

# ***Ibi: An Examination of the Yoruba Traditional- Existentialist Conception of Evil***

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### **Abstract**

The problem of evil is of universal concern to humankind. Various attempts have been made to account for it in Western philosophy as well as in world religions such as Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion. This article examines the Yoruba existentialist attitude to the problem of evil. Using the Yoruba oral tradition, it posits that for the Yoruba evil is the creation of each individual, so that God cannot be blamed for its existence. I conclude the article with my own personal view that given the individual as a carrier of evil seed, the best existential outlook is to be ready to face, with stoic courage, whatever life brings one's way.

### **Key Words**

*Ibi*, Yoruba, Traditional-Existentialist, Evil

### **Introduction**

One of the distinguishing features of African philosophy is its essentially existential and humanistic character. In any aspect of discourse, African concern is often influenced by a desire to teach humans how to approach concrete life issues, and not in merely analyzing them for a detached academic purpose. This explains why such otherwise philosophically insignificant objects, such as head (*ori*), legs (*ese*), or intestines (*ifun*), to mention but a few, would make fertile areas of enquiry in African philosophy, even though such would be more appropriate for biological analyses in Western scholarship. Through an in-depth examination of the concepts associated with these body parts, Africans are able to demonstrate their philosophical (often metaphysical) relevance to the concrete existence of individual persons. This is the major difference between African and Western philosophy.

The concept of *ibi* is one of such philosophically significant terms in the Yoruba analysis of the human condition. *Ibi*, in the Yoruba language, is an ambiguous term. It could mean at least three things: (1) a place, as in *ibi a gbe bi 'ni* (a place of one's birth); (2) evil, as in *Oluwa ya wa ya ibi* (may God separate us from evil) and (3) afterbirth (also called placenta),

as in *a o ni ri ohun gbe sonu bi o se ibi omo* (may we not find a worthless thing to throw away except the placenta of a baby). Whereas the first meaning can be dispensed with on the ground that it is not well suitable for a philosophical analysis, the remaining two launch us into one of the perennial problems in traditional metaphysics, that is, the problem of evil. Of the two, namely, *ibi* as evil and *ibi* as afterbirth, it is the latter that expresses the Yoruba traditional-existentialist attitude to the problem of evil. It portrays evil not only as inextricable from the human life, but also as intertwining with good, and thus inseparable from it. The aim of the present article is to explore this view vis-à-vis the prevalent view in Western philosophical literature. It also seeks to determine whether or not the traditional Yoruba attitude can be used to resolve the challenge posed by the existence of evil, especially to the existence of an all-knowing and all-powerful God.

The article, beside its introduction, is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the problem of evil as has been articulated by several scholars in the fields of metaphysics and philosophy of religion. In the second section, the problem of evil is given an existentialist explanation, with special reference to the Yoruba existentialist outlook. It is concluded in the third section that evil is a necessary part of the individual's life, and hence inseparable from it.

### **The Problem of Evil: a Review**

The problem of evil has been extensively debated in western philosophical and theological literature. The problem arose in western scholarship because of the doubt that allegedly surrounds the existence of God, who is believed to be omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. The problem probably never started until some thinkers (philosophers and non-philosophers) began to perceive some sort of incompatibility between these attributes of the Supreme Being (God) and the existence of evil in the world. They argued that a God with these attributes and evil in nature are strange bedfellows. As Swinburne (1987, 174) observed, "the problem of evil is then often stated as the problem whether the existence of God is compatible with the existence of evil." The existence of evil thus becomes a viable tool in the hands of atheists and agnostics against the existence of God.

