Africa, but for the sake of this research focus shall be given to the Yoruba and the Akan people. The reason for the choice of these two ethnic groups is none other than that there is the availability of documented relevant literature on destiny. The research makes the basic assumption that there is a common understanding of the concept of destiny which cuts across different African cultures. Like in this case, the West Africans, the eastern and southern African religions also believe in the concept of destiny. Thus, from the Akan and the Yoruba understanding of destiny, the researcher draws a basic understanding of the concept in the African thought system as a whole.

The previous chapters revealed that there are certain concepts in the African ontology that may seem to support the view that an agent is determined by his very nature and destiny was one of those concepts. In order to have a clear appreciation of the concept, this chapter traces it back to its roots, that is, Western philosophy. The chapter discusses the views of different philosophers concerning the concept of predestination in Western philosophy. In the same spirit the chapter ponders on the Greek myths that inform the belief in predestination in Western philosophy. After a discussion of the foundations of the concept, the chapter redirects its focus back to Africa. It is in this spirit that this chapter situates the concept of destiny as it is understood by the African ethnic groups, the Akan and the Yoruba. Just like in the notion of predestination above, the

Africans also have their own myths upon which one can find the basis of their belief in destiny. Further to this, the research went on to problematise the African concept of destiny. The problems associated with the concept include the source of destiny and whether destiny is alterable or not.

### **5.1 Predestination or Fate or Destiny in Western Philosophy.**

The concept of predestination or destiny or fate is not peculiar to Africans. The concept had been discussed earlier on in Western philosophy. There is need, however to understand the basis of the belief in fate or destiny amongst the Early Greek philosophers. The Ancient Greeks and Romans vaguely defined fate as the power which controls all beings, the gods as well and men and women; it does not decide events from day to day, but long ago fixed everything that was and is going to happen. VanInwagen (1983:23) understands fatalism as the thesis that it is a logical or conceptual truth that no one is able to act otherwise than he in fact does; that the very idea of an agent to whom alternative courses of action are open is self-contradictory. In philosophy, fatalism implies (i) that what is going to happen is inevitable and, (ii) that no one is able to act otherwise than he in fact does (1983:23).

Arguing for fate, White (1954:148) in his novel argues that all things happen that are intended to happen. For him, everything is necessary and he further argues that a man gets married for no reason beyond an awful inevitability (1954:280). Fatalism seems to take us behind the appearance of choice and chance to the hidden necessity which controls human life. Finally, fatalism sometimes takes a pseudo-scientific form in the belief that a person's destiny was determined by the stars and planets when he or she was born.

There is an abundance of myths in Greek literature which attests to the foundations of the belief in fate. The Oedipus myth, which is the story of a young boy who was destined to kill his father and

marry his mother, is one such myth which demonstrates the Greeks' basis of belief in fate or destiny. The story runs as follows:

Shortly after giving birth to a new baby boy, Jocasta, queen of Thebes, is delivered a terrible prophecy by Tiresias, a blind prophet. Tiresias tells Jocasta and her husband Laius the king that the child they now hold in their arms will one day murder his father and marry his mother. Laius decides that the child cannot be allowed to live. He sends it into the wilderness with the royal shepherd with instructions to expose the child. The kindly shepherd ignores this command and gives the child to the strangers he meets in the wilderness. This stranger is actually a servant of King Polybus of Corinth, and he delivers the baby to his sovereign, who is mourning the death of his own son. The Corinthian decides to adopt the baby as his own son and heir, naming him Oedipus, which means "swollen foot". Oedipus grows up believing his true parents are the king and queen of Corinth. When he turns eighteen, Oedipus journeys to Delphi to hear his fortune told by the oracle. She tells him the same prophecy that Tiresias uttered years before. Horrified, Oedipus decided that he cannot return to Corinth and decides to journey toward Thebes. On the road to Thebes, Oedipus is attacked by an old traveller. Merely protecting himself Oedipus inadvertently kills the old man. Oedipus flees the scene of crime, continuing towards Thebes. Next he encounters the Sphinx, a beast with the head of a woman, the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle and the tail of a snake. This beast has been killing anyone who travels the road after they fail to solve the riddle: What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening? The answer is man. The Sphinx kills herself in anger. When Oedipus arrives at Thebes, the people there made him their king for slaying the sphinx and marry him to the queen, Jocasta. It is not until years later, when a famine strikes Thebes, that the truth of Oedipus' situation becomes clear. The oracle demands that Oedipus find the murderer of Laius. Oedipus calls upon Tiresias to give him advice on locating the former king's murderer. The blind prophet's answer stuns everyone: Oedipus has accidentally murdered his father and married his mother. Jocasta hangs herself, and Oedipus gouges out his eyes. Creon, Jocasta's brother, assumes control of Thebes and banishes Oedipus to the wilderness, where he wanders until his death ([www.sampleTeacherGuide/Sample](http://www.sampleTeacherGuide/Sample)).

The Oedipus myth is one of the stories that informs the Greeks' belief in destiny or fate. An analysis of the myth reveals that the course of our lives is authored by the gods. Oedipus like his parents, tries to avoid the prophecy of his fate, but eventually they both meet with their fate. It is clear from the Oedipus myth that what the gods decree, human beings cannot evade no matter how much they put effort into it. In simple terms, what will be will be. The future, like the past, cannot be changed. If this is the case, one is left to wonder whether our lives are determined by our fate? Is it possible for an individual to control his or her own destiny or fate? To what extent are humans captain of their own fate? Are we then free or determined?

The doctrine of predestination has been a bone of contention among philosophers. In the history of mankind, there is no subject that has occupied more of the attention of the intelligent men than that of predestination. According to Calvin, "Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself, what He would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some and eternal death for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say he is predestined either to life or to death" (*Institutes*, Book III, Ch. XXI, sec. 5). The issue of predestination has been discussed from a philosophical, theological and practical perspective. In his book, *Historical Theology*, Cunningham (pp 418-419) observes that;

Some, at least, of the topics comprehended under this general head have been discussed by almost every philosopher of eminence in ancient as well as in modern times. All that the highest ability, ingenuity, and acuteness can effect, has been brought to bear upon the discussion of this subject; and the difficulties attaching to it have never been fully solved, and we are well warranted in saying that they never will, unless God gives us either a fuller revelation or greatly enlarged capacities, although, perhaps, it would be more correct to say that, from the very nature of the case, a finite being can never fully comprehend it since this would imply that he could fully comprehend the infinite mind.



The doctrine of predestination, then, typifies the value of God as unquestionable and unrestricted, free from outside control of the whole finite creation, and as originating solely in the eternal counsel of His will. From this point of view then,

God is seen as the great and mighty King who has appointed the course of nature and who directs the course of history even down to its minutest details. His decree is eternal, unchangeable, holy, wise, and sovereign. It extends not merely to the course of the physical world but to every event in human history from the creation to the judgment, and includes all the activities of saints and angels in heaven and of reprobates and demons in hell. It embraces the whole scope of creaturely existence, through time and eternity, comprehending at once all things that ever were or will be in their causes, conditions, successions, and relations. Everything outside of God Himself is included in this all-embracing decree, and that very naturally since all other beings owe their existence and continuance in existence to His creative and sustaining power (Lorraine Boettner; 2015; Ch ii).

It follows then from the discussion above that the finite creation exists as a channel through which God manifests His glory. And since finite beings, depend for their existence on God, then they are in no position to originate conditions which could limit the manifestation of His glory. God, as the Ruler of the universe, rules according to His will. It then follows that if the universe originates from God and he grants its continued existence, the universe must, therefore, be subject to God's control such that nothing can come to pass in the opposite direction to what He expressly decrees. To this effect, eternal purpose is depicted as an act of sovereign predestination.

Later on, philosophers such as St Augustine contributed so much to the issues pertaining to freedom and determinism. In the early stages of his career, Augustine defended vehemently that human beings possess freewill. According to Cowburn (2008:90), Augustine argues that nothing can compel the human will to choose one way or the other, so that (for instance) if a human being chooses evil, that is his or her free choice, not God's.

However, as he developed in his career, Augustine completely abandoned the view that human beings can do good or evil as they choose. According to Augustine, as a result of the original sin and personal sins, we are compulsive sinners unless or until God rescues us (Cowburn; 2008:90). One wonders what could have possibly led this philosopher, who once defended freewill, to shift goals and become completely against human capacity to make free choices. As Cowburn (2008:90) notes, Augustine wanted to exalt or glorify God and he felt that to do this he had to deny that human beings are to any extent independent of God; he also felt that to praise or give credit to human beings for anything they have done is to give something to creatures which should be given to God alone. In *The city of God*, Augustine discusses the pagan idea of Fate and says that if it is taken in its usual sense of the stars it is false to say Fate controls us; he then goes on to say that if Fate is taken to mean the connection of causes dependent on God, the idea is sound (Cowburn; 2008:90). In short, Augustine dismisses the capacity of individual agents to make choices.

This characterisation of God and predestination then leads us to the most compelling philosophy question; how then can an agent be a free and responsible agent if his or her actions have been foreordained from eternity? Boettner (2015;ch XVI) observes that;

By a free and responsible agent we mean an intelligent person who acts with rational self-determination; and by foreordination we mean that from eternity God has made certain the actual course of events which takes place in the life of every person and in the realm of nature. It is, of course, admitted by all that a person's acts must be without compulsion and in accordance with his own desires and inclinations, or he cannot be held responsible for them. If the acts of a free agent are in their very nature contingent and uncertain, then it is plain that foreordination and free agency are inconsistent. The philosopher who is convinced of the existence of a vast Power by whom all things exist and are controlled, is forced to inquire where the finite will can find expression under the reign of the Infinite.

Does the doctrine of predestination point to fatalism? In attempting to address this question, it would be wise to first of all understand the meanings of these words. Boettner (2015:ch XV) gives the distinction between fatalism and predestination by way of definition. According to him;

Predestination holds that events come to pass because an infinitely wise, powerful, and holy God has so appointed them. Fatalism holds that all events come to pass through the working of a blind, unintelligent, impersonal, non-moral force which cannot be distinguished from physical necessity, and which carries us helplessly within its grasp as mighty river carries a piece of wood. Predestination teaches that from eternity God has had one unified plan or purpose which He is bringing to perfection through this world order of events. It holds that all of His decrees are rational determinations founded on sufficient reason, and that He has fixed one great goal toward which the whole creation moves. Predestination holds that the ends designed in this plan are first, the glory of God; and second, the good of His people. On the other hand Fatalism excludes the idea of final causes. It snatches the reins of universal empire from the hands of infinite wisdom and love, and gives them into the hands of a blind necessity. It attributes the course of nature and the experiences of mankind to an unknown, irresistible force, against which it is vain to struggle and childish to repine.

Thus, the major differences between predestination and fatalism is that, the former preserves the freedom and responsibility. However, on the one hand, amidst of certainty God has ordained human liberty. On the other hand, fatalism allows no power of choice and no self-determination. To this effect, Boettner (2015:ch XV) observes that fatalism;

...makes the acts of man to be as utterly beyond his control as are the laws of nature. Fatalism, with its idea of irresistible, impersonal, abstract power, has no room for moral ideas, while Predestination makes these the rule of action for God and man. Fatalism has no place for and offers no incentives to religion, love, mercy, holiness, justice, or wisdom, while Predestination gives these the strongest conceivable basis. And lastly, Fatalism leads to scepticism and despair, while Predestination sets forth the glories of God and of His kingdom in all their splendour and gives an assurance which nothing can shake.

In defence of predestination as not implying fatalism, Calvin argues that;

... is a term given by the Stoics to their doctrine of necessity, which they had formed out of a labyrinth of contradictory reasonings; a doctrine calculated to call God Himself to order, and to set Him laws whereby to work. Predestination I define to be, according to the Holy Scriptures, that free and unfettered counsel of God by which He rules all mankind, and all men and things, and also all parts and particles of the world by His infinite wisdom and incomprehensible justice. . . had you but been willing to look into my books, you would have been convinced at once how offensive to me is the profane term fate: nay, you would have learned that this same abhorrent term was cast in the teeth of Augustine by his opponents [*The Secret Providence of God*, reprinted in Calvin's *Calvinism*, pp. 261, 262].