Two kinds of evil are often contrasted, namely, natural evil and moral evil. Also called physical evil, natural evil has been classified as those occurrences in the physical world that have harmful effects on humankind: "It includes those terrible events that occur in nature of

their own accord, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, natural diseases, and so on, that cause suffering to man and, in lesser degree, animals” (Pojman 1987, 152). Moral evil, on the other hand, covers all undesirable things for which human beings are responsible, including strife, theft, promise breaking, lying, murder, conspiracy and other such human-generated ill acts, which make life less ideal for human habitation. To these two forms of evil, Swinburne (1987, 175) has added mental evil and state evil. In the class of mental evil are painful emotions, which do not involve pain in the literal sense of the word - for example, feelings of loss, failure or frustration, whereas in the class of state evil are certain undesirable states of affairs, mainly states of men’s minds, which do not involve suffering. For example, there are the states of mind of hatred and envy; and such states of the world as rubbish tipped over a beauty spot (Swinburne 1987, 175).

Sometimes, however, the line between natural and moral evil is so thin that differentiating them becomes problematic. As John Hick (1993, 45) contends, “in practice it is often impossible to trace a boundary between the sufferings that result from human wickedness and folly and that which befalls humanity from without; both are inextricably mingled in our experience.” This often occurs especially when natural evil arises as a product of what humans do, or fail to do. Examples of this can be found in cases such as “when flooding results in loss of human life due to poor planning or shoddy construction of buildings” (Fasiku 2010, 73); when overeating results in constipation, and when environment-unfriendly manufacturing practices result in the incidences of acid rain, ozone layer depletion and oil spillage, to mention but a few of such instances. Actually, there is a sense in which most of the contemporary natural evils are products of humankind’s over-utilization of natural resources. This further diminishes the thin boundary between natural and moral evil.

Theistic arguments in reference to the problem of evil have been largely concerned with exonerating God from the accusation of being the source of evil or, if He is not, of being unable to rid the world of it. Defenders of theism, in order to avoid the obvious implication that God created evil, which manifestly contradicts God’s perfect goodness, have insisted that the existence of evil is mainly due to human freedom. This move has been dubbed the free-will defence of theism. It should be noted that the free-will defence is more effective in the treatment of moral evil than other kinds of evil. Human freedom, conceived in a liberal sense, makes human beings able to sometimes choose to do good and other times to do evil - it is the freedom to act rightly as well as wrongly. Having created them once and for all with

freedom of the will, God does not have the power to force humans to be committed to doing only good.

Free-will defence has received a wide range of acceptance, especially amongst Christian scholars. Aquinas (2003), Hick (1993), Plantinga (1974), and Swinburne (1977) are among the supporters of the free-will defence. However, in spite of the apparent effort of these thinkers, the free-will defence has remained at best an escapist argument, in that it only addresses moral evil without a corresponding effort to account for natural or physical evil. When the question of the source of natural evil is posed, the free-will proponent seems to run into difficulties. The remark by Hick (1993, 39) that natural evil seems “to be built into the very structure of our world” does little or nothing to address the issue as long as the world is believed to be created by God. Besides, to argue, as did the so called process theologians (Whitehead 1978; Mesle 1993), that through natural evil, man’s knowledge of his environment is enhanced and his domineering power over nature increased, raises the question whether or not God really needs these natural disasters to enable human beings fulfil the divine mandate to “replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1: 28).

In spite of the acclaimed logical non-compatibility of the existence of evil with that of God, Fasiku (2010, 68) has recently made a bold claim that “for a complete characterisation of God, evil should be part of His defining features.” This novel stance implies an ultimate trivialisation of the problem of evil, for the problem is generated, in the first place, by the alleged logical incompatibility of the existence of evil in the light of the nature of God. Once this logical hurdle is removed or shown to be unnecessary, the problem automatically disappears. Fasiku (2010) claims to have removed this logical hurdle by, instead of separating evil from the nature of God, making it an essential feature of Him. This seems to be the implication of the fact that His omnipotence includes the power for self-will: the power whether to act or not. Fasiku argues:

If he decides to act in our favour, and he does what we want, we describe his action as good, when he is not willing, and he acts against our will, we label his action as evil. Since the decision to act, and not, is God’s, and what we label as good and evil are God’s action and inaction, deriving from his power of decision, it follows that God is the author of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (Fasiku 2010, 75).