In the end, Boettner (2015; ch, XVI) cautions that the true solution to this difficult question respecting the sovereignty of God and the freedom of human beings is not to be found in the denial of either, but rather in such a reconciliation as gives full weight to each, yet which assigns a pre-eminence to the divine sovereignty corresponding to the infinite exaltation of the Creator above the sinful creature. The same God who has ordained all events has ordained human liberty in the midst of these events, and this liberty is as surely fixed as is anything else.

### **5.1.1 The Western Philosophers on Destiny**

The earliest philosophers were influenced by the doctrine of predestination which they understood as referring to the final destiny of a person. Since the doctrine of predestination opened way for the discussion of human destiny in the West, it is not surprising that there is a close connection between these concepts. From the concept of predestination, the conceptions of human destiny were born. Discussing the concept of destiny, Aristotle argues that most people agree that the supreme good is happiness. He used the Greek term *eudaimonian* (Owens; 1985:35). Etymologically it meant having a good *daimon* in the sense of divinely bestowed direction of one's

life (1985:35). The word, itself, therefore carried overtones of divine favour and guidance, somewhat as the Latin term *numen* implied the benevolent nod of the divinity (1985:35). *Eudaimonia*, in consequence, was practically synonymous with the notion of having a good destiny (1985:35). It meant the genuine happiness is implicitly sought by everyone in every rational action.

No matter how necessitarian the flow of natural events may have been for Aristotle and a little later for the Stoics and the Epicureans, these Greek thinkers did not at all feel compelled to make human conduct fit into a rigid determinism (1985:35). They accepted choice as an internally observed fact. The choice was not determined by antecedent causes, regardless of how great the influence these causes exercised upon it may have been. In the Aristotelian conception, then, the choice of human destiny should be made in accordance with human beings' nature as rational (1985:35). In other words, destiny is something that is freely chosen, but implying choice in accordance with the dignity of human nature. It is in this context that a person remains the master of his fate and the captain of his soul.

In the philosophy of Aquinas, human destiny becomes doubly a matter of choice, the choice of the sovereignly free creator in going above the exigencies of human nature, and the choice of the elevated human being in freely directing his life towards that ineffably sublime goal (1985:35). The first characteristic noted in the Aristotelian conception of human destiny remains therefore intact with Aquinas. Human destiny is now something freely chosen, chosen now by God as well as by each individual person (1985:35).

In Western philosophy, however, on one hand, there is no clear cut distinction between destiny and fate. This is evidenced by the philosophies of St Augustine who viewed human beings as completely determined by God's decree. On the other hand, with the works of Aristotle and St

Thomas Aquinas, the individual and God play a role in choosing his or her destiny. To what extent then, does it make sense to hold on to the position that both the agent and the creator are responsible for choosing one's destiny? According to Tinder (1981:38), to speak of choosing your own destiny, as we often do, reflects a misunderstanding of human beings and their powers – a misunderstanding at the heart of the present crisis of civilisation. He further asserts that perhaps people can create styles of life and control the general order of their daily existence, but their destinies must be given them (1981:38). To support this view, he furthers that the word 'destiny' itself is loaded with connotations of necessity (1981:38).

In this light, the concept of destiny is equated with fate. However, occasionally, the term is used to suggest that destiny, even if preordained and received, is somehow congruent with humanity in a way that fate is not. However, Raphals (2003:537) notes that there is a confusion between fatalism and fate. She then goes on to distinguish the two. According to her, fate or destiny means the notion that there is an immutable pattern to the world (Raphals; 2003:537). She further argues that it may be understood as humanly knowable or ultimately inscrutable, personified as (or under the power of a) God or independent of divine will. At the level of individual agency, a conscious agent is apt to consider the 'fate' she is 'given' in life, and ask what can be changed and what is unalterable (2003:537). In this sense, the concept of fate can provide a way to categorise or discriminate what can and cannot be changed. Raphals (2003:537) further indicates that the related epistemological question is foreknowledge; both about what is given (fate) and about what is alterable. Belief in fate (for the non-fatalist) may be closely connected to divination, since divination is based on the premise that fate can be controlled or at least influenced by conscious entities available to human contact.

On the other hand, Raphals (2003:538) argues that fatalism is the belief that events are fixed in advance and unchangeable by human agency. According to her, the idea that human action has no influence on events is readily confused with determinism, the doctrine that every event has a cause, either an earlier event or a natural law. Both are thus distinct from the belief in fate. Raphals (2003:538) further notes that the strong fatalist believes that outcomes are set by what is 'given', with no significant scope for intervention, therefore, she has no practical need for distinguishing which outcomes can be altered. For the fatalist, the future like the past cannot be undone. So for Raphal, destiny can be equated to or is synonymous with fate.

However, after a careful examination of the concept of predestination in the West, the researcher makes an observation that there is a difference between how the concept is understood by the Africans. For the Westerners then, destiny is understood to be otherworldly, whereas for the Africans, a person's destiny is understood to be this worldly. As Mitchell (1977:45) notes;

In African religions, people live their lives in the context of human frailty and death without the assurance of the deliverance from this condition either in this life or in the next. What, then, is the destiny of humanity in the African primal world view? Unlike Christianity, Islam, and Bhuddism, which offer a life of estistence which transcends death, the destiny of humanity in African religion is primarily this-worldly. The primary object of life is to fulfil one's life's destiny in this life. This includes attaining a respected position in the community, having children, living to an old age, and dying of natural causes.

Many Africans, as shall be seen in the coming sections, believe that each individual is given a particular destiny by the creator before birth. In an important sense, a person's destiny is part of his or her character; it is something that is part of the very essence of a person's being. In Ghana, for instance, it is believed that destiny is determined by the manner in which the new living being takes leave of God before birth. According to this belief an individual will go into the world and

choose all that is agreeable such as well-being, long life, and prosperity or he or she may choose grief, rags, and dark cloth (Mitchell; 1977:46). However, the memory of this choice is erased upon birth. What then necessitates the need for a discussion of destiny from an African perspective when it has been discussed by the Westerners is that the Africans do not see destiny in the same way that the Westerners do. When the Westerners see destiny as otherworldly, the Africans see it as this worldly. However, it is the conviction of this research that destiny cannot be viewed with the same lens as those of fatalism like some of the literature in the West would want us to believe. Having laid down the foundation or roots of the debate on destiny in the West, there is now need to look at the concept of destiny as understood by different African scholars. Focus shall be on the Akan people of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria.

## **5.2 The Foundations of African Belief in Destiny**

In African literature, there are several myths which inform the peoples' belief in the concept of destiny. Gbadegesin (2004:313) notes the following Myths as the Yoruba's basis of the belief in the concept of destiny:

In the *Odu Corpus*, the collection of verses constituting the basis of the Yoruba divination system, there are at least two references to the concept of destiny as it features in traditional Yoruba philosophy. In *Ogbegunda* is told the story of how *ori* (the bearer of a person's destiny) is prenatally chosen in *orun* (heaven), and how, once chosen, it is irrevocable. It is the story of three friends – *Oriseeku* (the son of *Ogun*), *Orileemere* (the son of *Ija*), and *Afuwape* (the son of *Orunmila*). *Obatala* had finished moulding their physical bodies, and they were ready to go to the house of *Ajala*, the heavenly potter of *ori*, to choose their *ori*. The three friends were warned by their friends to go directly to the house of *Ajala*, and not to break their journey for any reason.



While the other two friends took this advice seriously, and went straight to the house of *Ajala*, the third, *Afuwape*, decided to first see his father before going to choose his *ori*. *Oriseeku* and *Orileemere* got to the house of *Ajala* first and picked the *ori* of their choice, and proceeded straight to the earth. *Afuwape* got to his father and met with a group of divination priests, divining for his father. These diviners advised *Afuwape* to perform a sacrifice so that he may choose a good *ori*. He did, and proceeded to the house of *Ajala*. Though he met some obstacles on the way, he overcame them all, apparently due to the sacrifice he had performed. He chose a good *ori*, with the help of *Ajala*, and he was able to succeed in life. His two friends, *Oriseeku* and *Orileemere*, did not make a good choice and were never successful in life. Each got stuck with his choice until the end of his life.

The second reference is in *Ogunda Meji*, an *Odu* that is a unit of verses in the *Ifa* Corpus, which emphasises the importance of *ori* to a person. In the story, each of the gods (major and minor) is asked if he or she is willing to follow his or her devotee to the grave, that is, to literally die with his or her devotee. None of them is willing, not even *Orunmila*, the most important of them, who then concludes that it is only a person's *ori* that will go with him or her to the grave. Literally, *ori* means head, and the conclusion is therefore literally true: the heads of dead persons are never cut off before they are buried. But it is also meant to be a metaphorical truth: *ori* is a god, just like *Ogun* or *Oya*. But more than these two, the Yoruba believe that a person's *ori* is his or her paramount god. Therefore the story concludes that no *Orisa* blesses a person without the consent of his or her *ori*; and we should therefore leave other *Orisa* alone and worship our own *ori*.

In summation, the myth above is an account of creation of the human person which holds that the human body (*ara*) was moulded by *Orisanla* (one of the deities in Yoruba traditional religious system) out of sand. It is thereafter that the lifeless body is infused with *emi* (life or breath of life)

by *Olodumare* (supreme deity). The body at this stage becomes activated with life and then goes to *Ajala* (deity responsible for making Ori) to select an *Ori* (Ekanola; 2006:41). Ekanola (2006:41) further notes that the act of selecting *Ori* in *Ajala's* house has three important aspects. First, it is supposed to be one of free choice. You are said to be free to choose any of the *Ori* available in *Ajala's* storehouse (2006:41). Second, the *Ori* selected determines, finally and irreversibly, the life course and personality of its possessor on earth (2006:41). Third, each individual is unaware of the content or quality of the chosen *Ori*, that is, the person making the choice does not know if the destiny embedded in an *Ori* is good or bad (Ekanola; 2006:41). Other terms used to symbolise *Ori* include *Akunleyan* (that which is chosen kneeling), *Ipin-Ori* (allotment), *Ayanmo* (that which is chosen or affixed to oneself), and *Akunlegba* (what is received kneeling) (2006:41).

Apart from the creation myth that *ori* is selected in *Ajala's* house, there is another version of the basis in the belief in destiny. According to this account, it is *Olodumare* who confers destiny on each human person, which is later doubly sealed by *Onibode* (the keeper of the gate between heaven and earth.). However, all the available versions agree that destiny is determined by the *Ori*, either chosen or conferred upon a person. They also agree that by the time people arrive in the world, through birth, they are totally ignorant of the type of destiny awaiting them.

Commenting on myths, Ekanola (2006:42) went on to argue that there is need to look at these myths with a critical eye. According to him, many of the scholars who have written on the Yoruba concept of human personality seem to accept one version or the other of the mythical account of the creation of human beings as descriptive of what actually happens before each person is birthed. He further notes that some African philosophers have even used the creation myth as a primary premise from which many conclusions on the nature and meaning of human life are derived. For him, these mythical accounts are subject to two general criticisms. The first is that they lead to

incompatible consequences, while the second is that they are not supposed to be taken literally but should be understood as allegories (Ekanola; 2006:42).

The following are some of the problems arising from the literal interpretation of the Ajala version of the creation myth. First, the way the Yoruba are said to perceive the relationship between *Ori* on one hand, and the destiny and personality of individuals on the other, cannot be consistently held for some people (2006:42). For instance, it appears that physically deformed people have their destinies and personalities determined by their deformed *ara* (body) and not by any prenatal choice of *Ori* (Ekanola; 2006:42). In the Yoruba culture, people like the *abuke* (hunchback), *aro* (cripple), *afin* (albino), and *arara* (dwarf) are all called *eni-orisa* (special people of the gods). They are denied, by virtue of their physical deformities, the full opportunities open to normal people (2006:42).