It is evident from the quotation above that the author is a relativist as far as the problem of evil is concerned. Good and evil, from a relativist perspective, are products of local culture,

custom or prejudice. They are, in other words, expressions of preference and dislike, favour and aversion, etc.

The relativist position as regards the problem of evil can be advanced from another angle, namely, by asserting that what is evil to one may be good to another. This seems to be the implication of the Yoruba saying that *ti t'enikan ko ba baje, t'enikan ko le dara* (if it doesn't go bad for someone, it cannot go well with another). In Nigeria, while the family of the late Musa Yar'adua mourned the premature death of their son, father and husband, some members of Goodluck Jonathan's family may have thrown a secret party at their son's assumption of presidential duties. Nelson Mandela earned immortality in South African history for facing the evil of twenty-seven years behind bars. Other examples abound.

Furthermore, a smaller evil could be viewed as a way of forestalling a greater evil. In this regard Yardan writes:

A good person at times cannot avoid bringing about a genuine evil. A teacher at times allows his students to fail as he fulfils his responsibility to show them the ideal and how far they are from it. The high rates of failure in medical school are the result of measures taken to insure that incompetent doctors do not harm the public. The examiner who fails an airline pilot who is not physically fit or up till date [sic] on the plane he is flying brings about an evil, but he is doing his job, protecting us from greater evil (Yardan 2001, 43).

The considerations above seem to give credence to the claim that nothing is intrinsically evil. It all depends on the angle from which one is looking at it. The world has become so intricate and integrated that one cannot really delineate between good and evil. Doctors and other medical workers are often highly priced and respected members of human societies. Parents spend fortunes to get their children into medical schools. It appears that this profession gets its social significance through the existence of multifarious diseases, infections, ailments and even the possibility of death. Were human physiology made perfect from the outset, the relevance of medicine and its numerous branches would probably not have arisen. The same applies to the legal profession, which would have been significantly worthless were there no possibility of human conflicts and crime. Teachers are necessary to combat the evil of ignorance, consequent upon the imperfection of human knowledge. Other sectors of human endeavour are not in any way exempted from this good-evil intermingling.

## The Yoruba Existentialist Attitude to Evil

It seems that the conception of the Yoruba term *ibi* by Balogun (2009) is appropriate for our present purpose. According to him, “the Yoruba word for evil, *ibi*, denotes something that is not good, that is, absence of good or the corruption of goodness” (Balogun 2009, 1). *Ibi* is something undesirable, unfavourable and uncomfortable - something that makes life less than its ideal. Anything that impedes the achievement of goals, ideals, happiness or general well-being may be regarded as *ibi* (evil). Balogun (2009) illustrates this as follows:

For instance, if a nursing mother has just lost her baby, the Yoruba will not hesitate to regard such loss as evil (*ibi*) because it will definitely bring sorrow to the mother and to the entire family, and if such occurrence is persistent in a family, the Yoruba would exclaim *Olorun a dawo ibi duro* (God will put an end to evil). Furthermore, if a person has just been involved in a fatal accident [*sic*] that leads to the amputation of his/her hands or legs, such an accident, to the Yoruba, entails some evil because of the pain that the person will suffer. In other words, the Yoruba see evil as a misfortune (Balogun 2009, 1-2).

The foregoing exposition suggests that the Yoruba conception of *ibi* is not significantly different from the Western view of evil inasmuch as it represents everything negative - all that stands in humankind’s way to the realisation of happiness.

Nevertheless, the conception of the existence of evil as incompatible with the reality of God’s existence, prevalent in the west, is practically foreign to traditional Yoruba thinking. Except for a few Western-influenced contemporary radical thinkers, there has been almost no attempt by any Yoruba scholar to deny God’s existence. This may mean that the existence of God is an incontestable fact among the Yoruba. Like other major cultural groups in Africa, the Yoruba believe that the existence of God is a self-evident truth.