### **5.3 Problematising the African Understanding of Destiny**

African scholars who have grappled with the concept of destiny define it in various ways. According to Gbadegesin (1991:47), destiny refers to the pre-ordained portion of life wound and sealed in an *ori* (literally means head). The concept of destiny is loaded with different connotations. Scholars such as Gyekye (as cited in Mosley; 1995:343) and Wiredu (1980:15) do not differentiate between destiny and fate. For them these terms can be used alternatively. Madu (as cited in Ogbujah; 2008: 413) notes that as fate, destiny is seen as an absolute inscrutable power to which all living things are subject, and which may be either personified or delineated as impersonal. It is a unity or agency seen as an inevitable necessity controlling all things.

The African understanding of the concept of destiny raises a number of issues. Firstly, questions to do with the source of an individual's destiny arise. That is, whose choice or imposition

predetermines for the person what he or she will be in life? The literature available on the subject varies as to how an individual's destiny is allotted, whether it is a result of the person's choice or through an imposition of the other (Coetzee and Roux; 2003:206). According to Coetzee and Roux (2003:206), the possibility that destiny could be an outcome of a person's own choice raises a fundamental problem. To be able to make a choice, one must have adequate information as well as a preference for the rational. All this certainly makes it most unlikely that an individual would opt for a destiny that is undesirable. On the other hand, if a person's destiny is an imposition, it has serious implications in matters of moral responsibility. Why should a person be held morally responsible for his or her actions if he or she had no choice in the making of his or her character and personality? (2003:206).

Secondly, is to do with the nature or manner in which one chooses or receives his or her destiny. Thirdly, is this destiny alterable or unalterable? For purposes of this chapter, focus shall be on these first three, that is, source of destiny, whether we choose or our destinies are imposed on us and whether they can be altered or not. Coetzee and Roux (2003:206) further note that a greater conceptual problem arises from the issue of the alterability or otherwise of a person's destiny. If, indeed, the causes of our actions have been pre-ordained such that what will be will be, then why do we make efforts to alter pending misfortunes? (2003:206). One possible explanation has been that destiny does not amount to fatalism in which the person resigns him or herself to fate with respect to future situations. Among the Yoruba, for instance, it is believed that under certain conditions a person's destiny can be altered on earth, either for good or for bad. This sounds contradictory, but the main point of emphasis is on a person's moral character in the sense that destiny co-exists with freedom, morality, and responsibility. In Africa, the poverty of a lazy person is not blamed on destiny, nor is an offender spared punishment on account of his or her destiny.

Some, in fact, argue that destiny among the Yoruba is conceived as a mere potentiality whose actualisation depends on a person's human qualities. Others claim that a person's destiny merely determines the broad outline of his or her life and not the minute details. To that extent, the concept of destiny may be understood as a version of soft determinism. This view is championed by Segun Gbadegesin. On the other hand, for the Akan as represented by Gyekye (cited in Coetzee and Roux; 2003:227), it is not the individual who chooses a destiny. Rather, it is Onyame, the Supreme deity, that imposes destiny, and the deity always imposes good destiny, which is unchangeable. If so, then there is no problem of apportioning blame or responsibility (2003:227).

The manner in which these questions on destiny are tackled has serious consequences on human freedom. The chapter will then consider the implications of holding the position of whether destiny is alterable or not on human freedom.

#### **5.4 Source(s) of Destiny**

There is no general consensus amongst African scholars as to the source of an individual's destiny. Some scholars argue that individuals receive their destiny from God or the Supreme Being. However, there are others who think individual destinies are both chosen by the individual and received from the Creator. In other words, the individual and God help each other in choosing one's destiny. Gyekye also seems perplexed by the various accounts of how an individual gets their destiny. He argues that what is not clear is whether fate is self-determined, that is chosen, or decided upon by the individual soul or divinely imposed (Gyekye cited in Mosley; 1995:344). He further argues that some African peoples think that destiny is chosen by the individual whereas others think that it is conferred by the Supreme Being (1995:344).

According to Gyekye (1987:104), the Akan thinkers hold that every human being has a destiny that was fixed beforehand. For the Akans, the soul is the bearer of destiny. Before the soul descends to the world it receives its message from *Onyame*, which will determine the course of the individual's life. Speaking of the Ghanaian cultural characteristics, Wiredu (1980:17) argues that it is traditionally believed that each human being comes into this world with a specific and unalterable destiny apportioned to him by the Supreme Being.

The Yoruba people also believe in predestination. Makinde's definition of predestination presupposes that one's position on earth as well as the activities that led or would lead him to such a position were already pre-ordained from heaven and the situation could not be or have been otherwise (Makinde; 1984:198). Commenting on the Yoruba people's belief in predestination, Gbadegesin (1991) argues that the belief suggests that human beings are not on a purposeless mission in this world; that they have a mission to fulfil, a message to deliver...which is the meaning of their existence...and that this mission has been fully endorsed by the creator.

But unlike the Akan's account of the source of destiny, the Yoruba give a more different account of the concept. For the Yoruba, it is not the life-giving constituent, like the Akan *okra* or the Yoruba *emi*, but another non-bodily entity called the *ori-Inu* that receives the apportioned destiny (Kamalu; 1990:134). It stands before God and proposes a destiny which God either confirms or fashions. Or it kneels before God and has a destiny affixed to it. Either way, the apportionment is ultimately God's own. This maybe the reason why Idowu (1962) and Gbadegesin (1991) were led to a trimorphous conception of destiny. As he grapples with the concept of destiny, Gbadegesin finds himself faced with a series of questions. How does a person get his or her destiny? Is it by choice? Or is it by imposition?

In an attempt to answer these questions, Gbadegesin (2004:54) finds himself faced with three accounts of how one gets his or her destiny and these are *ayanmo*, *akunleyan*, and *akunlegba*. He says;

First there is the idea that the portion gets allocated to individuals as a result of their own ‘choice’ or rather the ‘choice’ of their own. Hence the idea of destiny as *akunleyan* (that which one kneels down to choose). Secondly, there is the conception of destiny as the position which is affixed to an individual not necessarily by his or her own choice. In this model, the individual kneels to receive the pre-ordained portion from the creator. Hence the idea of destiny as *akunlegba* (that which one kneels to receive). Third is the concept of destiny which seems to stand between the previous two. In this conception, though there is the idea of choice, the identity of the choice maker is not clear – whether it is the individual or some other being making the choice for him or her. In addition, there is the idea of a fixation of the portion on the individual. This is the idea of destiny as *ayanmo* (an affixed choice) (Gbadegesin; 1991:47).

In explaining these three through which one gets his or her destiny, Idowu (1962:174) notes that in *akunleyan* as destiny, “Whatever is thus conferred is unalterable and becomes one’s portion throughout life. That is what the person goes to the world to fulfil”. In other words, for the Yoruba it is not possible for a person to achieve something that is in contradiction to *akunleyan*. This is seen in such comment as “*o fe se rere, sugbon akunleyan ko gba*” (He wants to do well but his *akunleyan* does not allow him) (1962:174). This is mostly used when a person is seen making all sorts of effort to succeed but all to no avail. Again, the Yoruba confirm the strength of *akunleyan*, in the usage of words such as “*a kunle a yan eda, a d’ele aye tan oju nkan ni*” “we knelt down (in heaven) and choose our destinies, but when we arrive on earth, we become impatient” (Abimbola; 1976:113). Another tradition of importance speaks on *akunleyan*. According to Adeoye (1971:2), *Eleda* summoned all his creatures in *Orun* together to think of what they wanted to do in *Aiye*. *Eleda* was to be calling each breed’s representative, after their deliberation, one by one to recount

their assignment, they are given enough time to think on their mission (1971:2) According to Adeoye, “*Eleda* then allowed each of them to make his or her own *akunleyan*, that is, to think and pronounce whatever one wishes to go and accomplish in *Aiye* then *Eleda* would seal it” (1971:3). *Eleda* also gives chance to all other creatures to make their *akunleyan* (1971:3). There, bed-bug, lice, mosquito and others confess that they would be sucking blood and *Olodumare* sealed it (1971:3). So, all other creatures did and *Eleda* sealed it.

*Akunlegba* as another way in which one gets his or her destiny simply states that one kneels down and receives his or her portion of life. It is, however, partly presented as if there is a being who makes a choice of destiny on behalf of the receiver. The source of destiny in this kind is presumably *Olodumare*, who hands down an already sealed up destiny. This understanding of destiny, however, negates human freedom and points to strong destiny. As Idowu (1962:175) notes, “*akunlegba lo wa l’owo eda Ko s’ogbon owo Ko’s ogbon omo*” which translates to mean “That which is chosen kneeling is what the creator holds. There is no (other) means of (possessing) money. There is no (other) means of (possessing) children.”

In *anyanmo*, destiny is affixed on one and the receiver does not play an active role, he or she just passively receives this allotment. With regard to this, in the Yoruba traditional society, if a person is prosperous or wealthy, they say ‘*ayanmo tire ni*’ (that is his own destiny) (1962:175). Most often, people, as a matter of supernatural incapability, to justify themselves of not being wealthy or as wealthy as the men in question, use this. *Ayanmo* as a concept depicting destiny could be employed to either positive or negative consequences in a individual’s life (1962:175). It could be seen from the explanation above that *ayanmo* is strictly identical with strong destiny as opposed to *akunleyan* which is seen as weak destiny since it implies choice (Idowu; 1962:175). There are many traditional words which are used to establish the strictness and the rigidity of ‘*ayanmo*’



which is taken to be identical with and individual's destiny in the Yoruba society. For instance, they say '*ayanmo ko gboogun, ori lelejo*' (*ayanmo* is unchangeable, it is a matter with *Ori*) (1962:175). Or '*ayanmo mi, ko si eni to le yi pada*' (My destiny is from *Olodumare*, no earthly creature can change it) (1962:175).

From these three ways in which one receives their destiny lies the problem of choice and responsibility. Gbadegesin's central argument focuses on the fact that if the individual is responsible for choosing his own destiny then the problem of choice arises. For him, what choice can an unconscious mind make? On the other hand, if the individual is not responsible for the choice of their destiny then why should they be held morally responsible for their actions?

As evidenced above, the concept of destiny may have some serious problems for the Africans when analysed from the lenses of freedom and responsibility. A closer analysis of the concept of individual choice in the ways in which one receives their destiny shows that choice only applies to destiny understood as *akunleyan* (that which one kneels down to choose). However, choice implies that the person making a choice must be in a position to explain his or her choices in terms of intentions or purposes – teleological explanations (Weinberg and Yandell; 1971:181). Understood in this way, choice also implies choosing from varieties of genuine alternatives. However, this is not the case with the African understanding of destiny as articulated by Gbadegesin.

In the Yoruba myth of creation, the story of the three friends who went to the house of *Ajala* to select their *ori* is told. These three are said to be able to choose freely and the choice they make determines the life course of the individual and cannot be changed. However, these individuals are

not aware of the content of the *ori* they choose, that is, whether they are good or bad. Thus, an individual can only be held responsible for their course of conduct if their choice was free.

In the case of the African concept of *ori*, the individual is unaware of the choice he or she is making, that is, if they make the choice in the first place. How then does this impact on individual freedom? For an act to be called free it has to encompass a free choice which the individual is able to explain why they chose that particular act and not the other. Also, the individual must have all the information available to him or her concerning the choice that they will be taking. All these features are missing when one considers the African concept of *ori*. In other words, one may be led to argue that our talk of choosing our own destinies reflects a misunderstanding of human beings and their powers. In short, the word destiny itself is loaded with connotations of necessity.