From the Yoruba existentialist perspective, *ibi* is inextricably woven into each individual’s life. This is expressed in the Yoruba saying that *t’ibi t’ire la da’le aye* (The universe was created as a mixture of evil and good). The origin of this saying can be traced to the event of the individual’s birth. When a woman is undergoing labour, two things are expected: *omo* (the baby) and *ibi omo* (the baby’s after-birth or placenta). *Ibi omo* is also referred to as *ikeji omo* (baby’s second) or *alabarin omo* (baby’s company). According to Balogun (2009, 2), “it is instructive to note that in Yoruba thought, no woman would be congratulated for [*sic*] giving birth to a baby until the placenta which is translated as *ibi* or *ekeji omo* has come out.” This implies that a successful delivery is one in which both the baby and its *ibi* are successfully delivered.

Biologically speaking, the human placenta constitutes a two-way link between the mother and her foetus during conception and gestation, and this link ends when the pregnancy is carried to term. It is the lifeline of the foetus, for it is through it that liquid-food and other life-sustaining elements are transferred from the mother to the unborn child. It also serves as an outlet for the waste products generated by the foetus by passing it to the mother's system. As the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2010) states, "Placenta mediates the metabolic exchanges of the developing individual through an intimate association of embryonic tissues and of certain uterine tissues, serving the functions of nutrition, respiration, and excretion."

It should be noted that for the Yoruba, even the physical separation of the *ibi* and the baby at birth does not remove the spiritual bond already established between them at conception. This explains why as soon as a baby is born, the father is called upon to carry the *ibi* to a proper disposal. The most popular and perhaps the best way of disposing *ibi* among the Yoruba is by burying it; and probably to forestall a casual disposal, it is usually done on the day a baby is born. Thus the Yoruba say, *ojo ta ba r'ibi n'ibi n'wole* (it is the day we see *ibi* [placenta] that it enters into the ground). It is believed that an improperly disposed human placenta has a negative impact on the child's future, among other harmful consequences. For example, the Yoruba believe that when a baby's placenta is carelessly kept and is thus allowed to be eaten up by a dog, this may result in the child becoming promiscuous in his or her adulthood. It is also the recognition of this spiritual bond that motivates the Yoruba to protect their placenta jealously lest it falls into the wrong hands and is used for evil purposes.

The Yoruba use the spiritual bond between the foetus and its *ibi* (placenta) to establish an inextricable relationship between the individual human being and *ibi* (evil). They believe that evil is an indispensable part of each person's life. A life entirely spent in good, with no possibility of evil, is impossible within the Yoruba existentialism. The good-evil dichotomy popular in Western scholarship is therefore incompatible with the Yoruba conception of these notions. Rather than being viewed as incompatible, good and evil are seen as necessary complements for a meaningful life: an appropriate measure of good and evil makes a fulfilled life. This outlook is expressed in the *Odu Ifa Irosun Wori*, a verse in *Ifa corpus*,<sup>1</sup> as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> *Ifa* is a system of divination among the Yoruba of Nigeria. It is believed to have the intellectual ability to unravel secrets behind otherwise unknown occurrences, as well as being able to predict future happenings. In addition, *Ifa* is renowned for its wisdom and moral guidance encapsulated in principles for leading a flawless



*Bi a je adun titi lai je ikoro die sii,  
Aye a maa sun nii je,  
Eniti ko je iponju ri,  
Ko mo adun oro.  
A difa fun awon agbe tin wipe:  
Gbogbo igba aye iba je kiki ojo  
Aye iba dun aduntan.  
Won ni awon a rubo  
Ki Orunmila jowo yee gba won.  
Orunmila ni ki won wa rubo nitori iwere won.  
Ati pe ki aye le maa wa bi Oduduwa did a aye si,  
Igba ojo ati igba erun ko ma tase.  
Won ko rubo.  
Orunmila wa je ki ojo ro pupo li odun naa titi.  
A ko fi ri oorun rara.  
Eniyan beresi s'okunrun  
Won si ku pupo ni odun naa.  
Ohun ogbin ati beebee ko dara.  
Won pada wa rubo pelu ebe.  
Orunmila ni: eru goke.  
Ebo l'o sodi mejii.*

[If we continually tasted sweetness without tasting a little bitterness also,  
Life would be dull.