Gyekye supports the point that destiny is imposed by the Supreme Being. According to Gyekye (cited in Mosley; 1995:344), the concept of fate must be implicit in systems of thought like the African, which postulate a creator who not only fashioned human beings and the world, but who also established the order of the world in which people live. To substantiate his claim, Gyekye gives the Akan myth which expresses the idea of God determining an individual's destiny. The myth is as follows:

The rivers Tano, Bea, the Bosomtwe Lake and the sea were children of the Supreme Being. The latter decided to send these his children to the earth. The Supreme Being himself had planned where he would send each of the children. The goat got to know the plans of the Supreme Being. He, the goat, and Bea were great friends, so he told Bea of the plans of the Supreme Being, urging him to arrive before his brothers if their father sent for them. One day the Supreme Being sent for his children and Bea ran quickly and got there first; so the Supreme Being assigned to him the cool and shady forest country which had been intended for Tano, the favorite son of the Supreme Being. Tano therefore was sent to the grassy plains, and each in turn was given a place different from the original plan, due to the goat having revealed the plan to Bea (Gyekye; 1987:114).

The myth above as explained by Gyekye is a clear indication that destiny is ordained by God. For him, just like as sons of God had no place in choosing their final resting place, the same can be said of human beings. In his words, “God’s action in determining the place of the river spirits can be seen as the analogue of his determination of human destiny...” (Gyekye; 1987:114).

Arguing from the Yoruba myth of creation, one can notice that there is no element of choice whatsoever since the three were not aware of the contents of their *ori*. Choice entails choosing from a variety of alternatives. In other words, it only makes sense to agree with Gyekye that destiny is an imposition by the Supreme Being and not the choice of the individual.

### **5.5 Destiny as Alterable**

Gbadegesin’s understanding of the Yoruba concept of destiny is that it is not synonymous with fate and thus for him it is alterable. According to him, even though the traditional Yoruba people subscribe to destiny as *akunlegba* (received while kneeling), they still hold individuals as responsible for their actions. The fact that Gbadegesin discovered that the Yoruba do not shy away from praising or blaming individuals for their actions is evident that destiny is not a cut-and-dried phenomenon; it is alterable (Brown; 2004:58). Gbadegesin further argues that, even if a bad destiny has been imposed on one, an individual has the responsibility to change it for better or for worse. In light of this, Gbadegesin is of the view that there is need to change an unfavourable destiny. This however, is contrary to Gyekye’s understanding of destiny.

According to Kwame Gyekye (1987:116), since in the Akan system destiny is divinely determined, and that the Supreme Being’s prime characteristic is goodness, then the destiny fixed by God must be good. With this in mind, Gyekye argues that there is no need to try and change a destiny that is good. In other words, for Gyekye, there is no such thing as bad destiny. Consequently, talk of

trying to alter one's destiny is invalid where destiny is perceived to be good. This, however, sounds at odds with other African scholars who analysed the concept of destiny. There are scholars who believe, like Gbadegesin, that destiny can be bad. Abimbola (1976:116) notes that not all *ori* is good. *Ajala*, the one who makes head with clay in heaven is an irresponsible man, and he sometimes forgets to put the necessary finishing touches to some of the heads (1976:116). He might forget to bake some of them in fire and he might over bake them, rendering such heads potentially weak and unable to bear the strains of the long journey to earth (1976:116). If a person picks one of these bad heads, he or she is doomed to failure in life (1976:116). Contrary to this, Gyekye is of the view that bad things are not included in the message of destiny, and that an individual's failures are either because of the person's actions, desires, decisions, and intentions, or because of the activities of some supposed evil forces (Gyekye; 1987:116).

Gyekye seem to contradict himself where he argues that, "a person facing failures in life may try to do something about the situation by say consulting priests and diviners....But in so doing he or she would not be changing destiny as such; rather he or she would in fact be trying to better the conditions of life" (1987:116). It can however be argued contrary to Gyekye that when one improves the circumstances of his or her life, it implies that they would have changed the course of their lives, hence changing their destiny. The question of whether a destiny can be bad was necessary to be dealt with first since if there are no bad destinies, there will not be any need for humans to wish or try to alter destiny. However, the fact that there is evidence of bad destinies clearly justifies the need for the African individuals to make effort to try and alter their misfortunes through divination, prayers and offering of sacrifices.

Thus, Gbadegesin notes that divination for a newly born baby about its future prospects is the direct means of attempting to alter one's destiny. The rationale is that the diviner has the power to

discern the destiny of everyone and to do something about an unfavourable destiny (Gbadegesin as cited in Brown; 2004:58). He further notices that the Yoruba people hold the view that a good destiny can be negatively altered by the machinations of others and that they never give up this assumption, but continue to arm themselves against evil doers (2004:59). Through divination, one may be advised to make sacrifice to avoid pending doom.

According to Gbadegesin (cited in Brown; 2004:59), the Yoruba also believe that a bad destiny may be the result of the individual's own character subsequent to the imposition of an otherwise good destiny (2004:59). In other words, destiny only guarantees the potentials, not the actualisation of a life prospect. The latter depends on the effort of the individuals, hence the emphasis on *ese* (leg) and *owo* (hand) in the elaboration of the concept (2004:60). The hand and the leg are seen as symbols of hard work without which a good destiny cannot come to fruition (2004:60). In tandem with Gbadegesin, Idowu and Makinde believe that there are still ways for the Yorubas to change a bad *Ori* for better and a good *Ori* for worse. According to them, a good *Ori* can be improved through consultations with the deity *Orunmila*, *etutu* (sacrifice), and hardwork.

If the views of Gbadegesin, Idowu and Makinde on destiny being susceptible to altering are anything to go by, then an individual is free to either choose to go by a bad destiny or to change it for the better through divination, sacrifice, prayer and offerings. In other words, it is up to the individual to capitalise on these methods or not in order to change their fortunes as prescribed by bad destiny. Following this argument, it can be logically concluded that since these methods are available to everyone, then agents can be held morally responsible for their actions which they would have chosen out of freewill. In other words, for these scholars, destiny, whichever way it is received by the individual, is not detrimental to freewill and responsibility respectively.

## 5.6 Destiny as Unalterable

The concept of destiny as viewed by philosophers such as Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu is tantamount to fate. Elsewhere, Wiredu is viewed as arguing that destiny is synonymous with fate. He thus argues that, in Ghanaian cultural characteristics, it is traditionally believed that each individual comes into this world with a specific and unalterable destiny apportioned to him or her by the Supreme Being (Wiredu; 1980:17). For him, person may reason that “my destiny is obviously a gloomy one. However hard I may try I will never succeed, for no one can change the destiny that was fixed by God.” In other words, following Wiredu, destiny is synonymous with fatalism or hard determinism.

Also, Gyekye, in his article titled *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought - The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, views destiny as synonymous with fatalism. Oduwole (1996:48) defines destiny as “what must happen and cannot be changed or controlled”. She further argues that everybody has got his biography written before coming into the world, such that whatever he does is not done out of freewill but because it has been pre-ordained. In other words, destiny is understood as unalterable and thus this is synonymous with hard-determinism. Oduwole further asserts that whatever a person does is not as a matter of chance or luck, it is something which has been settled in pre-existence or by fate.

In his argument to support the view that destiny is synonymous with fate and is imposed by the divine, Gyekye further argues that it makes sense logically to assume that if human beings were fashioned, then they were fashioned in such a way that would determine a number of things about them (1995:344). For Gyekye, this must have been the basis for the African belief in fate. He further notes that the African repudiation of the notion of chance in African thought would seem

to lead to the idea of fate (1995:344). In one of his other works, Gyekye argues that there are proverbs amongst the Akan people which suggest that destiny is unalterable. For instance, the Akan proverbs that, “God’s destiny cannot be altered” and that, “No living man can subvert the order (arrangement) of God (Gyekye; 1987:113).

However, the Akans are not the only ones who believe in the concept of predestination. According to Makinde (1984:197-198), the Yoruba often say that *Ohun Ori wa se ko ma ni salai se eo* (what the Ori has come to achieve must definitely be fulfilled). In tandem with Makinde, E B Idowu (1962:171) also notes some Yoruba proverbs which speak to destiny as unalterable. The proverb states that, “We knelt down and chose a portion. We get into the world and are not pleased.” To further argue for the view that destiny is synonymous with fate, Wande Abimbola (1976:115) argues that, once a person has chosen his destiny by the selection of an *ori*, it becomes almost impossible to alter it on earth. For Abimbola, it is simply because people find it difficult to accept a bad destiny that they make serious, but fruitless attempts to rectify or alter it. He further points out that, even the gods are not in a position to alter an individual’s destiny. In line with Abimbola, Makinde (1985:57) further asserts that the best that the gods could do with regard to human destiny is merely to guide the fulfilment. Further to this, Idowu (1962:174) argues that the person passes into the world with his destiny doubly sealed by *Oludumare* and *Onibode*.

In other words, if we are to go by the arguments of the philosophers who aver that destiny is unalterable, then fate becomes the guiding force that controls actions which we ordinarily believe to be under the agent’s control or over which a person thinks he or she has a choice. As earlier on noted, a person is not even responsible for the choice of his or her *ori*; after careful analysis one may be convinced that the acquisition of *ori* is not an act of choice. The consequent result of holding this position is that a person cannot be held morally responsible for their actions.

According to Oduwole (1996:53), *ori*, the determinant of a person's destiny, denies the act of choice, freewill and moral responsibility. Therefore, it becomes apparent that the Yoruba and Akan concepts of destiny as outlined above cannot be consistently held together with the concept of freewill. In short, the concept of destiny as unalterable implies that the human agent is determined. The individual thus is dependent on, conditioned by what brought it into existence, hence determined, in this case by the divine decree.

It seems from the views of different scholars above plausible to conclude that if destiny is unalterable, then it follows with necessity that human beings are determined. Appealing as this view may be, the view that destiny is unalterable does not, for its proponents, amount to determinism. According to Gyekye (1987:121), the concept of destiny (*nkrabea*) might be held to be subversive of the reality of humans as causal free agents. He further argues that for if actions are predetermined, then thoughts, deliberations, decisions are of no consequence; there is nothing that a person might think of or do that will affect the result (Gyekye; 1987:121). From this, Gyekye (1987:121) then notes that the effects of destiny on volitional causality are relevant to the questions of freewill and moral responsibility.

He thus poses a question: Is the Akan concept of destiny destructive to human free will? He proceeds to answer this question by arguing that since destiny expresses only the basic attributes of the individual, and because destiny is *general* and not specific, human actions are not fated or necessitated; this fact gives viability and meaningfulness to the concept of choice. According to Gyekye (1987:121), even if one considered free will not to be absolute in the light of human creatureliness, it must nevertheless be granted that the individual can make his or her own existence meaningful through the exercise of free will within the scope of destiny. His argument is hinged on the fact that actions and behaviour originate from thought, desire, choice (implicit in the concept



of *asiane*) and accident, which is invariably tied to the concept of destiny. In Akan thought, “accident” refers to an action or event that is unintended but that has a cause. Gyekye (1987:121) further argues that, as far as human actions are concerned, the cause is, of course, the person himself or herself. He was led to conclude that the very nature of destiny allows room for the exercise by the person of freewill and, consequently, “accidental” and “unpremeditated” actions are considered as deriving from the exercise of freewill and hence are the person’s responsibility.

### **5.7 Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussion, it can be seen that scholars do not agree on whether destiny as received from the Supreme Being is alterable or unalterable. On the one hand, scholars such as Gyekye and others believe that once received, destiny becomes the blueprint of the individual’s life and is unalterable. They do not see the need for the individual to want to alter their destiny because all destinies from the Supreme Being were good. On the other hand, Gbadegesin and others argue that, even though received from the deity, destiny is not a cut-and-dried phenomenon, hence it can be altered. These scholars believe that there are both good and bad destinies, hence, the need for an individual to want to alter their destiny.