One who has never experienced the hardship of adversity,  
Does not really know the pleasure of prosperity.  
This was the teaching of *Ifa* for a group of farmers,  
Who said that if all seasons were just the rainy season,  
The world would be immeasurably pleasant.  
They said they would offer sacrifice  
So that Orunmila<sup>2</sup> might graciously help them.  
Orunmila said that they instead sacrifice because of their foolishness,  
And that the world should remain as Oduduwa has created it,  
So that the rainy season and dry season will not fail to come.  
They would not sacrifice.  
Orunmila then allowed the rain to pour down continuously that year,  
So that there was not even a glimpse of the sun.  
People began to become ill,  
And many of them died that year.  
Also crops and the like did not fare well.  
The people returned to sacrifice and pray.  
Orunmila said to them: ashes rise;

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life on earth. More information on the Yoruba system of divination can be found in Wande Abimbola's *Ifa Divination Poetry*, New York: Nok Publishers Ltd., 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Orunmila is the Yoruba god of divination. He is reputed to be the god of wisdom. It should be noted that Orunmila is a proper name, and hence it lacks direct translation in English or any other language outside the Yoruba language.

The sacrifice must be doubled (Karenga 1999, 241-244).

In the quotation above, the Yoruba belief in the necessary intermingling of good and evil is sufficiently demonstrated. The quotation also expresses the Yoruba conviction that nothing is wholly good or wholly evil. They will say: *ire wa ninu ibi; ibi wa ninu ire* (there is a measure of good in evil and there is also a measure of evil in good.) This point is well articulated in *Odu Ifa Iwori Ose* (a verse in *ifa* literary corpus) which reads thus:

*Ise kii de ki o ma mu ire re bo ni.*

*T'ibi t'ire eji wapo.*

*A difa fun "Owo-kosi-eniyan-ko-sunwon."*

*Won ni; oju ti o ri ise, ki o ma bara je,*

*Ki o toju oruko rere re.*

*Adun ni gbeyin ewuro.*

*Won ni ki o rubo.*

*Ki ise le doro fun un si.*

[Adversity does not come without bringing its good aspects to us.

That which is evil and that which is good come together.

This is the teaching of *Ifa* for one called "The-lack-of-money-disables-a-person."

They said: one who experiences adversity should not lose hope,

And that she should maintain her good name.

For the sweetness of the bitter leaf comes after its transformation through cooking.

They said she should provide sacrifice,

So that adversity can likewise be turned into prosperity for her] (Karenga 1999, 264-265).

Arising from the foregoing is also the issue of the imperfection of human judgment as to what is good and what is evil. In other words, some things appear evil, but in reality they are good. It is in recognition of this that the Yoruba say *ti Olorun ba n se ire, a lo n se'bi* (when God is doing good, we often think that He is doing evil). The root of this saying is perhaps traceable to the acknowledgement of the poverty and partiality of human perception and judgment. Only God has exhaustive knowledge of things and situations, hence He is described as *Oba to ri ohun t'enikan ko ri; Oba to mo ohun t'enikan ko mo* (a King that sees that which others don't see; a King that knows that which none knows). When a situation arises which tempts us to doubt God's existence, such as the occurrence of a premature death or an accident, we often hear such consolatory remarks as *ewe kan ko ni bo l'ara igi ki Olorun ma mo si* (a leaf will not fall off its mother-tree without God's knowledge of it). The word 'knowledge' is

used here in the sense in which it refers to ‘approval’; hence the saying is properly translated as “nothing happens without God’s approval of it.”