Put in the context of the debate on freedom and determinism, the understanding of the concept would imply that the agent who is believed to be unable to alter their destiny is therefore determined; and the one who can alter their destiny is regarded as possessing freewill. This, however, has been the traditional problem of the concept of destiny, that is, individuals cannot be held morally responsible in a world perceived to have been pre-ordained by the Supreme Being. Those who hold this view as indicated above believe that human beings are determined and that freewill is an illusion. However, those scholars who believe that destiny is alterable attest to the

view that individuals possess freedom and that they can be held morally accountable for their actions. Both views seem to imply that freedom and determinism are incompatible. However, it is the conviction of this research that the African account of predestination is relative and not absolute since one's destiny can be adversely affected by witches or one's enemies. Conversely, an individual can take ritual action through divination and sacrifice to overcome what is apparently a bad destiny. A person's lot in life is by no means totally predetermined, and while there is a certain amount of fatalism in the African worldview, it is fatalism of the last resort. The next chapter will try and find out whether these two seemingly contrasting views are compatible with each other with regard to the African concept of destiny.

## **Chapter Six: Destiny in Africa: A Case for Soft-Determinism**

### **6.0 Introduction**

In the previous chapter the research focused on the traditional problem of the concept of destiny, that is, whether destiny can be understood as alterable or unalterable amongst the Akan and the Yoruba peoples. Generally, it has been seen that some scholars believe that destiny once handed down by the Supreme Being cannot be altered. Others are of the view that, even though destiny is understood as received from the Supreme Being, one can do something to alter a bad destiny and improve a good one. This created a rift between these two schools of thought. Those who believe that destiny can be altered can be used to affirm that human beings possess freewill; and those who believe that it cannot be altered can be used to affirm determinism. In short, each school of thought emphasised its view to the exclusion of the other. Thus, the previous chapter dealt with the traditional argument of whether destiny is alterable (implying freewill) or unalterable (implying determinism).

However, the major aim of this chapter is to focus on the major part of the concept of destiny, that is, finding out whether these seemingly contrasting views are compatible with each other or not. The concept of destiny amongst the Africans as indicated by Gyekye and Wiredu presupposes that the African agent is determined. However, though both scholars argue that destiny is unalterable they still insist that the fact that it is unalterable is not detrimental to human freedom.

Thus, having been equipped with the African views on destiny, the chapter proceeds to look at how this understanding of the concept impacts on individual freedom. In this spirit, an attempt is made to answer questions such as; does the African understanding of destiny presuppose

determinism or freewill? Are these concepts which imply freedom and determinism compatible with each other? And if the human agent is determined, to what extent can we hold him or her morally responsible for his or her actions?

### **6.1 African Concept of Destiny: A Case for Soft-Determinism**

In African philosophy it is difficult to talk of the metaphysical freedom of humans within the ontological hierarchy of being in which Africans believe. Human beings act and live in accordance with their nature as a creation of the Supreme Being. Other beings and forces like the deities, the ancestors, witches, wizards, nature, etc., also play a significant role in influencing activities in the physical world. This explains why lots of sacrifices were performed in traditional African society to help maintain the harmony between these forces for the benefit of humans.

Theoretically, some Africans believe that an individual cannot alter his destiny; but in the actual sense, this seems not to be the case. Though it is generally believed that destiny is handed down by the Supreme Being to the individual, this does not mean that this is the blue-print of the individual's life. The individual can change the course of their life through either hard work, prayers or sacrifices to the Supreme Being and those in the spiritual realm.

In the Akan worldview, Gyekye argues strongly that destiny is unalterable because it is handed down from the Supreme Being (Gyekye; 1987:114). This however puts forth a fatalistic interpretation of destiny in African philosophy. The implication of this to the African agent is that he or she is not free to act out of his or her own will, but act in accordance with the written manuscript. Moses Makinde, who is a defender of a pre-apportioned destiny, tried to avoid taking away moral responsibility from the individuals. He then argues that *Ori* is a mere potentiality (Makinde; 1985:198). For Makinde, *Ori* chosen in heaven is in potency and needs hard work,

consultation with *Orunmila*, and making offerings and sacrifices which enable a good *Ori* to be realised or a bad *Ori* to be improved. However, this seems to be at odds with the doctrine of predestination that he vehemently defends. In other words, Makinde cannot hold both views without seriously contradicting himself.

As noted by Gyekye (1987:120), the argument in Western philosophy pertaining to human free will and responsibility is that; “If every event is caused, as determinism holds, then human action and behaviour too are caused, and hence we cannot be held to be free and therefore cannot be held morally responsible for those actions.” In addition, he notes that there is a suppressed premise in the argument, which is that human actions are (a species) events. For him, the premise is wholly not correct. He further argues that there is a sense in which human actions cannot be considered as events. Events are mere happenings or occurrences, which do not have their origin in human design and motivation (1987:120).

Like Makinde, Gyekye notes that the message (*nkra*) borne by the soul is said to be comprehensive; it determines only the broad outlines of an individual’s mundane life, not the specific details. In this sense, it is plausible for one to argue that only the broad outline of the individual’s life are determined, but the specific details can allow us to talk of circumstantial freedom, hence, soft-determinism. He further argues that divine knowledge of an individual’s destiny does not appear to be fatal to his exercise of free will, since the individual does not presume to have access to this knowledge of God. In other words, Gyekye, who happens to hold on to the view that we are predestined from creation, also admits that this predestination is not detrimental to the individual’s exercise of freewill.

However, a closer look at Gyekye's views shows some inconsistencies. The concept of predestination that he holds in his doctrine is inconsistent with freewill. In other words, to hold on to the view that there is predestination is to subscribe to determinism. However, the fact that Gyekye reveals an inconsistency in the Akan thinking on predestination may imply that the Akan people theoretically believe predestination to be true, but in practice, this is not the case.

The concept of destiny, when viewed from the points above, seems to support fatalism. However, one may argue at this juncture that the African conception of destiny does not attest to fatalism. Fatalism is the view that what will be will be. Fatalists hold the view that everything has been predetermined. This position however does not allow for any kind of freedom of action. Consequently, fatalism leads us to the view that one will be wasting time and energy if they try to change any bad occurrence even if there are means of changing it; what will be will be. According to Makinde (1985:53), a fatalist will argue that if he had been fated not to die of an illness it does not matter whether he seeks medical attention either by going to the hospital or not. If he had been fated to die of an illness, it does not matter whether he goes to the hospital or does not. If he will die, he will die and if he will not, he will not.

In other words, hard determinism or fatalism presents the individual as a sitting duck to which things just happen without its contribution. Further to this, if we are to go by fatalism, then moral responsibility flies in the face of fatalism. For the fatalists whatever happens to the individual has been antecedently predetermined such that it is unavoidable. If this position is accepted as true, then this might lead to the justification of wrong or bad acts by simply arguing that it has been predetermined. This, however, is an unacceptable position in the African worldview(s). A position like this for the Africans, apart from reducing a person to a mere sitting duck, does not allow

progress, development and criticism in the community. However, one can argue that the African community does not see a person as passive or docile.

In a bid to refute fatalism or hard determinism, Gyekye (1987:115) argues that;

...one might say that only certain 'key' events and actions are embodied in destiny. Perhaps better, the destiny of an individual comprises certain basic attributes...Nevertheless, it is clear that the Akan notion of destiny is a general one, which implies that not everything that a person does or that happens to him or her represents a page from the 'book of destiny'.

In addition, Gyekye argues that there are certain things that are not in the message of destiny. Thus, an individual is held responsible for actions that he deliberately performs and can only attribute to destiny those whose cause transcends him (1987:115).

Using Gyekye's views, one can argue that the Akan believe that there are certain aspects of their lives that are determined and others that are not. However, Gyekye fails to tell us which aspects of destiny are determined and which ones are not. Notwithstanding this drawback, the Akan as noted by Gyekye, believe that the individual is both determined and at the same time possess a certain degree of freedom to be held morally accountable for his actions. Therefore, freewill and determinism, understood from the African conception of destiny, become compatible with each other in the sense that destiny does not determine every minute detail of the individual's life. However, there seems to be a problem here; how then do we know that these are actions deliberately performed by the individual or that they were caused by forces above him? This question remains unanswered in the debate on the concept of destiny in African philosophy.

As evidenced above, destiny amongst the Africans does not attest to fatalism. If this is the case, does it mean it attests to freewill? In order to offer insights into this question, it is important to

attempt to answer the question; what are the necessary conditions for one to be said to have performed an act out of freewill? And, does the African concept of destiny attest to freewill?

According to Kane (1998:4), freewill entails the power of the agents to be the ultimate creators (or originators) and sustainers of their own ends and purposes. In other words, freewill with respect to an action, entails that the action is causally brought about by something that (a) is not itself causally brought about by anything over which she has no control, and (b) is related to her in virtue of its causing her action, she determines which action she performs (Clarke;1993:203). Plantinga (1974:166) argues that freewill entails that no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not. According to Kane (1998:4);

When we trace the causal or explanatory chains of action back to their sources in the purposes of free agents, these causal chains must come to an end or terminate in the willings (choices, decisions, or efforts) of the agents, which cause or bring about their purposes. If these willings were in turn caused by something else, so that the explanatory chains could be traced back further to heredity or environment, to God, or fate, then the ultimacy would not lie with the agents but with something else.

In simple terms, all libertarians agree on the view that for an action to be considered free implies that it is not causally determined by anything outside the agent. In other words, there are two key issues in the libertarian conception of freewill, that is, the individual must be the originator and must have complete control over his actions. If we take away these two from the Libertarians, then they will not have better grounding for moral responsibility. Furthermore, libertarianism emphasises on individual free choice. Free choice is meant an action that is not coerced or constrained by anything. Free actions are those that are up to the individual. The individual, thus, chooses them but could have chosen differently because they were not forced to choose as they



did. Being able to choose between genuine alternatives is the cornerstone of the libertarian argument on freewill.

The African concept of destiny does not attest to freewill. With the libertarian freewill, a person will be understood as extremely free and could be held responsible for all and everything that happens to him or her on earth. This would include, holding a person responsible for his height, colour of eyes, complexion and even sex. In other words, a person could be praised for his or her beauty and blamed for his or her ugliness. This position, however, is contrary to the African concept of destiny.

There are African scholars who believe that even though destiny is pre-apportioned by the Supreme Being, the individual can still alter it, implying that human beings possess a certain degree of freewill. However, those scholars who hold this view do not believe that there are certain elements of human life that are determined. Gbadegesin (1991:54) argues that it is human tendency to want to draw a distinction between fatalism and predestination on the one hand, and between strong destiny and weak destiny on the other. While fatalism (or strong destiny) presents the picture of a cut-and-dried portion of life weak destiny leaves room for manoeuvres within the context of a general allotment of destiny (1991:54). Wiredu (1980:19) argues that what the traditional philosophy of humans implies is not that humans as such has freewill, but only that a person is in principle capable of attaining freewill.

However, the libertarian understanding of freewill which emphasises more on action brought about by an agent is inconsistent with the African understanding of reality in general and destiny in particular. The Africans thus believe in agentive causality which leads them to postulate mystical powers as causal agents to events in the world (Mawere; 2011:19). In the African conception of

destiny the belief is that the agent is controlled by the Supreme Being and the activities around him are influenced by the entities of the invisible world. However, that being the case in the African worldview, they still believe that the individual is capable of bringing about his actions within his external limitations. This is the reason why they believe that even though destiny is handed down by the Supreme Being, an individual can still do something about an unfavourable destiny.

Thus, just by looking at the way the Africans receive their destiny, one is bound to argue that there is no freedom of choice which is the cornerstone of libertarian theories. Instead the individual is compelled to choose with no genuine knowledge about the contents of the choices he or she chooses. This destiny is said by some to be irreversible even by the gods themselves. However, other scholars feel that destiny, even if handed down to individuals by the Supreme Being, can still be altered.