The question of whether God is responsible for evil thus becomes inevitable within the Yoruba existential understanding of evil. Various Yoruba scholars (among them Idowu 1962; Dopamu 2000; Oluwole 1995; Balogun 2009) have extensively debated this question. For example, Balogun (2009, 5-6), agreeing with Sogolo (1983) and Oluwole (1995) presents a picture of God who, largely limited, is neither omnipotent nor omni-benevolent, and to whom the creation of heaven and earth is never credited. The consequence of this is that the Yoruba God, unlike the Christian God, is not an all-good being. This re-conceptualization of the Yoruba God is perhaps thought necessary to resolve the puzzle of incompatibility between an all-good God and the reality of evil in the world. It should be emphasised that it is this perceived incompatibility that brought about the intractable problem of evil in Western scholarship.

Denying God certain attributes in order to make him less guilty of creating the world infested with so many evils, or making evil a part of him so he can be made compatible with the existence of evil, is what can be referred to as “a cheap solution” to the problem of evil. God, whether in Africa or elsewhere, is all-powerful, all knowing, and all-good; and he is the creator of heaven and earth. According to Mbiti (1969, 29), “the minimal and fundamental idea about God is found in all African societies ... everybody knows of God’s existence almost by instinct and even children know Him.” Bolaji Idowu (1962), in his famed *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, highlights the attributes of the Yoruba God, with little or no significant difference from the Christian or Islamic God. Although *Olodumare* is responsible for the creation of heaven and earth, he cannot be held responsible, within the Yoruba worldview, for the existence of evil because, as the saying goes, *Olorun ko s’ebi; rere lo mi se* (The Lord never does evil, only good). The question then is, if God does no evil, who does?

In Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, the prevalence of evil in the world has been blamed on the agency of Satan, a primordial being who allegedly revolted against God and was consequently cast into the world as a deserving punishment. Given the influence of the two

religions on contemporary Yoruba minds, one is tempted to translate Satan as *Esu*<sup>3</sup>. However, this is an error of translation probably originating from confusing *Esu* with *Satani* (Satan). Whereas *Esu* is an indigenous divinity in the Yoruba cosmogony, *Satani* is a foreign character introduced into the Yoruba religious vocabulary through Christianity and Islam. He, like Jesus or Mohammed, has no precise equivalent in the Yoruba language and religious thought.

There is no gainsaying the fact that *Esu* is similar to Satan in some significant respects. According to Dopamu (2000, 42), “it is true that *Esu* possesses many Satan’s qualities in having influence over the world of men and women, in his domination of lives of many people, and in his desire to do evil, to bring evil, to act evil, to cause evil, to instigate evil, to behave evil, to encourage evil.” Spelling out the difference between Satan and *Esu*, however, Dopamu writes further:

But *Esu* differs from the Biblical or Islamic Satan in not having a hell, or not being a fallen angel, in not being directly opposed to God, in not being responsible for the fall of man, in having some good element in him and in not commanding other divinities to do evil under his tutelage (Dopamu 2000, 42).

The probable conclusion from the foregoing discussion is that, unlike in the Christian and Islamic traditions, the Yoruba do not have an all-evil being to which one can wholly attribute evil. Nevertheless, evil exists in the world. The problem then is how does one account for it?

To this question, one might seek an explanation in the possibility of each individual bringing to the world his or her own evil. This corroborates the stance of Sartre (1994, 390) that puts “every man in possession of himself as he is and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his shoulders.” In discussing the problem of evil, scholars have often taken it for granted that things are either good or evil based on the individual’s personal encounter with them. Evil does not exist in a vacuum. Its existence is confirmed through its occurrence to people, not as a corporate entity, but as individual existents. This is the personal element of evil to which scholars’ attention has often not been sufficiently directed. Both natural and moral evil get their significance from the impact they exert on human

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<sup>3</sup> *Esu* is a proper name for a Yoruba god of justice. Sometimes it is wrongly translated as “the devil” or “Satan”. The Yoruba god, *Esu*, however, is neither of these. He is a deity without any relation with either the devil or Satan in the Christian or Islamic religion.

beings. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, wars, famine, drought, poverty, terrorism, holocaust, bad government, death, et cetera, are of concern to scholars and other contemplative persons because of their negative effects on the concrete existence of individual men and women. To this end, one may reasonably conclude that the problem of evil is an existential problem.

Now, the Yoruba saying earlier quoted, that is, *t'ibi t'ire la da'le aye* (literally meaning “with evil and good the world is created”) requires some detailed analysis. To this end, our first task is to clarify the sense in which the term *aye* is used here. As a Yoruba concept, *aye* can be used with at least two significations. Primarily, *aye* is used to mean the world in which existence takes place - the objective world. In this sense, *aye* is contrasted with *orun* (heaven), from where humans not only come but also to where they are believed to return after death. Hence the Yoruba say: *aye l'oja; orun n'ile* (the world is a marketplace; heaven is home).

In the second sense, *aye* may mean the life of an individual, as in the saying, *aye mi o ni baje* (my life will not go bad), or it may refer to a corporate existence, that is, *aye alakowe* (the life of the educated). This is the subjective world of individual existents. *Aye*, as contained in this saying, is used in the second sense.

Also of importance to our analysis of the above Yoruba saying is the auxiliary verb *la*, which is a contracted form of *ni a*. Suffice it to say that the latter can be substituted for the former with no loss in meaning, as in: *t'ibi t'ire ni a da'le aye*. The *a* component of *ni a* represents the subject of the verb *da*. Following the English grammatical pattern, we may rightly divide the saying into dependent and independent clauses thus: *t'ibi t'ire ni* (with evil and good [dependent clause]) and *a da'le aye* (we create(d) the world [independent clause]). It should be borne in mind that an independent clause can stand alone as a meaningful statement because it expresses a complete thought. *A*, when it is used as a subject in a Yoruba sentence, usually means “we”. For examples, *A ti de* (We have come); *A ti jeun* (We have eaten); *A kii fa'ri lehin ol'ori* (We don't cut a man's hair without his consent); *A je gbese* (We are indebted). Similarly, the independent clause *A da'le aye* means “We create the world.” We can now appropriately translate our saying as “With evil and good we create the world.”

The foregoing analysis is significant in some notable respects. First, it reiterates the position argued for earlier that the Yoruba do not regard God as the source of evil. This motivates us

to look elsewhere for the source of evil. Second, such analysis is requisite to demonstrate an arguable point that each individual comes to the world carrying his or her potential for good and evil - we create our own world. Living through time and space, that is, in the world, with no possibility of experiencing evil is practically impossible within the Yoruba worldview. This probably explains the Yoruba saying that *Wa a pe l'aye, oju e ko ni r'ibi, ikan ni eyan ma f'owo mu nibe* (either to live long or not to experience evil: one will have to choose one from the two). In saying this, the Yoruba seem to have accepted the fact that evil is an inevitable part of the world, so that inasmuch as one exists in the world, one cannot be totally separated from evil.

We may espouse the position above using the Yoruba myth of the creation of individuals. One important issue of philosophical interest in this myth is how it helps to explain human destiny with its existential co-ordinates, namely, freedom and responsibility of the created individual. Idowu (1962) describes the Yoruba conception of destiny as trimorphous because it has three dimensions that must be fulfilled by each individual:

A person obtains his destiny in one of three ways. He kneels down and chooses his destiny: for a destiny which comes upon a person in this way we have the name *A-kunle-yan* 'That-which-is-chosen-kneeling;' or to kneel down and receive his destiny: for this we have the name *A-kunle-gba* 'That-which-is-received-kneeling;' or his destiny is affixed to him: for this we have the name *A-yan-mo* 'That which is affixed to one' (Idowu 1962, 173-174).