One may ask, how then can one change his or her destiny? Here it can be argued that there is need for one to work hard in order to bring to fruition the potential success that the choice of *Ori* carries with it. Therefore, from the African understanding of destiny, the choice of good *Ori* does not automatically lead to success. In other words, one has to work hard in order to bring to fruition his potentialities. In addition to this, Makinde (1985:63) notes that "...we are told that some destiny can be altered either by dint of hard work or lack of it, or by means of appropriate sacrifice to one's *Ori*". He went on to clarify his position by arguing that;

There seems to be an implied belief that it is within one's power to make good *Ori* successful as it was destined to be, or make it unsuccessful as it was not destined to be. The question of sacrifice also seems to imply that it is within one's power (by means of propitiation to one's *Ori*) to make a bad '*Ori*' successful as

it was not destined to be, or let it remain unsuccessful (by lack of propitiation to one's Ori) as it was indeed destined to be (Makinde;1985:63).

In other words, Makinde's position boils down to the fact that it is up to the individual to choose either to be successful or to be a failure in life. Having noted this, one can concur with Makinde here that humans are liable for some things which happen to them in life. Even if one had chosen a bad *Ori*, the person can still be held responsible for his or her action. The reasoning behind this is simple: he or she is not being held responsible for choosing a wrong *Ori*, but for what he or she makes out of which ever choice of *Ori*. Following this argument, the individual does possess the freedom to affect one's *Ori* for better or for worse.

As has been noted above, individuals are held liable for actions that they would have deliberately performed. In this case, there is a certain degree to which the individual is free to make some choices after a careful deliberation. However, the question still remains: Which actions can we ascribe to the individual and which ones to forces above him? This question remains unanswered in the debate on the concept of destiny in African philosophy. To answer this question, this research, however, argues that the metaphysical world controls the conditions of the material world (events) surrounding the individual, but the individual' will (action) is not determined.

As noted in the third chapter, in the hierarchy of beings, the higher entities in the spiritual world are said to control the lower entities in the physical world. However, there is an interdependence of the physical and spiritual worldviews. This led Uchedu (as cited in Asouzu; 2004:160) to argue that the world of human beings and the world of the spirits are interdependent such that between them, there is always some form of interdependence, a beneficial reciprocity (2004:160). Thus for Uchedu, this principle of reciprocity demands that the ancestors be honoured and offered regular sacrifice, and be fed with some crumbs each time the living take their meal; it also imposes on the

ancestors the obligation of “prospering” the lineage, protecting its members, and standing with them as a unit against the machinations of wicked men and malignant spirits (2004:160).

If the relationship that exists between the world of human beings and the world of spirit is that of interdependence, then it means the African understanding of destiny is not detrimental to human freedom. In this regard, the agent is able to change the course of their events for better or for worse through appealing to mystical powers.

The traditional Africans generally believe that the Supreme Being, the Creator, made the world good and introduced order into it. Thus when any element of evil disrupts the smooth running of life, it is often believed that it is caused by an agent other than the Creator. In such cases, witchcraft is brought in to account for such misfortunes (Uduigwomen, 2002: 37). Witchcraft and other such phenomena are believed to be supernatural. Almost all mishaps – accident, miscarriage, impotence, bareness, academic failure, poverty, suffering, death, chronic sickness, etc. – are believed to be caused, most times by witches and other devilish practices, especially when such problems defy all attempted solutions (Akpan; 2011:725).

In traditional Africa, explanations of causes for one event or the other preclude the concept of chance. Extraordinary occurrences which may be inexplicable because of a person’s limited knowledge are immediately attributed to supernatural powers (2011:725). They are not considered as “chance–occurrences.” Thus, wicked people may seek the power of malignant spirits to change another person’s fortunes for the worse. Through witchcraft and sorcery, a person can alter the destiny of his enemy or those he would have had a fall out with. According to Evans-Pritchard (1937:21), a sorcerer uses the technique of magic and derives power from medicines. In other words, sorcerers use black magic and medicines against others. Also witches are thought to be able

to do extraordinary things beyond human abilities. So if this is the understanding of reality in the physical world, what then is the position of the agent where it pertains to freewill, especially the agent who is under the attack of the witches and sorcerers? Is it not the case that he or she is at the mercy of these beings? This may however sound like advocating for the view that events are determined by the will of spiritual beings, the operation of automatic forces, and the self-willed actions of men.

However, a person can still manipulate the invisible world to his advantage and to protect himself from these spirits. In this regard then, a person has an option to look for ways to change his or her life for the better through appealing to mystical powers such as magic. Through magic, a person can control or bend the powers of the world to a person's will, thus in a way forcing things to happen (Noss; 1963:20). For Idowu (1973:189), since magic is an attempt by human beings to tap and control the supernatural resources of the universe for his or her own benefit, then it serves an individual's egocentricity (self-centeredness) and is a short cut to spiritual bliss.

Parrinder (1970:116) argues that there is need to distinguish between good (white magic) and bad magic (black magic). According to him, good magic is primarily used for protection against the evil forces that are found everywhere. Thus charms, amulets, herbs, seeds, powder, skins, feathers, chanting of magical formula, cuts on the body and any other magical practices are used to protect individuals, cattle, houses and possessions from evil powers. In addition to protection, good magic may also be used to bring rain by the rainmaker and predict the future by the diviner. With the help of the medicine man, magic can also be used to win a lover, produce abundant crops, gain more children or cattle, and in general, increase one's personal fortunes in life. Good magic is openly favoured by society and used for the individual's benefit.

On the other hand, bad magic is secretly practised without the approval of society and for evil purposes. In contrast to the positive benefits received from good magic, black magic is intended primarily to harm people and property. Therefore, black magic is feared by people. Society opposes it. It is practised at night and without approval. Mbiti (1969:199) points out that a great deal of belief here is based on, or derives from, fear, suspicion, jealousies and ignorance of false accusations, which go on in African villages. Therefore black magic is associated with sorcery.

In this case, the agent has the power to do something different in exactly the same circumstances. Thus, the agent who realises that his course of life has been changed by malignant spirits has the power to deliberate and weigh various alternatives on whether he should or should not use magic or consult the spirits to change one's misfortunes or even offer sacrifices to a deity. In the African worldview, there are individuals who are considered experts in finding reasons for disharmony in the universe. These individuals advise on measures to be taken to restore the force of life. In other words, they help restore the power of life diminished by witchcraft and sorcerers through such procedures as prayers, sacrifices, offerings, protective and curative medicines; shame and guilt; ordeals and punishment; therapeutic dances and reconciliation rituals (Magesa; 1997:194).

That being the case, even if we have noted that the Africans dismiss the concept of chance and embrace the concept of causality (empirical and supernatural), it can still be argued that their understanding of causality does not infringe upon one's freedom. If freedom is to be understood as the availability of alternatives to choose from given circumstances, it then follows that the African agent can be argued to possess freedom. Thus, if an individual is not satisfied with their fortunes, there is still room for an African agent to do something about it. In other words, even though there is belief in agentive causation, the same agents can be consulted in order to reverse

one's misfortunes. So the fact that they can consult these agents means that they do have genuine alternatives, hence freewill.

To buttress the above point, one can cite Gyekye (1987:120), who poses a question after considering the deterministic conception of the world and of life: can humans be said to be free in their actions and behaviour? Can they be moral agents? Gyekye noted that the Akan thinkers answer these questions in the affirmative. As noted in the first chapter, the argument pertaining to human freewill and responsibility runs as follows: "If every event is caused, as determinism holds, then human action and behaviour too are caused, and hence we cannot be held to be free and therefore cannot be held morally responsible for those actions" (Gyekye; 1987:120). Gyekye, thus, notes that there is a suppressed premise in the argument, which is that human actions are (a species of) events. He thus argues that this premise is not wholly correct. In order to augment his views, Gyekye goes on to differentiate between human actions and events. According to him, there is a sense in which human actions cannot be considered as events (Gyekye; 1987:120).

He further argues that events are mere happenings or occurrences, which do not have their origin in human design and motivation (1987:120). He gives examples of what he views as events and these include; the flooding of a river, the erosion of the sea, a tremour of the earth, capsizing of a boat during a storm etc. (1987:120). On the other hand, human 'events' insofar as they originate in human thought, deliberation, desire etc. cannot strictly be regarded as events. Thus, the African understanding of causation is confined to events, natural and nonhuman, that are beyond the control, or power of people, to the exclusion of human actions. In short, Gyekye (1987:121) is led to conclude that in Akan thought, the doctrine of causality or determinism is irrelevant as far as human actions are concerned. This, for Gyekye (1987:121), means that the doctrine of determinism is not fatal to the freedom a person has in actions and behaviour.

Thus, Africans understand destiny as both alterable and unalterable. This, however, does not present a paradox in the African thought system. There are certain elements of the individual's life that cannot be ascribed to their destiny. Thus, the fact that individuals are praised or blamed for their actions is a clear indication that the individual is the cause of that action and not any supernatural force outside of a person. And also the fact that Africans believe and actually punish wrong-doers is an indication that the individual is solely responsible for bringing about that action which he or she is being punished for. As indicated earlier on, there are several ways in which it is believed in different African cultures that one can alter their destiny. These ways include prayers, sacrifices and offerings. At this juncture there is need to consider these ways and how they can be capitalised by the individuals to fulfil their goals.

## **6.2 Methods Used to Alter One's Destiny**

As noted earlier on, destiny is not a cut and dried phenomena. There are a number of ways that can be used by an African to alter an unfavourable destiny. Thus, this section discusses how one can manipulate the spirits to act to their advantage.

The first method is prayer. It is believed amongst the Africans that prayer can be used by an individual to alter his destiny for the better. According to Mbiti (1969:61), prayer is the commonest act of worship. When the Africans pray, some of their prayers are addressed to God, and some to the living-dead or other spiritual beings many of whom serve as intermediaries (1969:64). Mbiti (1969:64) notes that, the Yoruba people pray for material blessings and protection against sickness, death, or for victory over enemies and longevity of life. Thus, African people communicate with God through prayer, pouring out their hearts before Him, at any time and in any place. The prayers



are chiefly requests for material welfare, such as health, protection from danger, prosperity and even riches (1969:65).

According to Magesa (1997:177), for Africans, when life is threatened or weakened, prayer is most abundant both private and public prayer. Prayer is believed to be a means of restoring wholeness and balance in life. He further notes that praying places the individual or the community in the hands of the greater invisible and mystical powers and intends to overcome or to assuage displeasure (Magesa; 1997:177). Adeyemo (1979: 33) notes that many traditional Africans are very spiritual-minded and pray continuously for the well-being of their family and community. It is commonly accepted that prayer is the primary medium whereby Africans communicate their deepest desires to God, the divinities, and the ancestors.

It is this researcher's conviction that Africans can harness spiritual forces to their advantage. In addition to prayer, another way of doing this is by seeking knowledge of divine intentions through consulting diviners or oracles. As Mitchell (1977:59) observes, many if not all of the

...African cultures have several religious practitioners who are believed to be able to ascertain divine intentions through one means or another. The diviners and oracles provided knowledge about the cause of misfortunes and or a reading of the probable success of anticipated future ventures such as a long trip or the opening of a new business. This knowledge permits the individual to take the appropriate action...to utilise spiritual forces.

Furthermore, Africans also believe that the spiritual forces can be harnessed by approaching the ancestors and requesting for their intercession. For instance, Mitchell (1977:59) notes that the Yoruba people approach the *Egungun* masqueraders during the Yoruba *Egungun* festival seeking intercession for their children. He further notes that the performance of these rituals seeks to restore the situation and remove the ancestors' curse. In line with ancestral intercession, is intercession by

the gods. For the Africans, then, spiritual forces can be harnessed by approaching the gods and requesting their intercession. In light of this, Mitchell (1977:60) argues that this may involve a positive appeal to the deity that the person or group worships or the performance of sacrificial rituals to redress the violation of a taboo associated with that deity or the neglect of some religious obligation owing to it.

In addition to the above ways of changing one's destiny, the Africans also believe that they can change their fortunes for better by employing the services of specialists in magic. These individuals are believed to have special esoteric knowledge of techniques that will harness spiritual power for particular needs (Mitchell; 1977:60). These individuals range from sorcerers to makers of charms. For instance, an individual who feels threatened by witches may go to a charm-maker and request a protective charm (1977:60).

Adding on to the above, Gbadegesin (1991:120) notes that the Yoruba people have a strong belief in the causal efficacy of a category of the spoken word: incantation. Incantations are verbal utterances with particular tasks of changing the circumstances of the life of a group or an individual for the better or for worse. He further notes that there is actually little or no difference in the principles underlying the working of prayers and the workings of incantation.

Another common way for an African to have a short cut to spiritual bliss is through sacrifices and offerings. Sacrifices can generally be defined as religious acts belonging to worship in which offering is made to God of some material object belonging to the offerer – this offering being consumed in the ceremony, in order to attain, restore, maintain or celebrate friendly relations with the deity. The main purpose of sacrifices is to express faith, repentance, and adoration. A sacrifice is meant is to please the deity and secure his favour (<http://mb-soft.com/believe/txs/sacrific.htm>).

There is a general consensus amongst different scholars that sacrifice is of a great value and that sacrificial practices form the heart of different religious traditions. According to Tylor (1871:324), sacrifice was originally a gift to the gods to secure their favour or to minimise their hostilities. However, to view sacrifices in this way presented a problem for Tylor. He notes that the major fault of this view is that it sees sacrifice as an activity without moral significance (Tylor; 1871:324). It fails to observe that even between the humans, the giving of gifts establishes a personal relation between giver and recipient. Hence, sacrifice needs not be interpreted as efforts solely aimed to circumvent the higher beings.

Contrary to Tylor, Smith (1996:233) argues that the original meaning of sacrifices can be seen clearly in firstling sacrifices of primitive hunters and food gatherers, which are sacrifices of homage and thanks-giving to the Supreme Being to whom everything belongs, and who, therefore, cannot be enriched by gift sacrifices.

According to Mbiti (1969:58), sacrifices and offerings constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African peoples. However, sacrifices and offerings are distinct. So Mbiti goes on to make a distinction between sacrifices and offerings. He thus argues that sacrifices refer to cases where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal, in part or in whole, to God, supernatural beings, spirits and the living dead (1969:58). Offerings on the other hand, refer to the remaining cases which do not involve the killing of an animal, being chiefly the presentation of foodstuffs and other items (1969:58). Mbiti further observes that the materials for sacrifice differ from communities to communities. To him, the African uses almost everything that they can get hold of for sacrifice and offerings to God and other spiritual beings. As a rule, there are so many sacrifices without prayers. Sacrifices and offerings are silent responses; prayers are the verbal responses.

### **6.2.1 Types of Sacrifices**

The Yoruba people believe that there are two categories of sacrifice. According to Awolau (1981:143), these are the feasts, partaken of by the supernatural beings and then by the community of worshippers; and those which are intended to avert calamity and atone for the offences which provoke such sacrifices. For the Yoruba, these two categories are further subdivided into thanksgiving, votive, propitiatory, preventive, and substitutionary and foundation sacrifice.

According to Awoniyi (2015:67), thanksgiving and communion sacrifices, serve as a means of expressing thanks to, and of holding communion with, the supernatural Being or the divinities. The Yoruba sacrifice of thanksgiving is almost always accompanied by feasting. The worshippers and divinity (though the latter is invisible) share a common meal. In this way, a beneficial relationship is established.

Awoniyi (2015:67) notes that votive sacrifice is used as a means of expressing thanks to the supernatural beings, and to fulfil vows. This, in a sense, is a sort of thanksgiving sacrifice. It is a common practice among the Yoruba for devotees of some divinities to go before their divinities to pour out their minds and to promise that if their needs are met, they will give specified offerings in return (2015:67). Vows could be made at any time but especially when a person is under some strain, and when the times seem troublesome and human aid is of no avail. The Yoruba believe that whatever promise is made it must be fulfilled, especially when the promise is made by man or woman before a divinity (Awoniyi; 2015:67). To fail to fulfill the promise is to incur the displeasure of the divinity and to lose the benefit already received and many more.

Another type of sacrifice is the propitiatory sacrifice. For the Africans, the failure of crops, famine, outbreak of plague and disease, protracted illness and sudden death or similar calamities are

attributed to the anger of the gods, the machinations of evil spirits or to some ritual error or defilement committed by men (Awoniyi; 2015:68). Efforts are made to locate the causes of the trouble and to remove them, calm the wrath of the divinities or spirits and win back their favour. The means employed by the Yoruba is the propitiatory sacrifice, that is, a sacrifice that is believed to be capable of propitiating the anger of the gods and spirits and of purity for individuals and the community (2015:68).

Amongst the Yoruba people, sacrifices are done as preventive measures against evil. Awoniyi (2015:68) further notes that it is strongly believed by the Yoruba that as sacrifice removes evils from the community or from an individual, so also does it keep off evil or misfortune. In consequence of this belief, precautionary measures are taken to prevent imminent danger and disaster (2015:68). People get to know the dangers ahead by means of oracles. For example, before a man takes a wife or a woman a husband, before a person undertakes a journey or begins an enterprise, he or she consults the Oracle which gives him or her guidance as to what the future looks like, what dangers lie ahead and what can be done to change unpleasant circumstances (2015:68). Once a person goes by the directive of the Oracle, it is believed, he will easily avoid getting into trouble. But when the order or the directive of the Oracle is defied, the consequences can be grave (2015:68).

Substitutionary sacrifice is the form of sacrifice which has an element of propitiation as well as of prevention and substitution in the sense that something (rather than the person who should have suffered privation, discomfort or even death) is offered to propitiate a thirsty divinity or spirit who plans evil against a person (Awoniyi; 2015:68). The sacrifice also saves the person who offers it from premature death. Last but not least is the foundation sacrifice. In some respect, it is preventive while in another, it is propitiatory, and yet in another, it is thanksgiving (Awolalu, 1981:142-159

& Idowu, 1996:124-128; cited in Awoniyi; 2015:78). It is difficult to classify foundation sacrifice under only one of the categories earlier discussed since it has an element of all these types.

### **6.2.2 Significance of Sacrifices and Offerings**

Thus, the Africans believe they can restore or maintain the power of life through sacrifice and offering. These sacrifices and offerings involve the setting apart of an item, usually associated with human use, for the supernatural powers (1998:181). According to Isizoh (1998:110) sacrifices consisted of an animal or a monetary offering to a particular divinity or ancestor. Magesa (1997:181) further notes that animals and food products are most often used for sacrifice and other forms of dedication:

The mechanism of the sacrifice is explained by the possibility of liberating, transmitting and directing the “vital dynamism” which would be particularly concentrated in the blood, that of animals and of men...One of the present principles is that of substitution as one can recognize in the sacrifices accompanying sacrificial animal(s) [which] are placed one against the other, sometimes with both enveloped in the same sheets, demonstrating in this way that the animal is being immolated in the place of the man and offered in the name to a Spirit (1997:110).

What then is the meaning of these sacrifices and offerings to the African people? According to Magesa (1997:183), the fundamental meaning of sacrifices and offerings lies in their efficacy to restore wholeness. If wrong-doing causes a dangerous separation of the various elements of the universe, sacrifices and offerings aim to re-establish unity and restore balance. In the words of Evan Zuesse (cited in Magesa; 1997:183), the goal of sacrifices and offerings is “to give the

cosmos dynamic continuity”. In other words, the ultimate purpose of these two is to re-establish the pristine, divine order of the universe.

For Mbiti (1969:59), sacrifices and offerings are made in order to maintain the ontological balance between God and humans, the spirits and humans, the departed and the living. For Harry Sawyer, sacrifices are also performed to restore health and prevent sickness. The sacrifices “are intended to avert failure in business, or some other form of ill-fortune attributed to the influence of some evil spirit, but more often to witchcraft” (1975:59). Mbiti (1969:59) further notes that when this balance is upset, people experience misfortune and suffering, or fear that these will strike them. The making of sacrifices and offerings on the other hand, is also a psychological device to restore this ontological balance (1969:59). Mbiti goes on to argue that sacrifices can be understood as a means by which people attempt to restore or maintain good relations between themselves, the community, God, ancestors, and the cosmos.

Acts and occasions of making and renewing contact between God and man, the spirits and man. When they are directed to the departed, they are a symbol of fellowship, a recognition that the departed are still members of their human families, and tokens of respect and remembrance of the departed (Mbiti; 1970:179).

To augment Mbiti’s argument, Idowu (1994:120) describes sacrifice in African traditional religion thus: “The basic purpose of sacrifice is right relationship between a person and the Deity; the more urgent the need for the maintenance or restoration of that relationship, the higher the condition man is prepared to fulfil.”

Further to this, traditional Africans believe that sacrifices are capable of moving the hand of God and activating God’s functionaries, for;

Sacrifices are offered to a spirit...who is supposed to be more powerful than human beings in the natural state. Sometimes sacrifices are offered to ancestors who, now spirits, are more powerful than the living, and in a few rare instances to Supreme God.

In short, sacrifices and offerings are believed to be the means of communication between the visible and the invisible worlds.

From the above discussion by different scholars, sacrifice can be summarised as serving the following purposes:

- Expressing gratitude to the spiritual beings;
- Fulfilling a vow;
- Establishing a communion between humans and the spiritual beings;
- Averting the anger of the divinities and spirits;
- Warding off the attack and evil machinations of enemies
- Purifying a person or a community when a taboo has been broken or sin committed;
- Preventing or expelling epidemics; and
- Strengthening the worshippers against malign influences.

However, as noted above, the Africans seem to abhor the idea of the absolute freedom as well as bondage of human beings. In other words, a person's freedom is in his free capacity to choose to work with the god and nature or not. The former leads to a person's successful living, while the latter leads to a person's peril. Evil or unsuccessful living is not caused by the gods but by human beings through the negative manipulation of the forces in nature and the ambivalent nature of the gods.



Following the discussion above, the agent who receives his destiny from God is subjected both to fate and freedom. Understood this way, the agent is restricted by his or her destiny but still remains the architect of his own future. Thus, there is no contradiction in the African thought system to hold to the view that destiny is both alterable and unalterable. In other words, viewed as given to the individual by a Supreme Being, it is unalterable and viewed as a resource to be exploited, it is alterable. Thus, by analysing the Akan and Yoruba concepts of destiny, it becomes highly convincing that they subscribe to soft-determinism. However, to argue for the African concept of destiny as implying soft-determinism can attract some criticism. The apparent criticism that the research might face is that soft-determinism has been used already to try and bridge the gap between libertarianism and hard determinism.

However, to circumvent this challenge it is of paramount importance at this stage to show the difference between the Western conception of soft-determinism and the one that this research is advocating. The former accepts the view that human actions, like other events are determined. However, this research argues for a soft-deterministic view which is hinged on the fact that there is a distinction between human actions and events. In other words, it is the events in the African physical world that are subject to causal laws, whereas the individual's action or will is not determined. Further to this, agent theorists as noted earlier on added agent causation to the two views in the debate on freewill, that is, that event is either the necessary outcome of previous causes or an uncaused, random event that simply happens. Though it sounds plausible that later on they acknowledged agent causation, there is still need to incorporate another causal entity, that is, agentic causality. Agentic causality, here, has to do with non-physical agents and their impact on human freedom.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion has revealed that some Africans understand the concept of destiny as unalterable and others as alterable. However, whichever view one is to go by, it should be borne in mind that the concept of destiny has serious implications on human freedom. This chapter carefully analysed the concept and revealed that there are elements of both freewill and determinism in the African conception of destiny. That being the case, the chapter argued that the African people are soft-determinists who embrace both determinism and freewill not as incompatible views, but as views that can co-exist. The Africans, however, believe that there is an interconnectedness of the visible and the invisible world. The spirits in the non-physical realm can be manipulated by individuals for their benefit or to cause harm to their enemies.

As has been indicated that witches and sorcerers can change one's fortune through appealing to malevolent spirits, it goes without saying that destiny can be altered for better or for worse. Furthermore, the fact that people pray and offer sacrifices and offerings is another way of showing that the existence of human beings is purposeful. There would be no need of sacrifices if they were not able to bring about fruitful results to participants. The chapter also looked at the type of sacrifices that Africans can use to manipulate those in the spiritual realm for their own benefit. It went on to look at the significance of these sacrifices and offerings. In the final analysis, the chapter argued for destiny as a case of soft-determinism.

## **General Conclusion**

The central argument in the thesis is that when human beings look at their lives they seem to be faced with two issues: on the one hand, they seem to be in control of their lives and are capable of making choices. However on the other hand, their choices seem to be determined by nature. This created a problem in philosophy as to whether a person can be held morally accountable for his or her actions if their lives were caused. This led to the rise of three schools of thought, which are, the hard determinists, libertarians and compatibilists. In Chapter 1, the study noted that there are several versions of hard determinism. In light of this, theological, psychological, physical, ethical and logical versions were discussed. What is of paramount importance about these versions is that they all uphold the principle of universal causation which holds that for everything that happens there is a cause, the underlying assumption of universal causation being that there is a necessary connection between cause and effect. Various Western philosophers came up with different understandings of the principle of causation. The thesis traced the views of different philosophers from the pre-Socratic, through the medieval period to the modern period. However, it has been noted that the principle of causality is not foolproof and received criticism from such philosophers as David Hume and Isaac Newton.

After exhausting the arguments proffered for and against hard determinism, the discussion looked at the libertarian argument, which is a direct attack on hard determinism. As noted above, libertarians negate the determinists' view that every event has a cause, arguing that there are some events which are uncaused. Under libertarianism, three theories were discussed. These are indeterminism, which accepts determinism in all aspects of nature but not in the human realm; agency theory, which distinguishes event and agent causation; radical existentialism, which is the extreme of libertarianism, and holds human freedom even in some cases where other libertarians

would find it difficult to argue for free will. Last but not least are agency theories. Agency theories, which are the framework of this study, reject both determinism and indeterminism. As indicated earlier on, these theories believe that there must be a distinction between event and agent causation, the former being events understood as being brought about by natural forces, whereas the latter are results of events brought about by the free action of an agent. After a careful examination of the libertarian view of freedom, the discussion unravelled some of the pros and cons of the theory. However, it was also noted that on the one hand of the freedom and determinism debate, there is determinism which emphasises causation of human acts to the exclusion of freewill. On the other hand, there are libertarian theories which emphasise freedom of human acts to the exclusion of determinism. The result of the conflict between these two is that the theories are mutually exclusive, a position called incompatibilism. However, other philosophers known as the compatibilists believe that these two can co-exist by holding the view that every event has a cause and that at least some human choices are free. By pushing forward the need to distinguish events from acts compatibilists somehow managed to strike a balance between the determinists and the libertarians. However, it has been argued that this analysis of the problem leaves a lot to be desired since it fails to account for some cultures that do not end at event and agent causation but move beyond these two to recognise supernatural and mystical powers as capable of influencing activities in the physical world. This led to the discussion of the concept of causation as it is understood by the Africans.

The second chapter focused on how the concept of causation, which is the founding principle of determinism, is understood by the Africans. It was revealed that the Africans believe in the principle of causality. The chapter first discussed the issue of whether we can talk of African metaphysics. After clearing the ground by establishing that it is rational and justified to talk about

African metaphysics just like we can talk of Western metaphysics, the notion of chance happenings as we have it in the West was discussed. It was, however, noted that in African metaphysics the notion of chance has no place. For the Africans, then, the world is purposeful and there is no room for chance occurrences. The Africans believe in both supernatural and empirical causation, though the former is of more importance to them.

Generally, as highlighted in the chapter, the Africans believe that there are events that can be explained by tracing them to empirical causation. Natural occurrences such as the flooding of the river, bushfire, drought and other natural occurrences can be explained by appealing to empirical, scientific, and non-supernaturalistic causes. As indicated, this type of causation is not significant in explaining phenomena between certain events in the African worldview. Also there are events that are brought about by spiritual agents. Under supernatural causation, it was indicated that there is an interconnected relationship between the physical and spiritual realms. The invisible world, is thus not separate from the physical world such that entities in the spiritual realm can influence activities of inhabitants of the physical world. In light of this, these entities are understood to be ranked in a hierarchy depending on the forces they have. The entity with the greatest force, the Supreme Being, is at the apex of the hierarchy and the divinities, ancestors, spirits, the human beings and inanimate things in their descending order. In this set up, the people believe in forces and powers which affect human behaviour in important ways. The discussion then addressed the question of whether the people's belief in supernatural causation is consistent with human freedom. The research answers this question in the affirmative. It is possible to hold on to the belief in supernatural and mystical causation and to assert human freedom. This is so because, as indicated in the body of the thesis, the metaphysical entities influence activities in the physical world, whereas the individual's action is undetermined. Thus it is the conviction of the research

that even in the face of mystical and supernatural causation, an individual still possess freedom which is sufficient to hold them accountable for their actions.

The third chapter looked at the Akan worldview. But before discussing the Akan people's conception of reality, the thesis first of all gave a general description of what Africa is and its geographical location since it is the continent that harbours the two ethnic groups that inform the research. In light of this, it proceeded to give a general overview of the specific country that harbours the Akan ethnic group, Ghana. An overview of the ethnic groups that are in the country was given, singling out the Akan people as the group that informs this research. In light of this, the research proceeded to look at the Akan people of Ghana and their history. Furthermore, an attempt was made to discuss what a people's worldview in general means and in particular what comprises the Akan worldview. It was noted that a people's worldview is the way that the people view reality. To this effect, a people's worldview cannot be separated from their religion and culture.

In light of this, the research moved to discuss the Akan religio-cultural views since these are the cornerstones of their worldview. Religion, following Mbiti, is believed to permeate every facet of the African individual's life. Culture, which is inseparable from religion, influences how the Akan people view reality. Under cultural beliefs, the research noted that most Akan people still subscribe to matrilineality. This belief in matrilineality by the Akan people prompted the discussion of the metaphysical constituent parts of a person. The purpose of the discussion of these constituent parts was to try and understand one of the constituent parts, *okra*, which the Akans believe to be the bearer of destiny. In unravelling the available literature on *okra*, it was observed that the two scholars who contributed to the discussion on the metaphysical concept of person did not agree on whether it should be seen as quasi-physical or spiritual. Thus, Wiredu and Gyekye are at

loggerheads where it pertains the nature of *okra*. It was shown that Wiredu holds the belief that *okra* is quasi-physical thereby avoiding the philosophical problems associated with dualism. In arguing that it is immaterial Gyekye entangled himself with the problems that Descartes faced. After a careful analysis of the views of these two philosophers, the research finds Wiredu's characterisation of *okra* as more appealing than that of Gyekye. After the discussion on the nature of *okra* the research considered the role that *okra* plays in the Akan concept of destiny.

In the fourth chapter, the research focused on the Yoruba worldview. An overview of Nigeria was given since it the country of origin of the Yoruba people. There are several ethnic groups in Nigeria, with the Yoruba comprising the largest group in the country. The Yoruba share a common language, culture and myth of origin. A general discussion of the origins of these people was given. These people, as indicated, are believed to have religious and cultural views which are passed from generation to generation, which inform their worldview. These views are believed also to have been passed on in the form of mythical legends, fables, poetry and folktales.

This prompted the research to look at the status of myths with regard to philosophy. It was argued in this research that although other scholars might have argued that myths are irrational and unphilosophical, the Africans (and this research) believe that there are elements of philosophical worth in these myths. Thus, after showing that from myths we can derive something of philosophical worth, the research proceeded to look at the Yoruba myth of creation of the universe and the human beings. From this myth, it was indicated that the ontological make up of a person can be derived. Thus, in light of this, there are scholars who hold that a person is made up of three elements, which are, the *emi*, *ara*, and *ori*. Others believe that there is need to add another element to these three to make them four. As to which is the fourth element scholars hold variant views, with some advocating for *okan* and others of *ese*. Although there are variations on which one is

the fourth element, it was argued that all scholars who wrote on the Yoruba concept of person do stand on common ground on the view that a person is composed of physical and non-physical constituent parts. The research then discussed the role that *ori*, one of the constituent parts of person, plays in human destiny. In the discussion of *ori* as a bearer of destiny, it was shown that scholars also do not agree on the source of *ori*. Some believe that it is chosen from *Ajala* and others believe that it is received from *Oludumare*. The chapter concluded by drawing similarities and differences between the Akan and Yoruba metaphysical components of person.

In the fifth chapter, the research looked at the African concept of destiny as presented by Gyekye, Wiredu and Gbadegesin. These three philosophers represent the Akan and the Yoruba people's understanding of the concept. However, the chapter first looked at the concept of predestination or destiny as we have it in Western scholarship. The chapter revealed that predestination as discussed in the Western discourse is otherworldly, whereas for the Africans destiny is understood to be this worldly. It was argued that these disparities between the African and Western understanding have necessitated the need to understand how the Africans understand the concept. There is a tendency in the Western literature to associate predestination with fatalism as evidenced in the Oedipus complex. However, in African philosophy there are two schools of thought on whether destiny attests to fate or freedom. But before exploring the views of these schools of thought, the research first discussed the foundation of the African belief in destiny, which is the *Odu* Corpus myth of the creation of human beings. It went on to problematise the African understanding of destiny. Under this section, the research discussed such controversial issues in the concept of destiny such as the source of the individual's destiny. Here the discussion centred on whose choice or imposition predetermines a person's destiny. Further to this, the section also discussed another controversial issue in human destiny that is, the manner in which an individual receives or chooses his destiny.



Finally, drawing from the manner in which one receives, is the question of whether this destiny is alterable or unalterable.

In light of the three problems above, the chapter noted that for both the Akan and the Yoruba people, destiny is received from a Supreme Being. What scholars do not agree on is whether this destiny is imposed on the individual or he can choose his destiny. On the one hand, there are scholars such as Gyekye who believe that if destiny is received from the Supreme Being then it cannot be altered, thus it becomes the blueprint of an individual's life. On the other hand, there are scholars such as Gbadegesin who believe that even though destiny is received from the Supreme Being, it can still be altered, thus it is not a cut and dried phenomenon. Gyekye and his followers who believe that destiny received from God is always good and cannot be altered seem to attest to the doctrine of determinism. And Gbadegesin and his followers who believe that an individual can change his destiny for better or worse seem to support the libertarian view that individuals possess metaphysical freedom. These variations in the African understanding of destiny vis-à-vis freedom and determinism have prompted the discussion in the succeeding chapter which focused on the middle way between those who argue for destiny as alterable and destiny as unalterable.

The sixth chapter argued for an understanding of the concept of destiny in Africa as attesting to soft-determinism. The chapter demonstrated that even those scholars such as Gyekye who argued that destiny is unalterable still would not want to be associated with determinism. This is why he is seen as also arguing that destiny speaks to the broad outline of the individual's life (determined) and not the minute details of the individual's life (freedom). The chapter notes that this is as far as Gyekye goes in his explanation of human freedom. He however, does not tell us which aspects of destiny are determined and which ones are not. However, it is the conviction of this study that Gyekye should have pushed his argument to specify that it is the events and not the human actions

which are determined by previous causes. In this regard the chapter observed that the African concept of destiny does not attest to determinism and neither does it attest to metaphysical freedom. Thus, it was shown that it attests to soft-determinism, which is the view that even though the circumstances surrounding the individual's life (events), the individual's will (action) is still undetermined. In this sense there is a difference between being influenced by previous causes and being totally determined by them. Influences can only create certain tendencies, but their outcome is neither inevitable nor perfectly predictable. With these observations, the research recommends for the inclusion of the African views of destiny in the freewill–determinism debate in order for the debate to have an adequate representation of other cultural beliefs.

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