One may agree with Gbadegesin (2004) that the concept of choice is problematic when applied to the Yoruba interpretation of destiny. This intricacy applies to the trio of *akunleyan*, *akunlegba* and *ayanmo* explicated in the quotation above. Scholars such as Ogungbemi (2007) and Gbadegesin (1998; 2004) have thought that the concept of *akunleyan* presupposes some element of choice by the individual. This, however, is not consistent with the Yoruba saying that *akunleyan ohun la d'aye ba* (that which we chose kneeling is that which we encounter on earth). According to Bewaji (quoted in Gbadegesin, 2004, 57), "*adayeba* indicates that you have no control over where you are borne [*sic*], whether your parents are Hausa, Ibo or Yoruba ... whether you are born into wealth or poverty."

The exposition above is relevant to our reflections in this article because it helps to raise the question: *ki la d'aye ba?* (What do we encounter on earth?) This question can be contemplated in the light of Macquarie's bifurcation of existence into facticity and possibility. Facticity, in the existentialism of Macquarie (1966), is defined in terms of 'the givens' as found in a particular existence, namely, intelligence, race, temperament, and any

other factors that are not chosen by humankind. Besides, we also encounter on earth factors such as our parentage, nationality, state of origin, environment of birth, fingerprints, and, most importantly, death, which is “freely given yet not freely chosen” (Adadevoh 2008, 53). Being born into any of these circumstances also has its further implications. For instance, that one is born to a particular couple, has, among other things, the implication of determining one’s blood group, genotype, DNA structure, height, complexion, colour of eyes, as well as whether or not one is prone to diabetes, colour-blindness (or other eye defects), sickle-cell anaemia, certain types of cancer, arthritis, obesity, high blood pressure and other genetically determined diseases.

The foregoing demonstrates that the circumstances of one's birth significantly determine what kind of evil one is prone to in life. A person born into a family of black parents inherits the evil of racial discrimination, while one born in an African country the evil of bad government, besides exposure to poverty, diseases, drought, famine, colonization, political unrest, among others. Being a Jew in Nazi Germany exposed one to the evil of the holocaust. Similarly, being a Nigerian exposes one to the evils of ‘epileptic’ power supply, insecurity, bad roads, erratic telecommunication services, massive unemployment, ritual killings, armed robbery, low life expectancy, high morbidity rate, political corruption, and the attendant frustration. Since if given a chance the majority of us would have chosen to be born elsewhere, these evils are facts we have to learn to live with.

Consider sex for instance. The facticity of sex is that no one chose to be male or female. Perhaps some of us would have preferred to be something else. Of course being any of these sexes has evils associated with it, so that to whichever one of the two one belongs, the reality of evil is unavoidable. For instance, the evils associated with being a man include the burden of high societal expectations, familial responsibilities, exposure to high-risk occupations such as military operations, fire fighting and hunting. Perhaps being a woman attracts more evils - patriarchy (which manifests in victimization, subordination, disinheritance, domestic violence), genital mutilation, rape, widowhood rites, childbearing complications and death, women trafficking, prostitution, and other innumerable crimes against womenfolk. Other woes faced by women are directly related to their physiology and anatomy, and include cancers of the vulvar, cervix, uterus, ovaries, breast, as well as uterine fibroids, menstrual pains, and complications associated with menopause.

Unlike facticity, possibility covers all conscious choices that we make as we journey through life. These may include choices of courses of study, professions, religions, spouses, friends, foods, places of settlement, hobbies and such other things that make one an active participant in human existence. Not surprisingly, each of these choices has evils associated with it. When the Yoruba say: *Iku ogun nii pa akinkanju; iku odo nii p'omuwe* (it is war-related death that kills the brave; it is water-related death that kills professional swimmers), they do not mean that as a matter of course all brave people die of war-related events, nor that all swimmers of water-related mishaps. Instead, the saying expresses their acknowledgment of likely hazards associated with certain chosen professions. A Chinese expatriate leaves his country for Nigeria's oil-rich Niger-Delta only to be kidnapped or killed by the militants or other irate inhabitants of the region. Similarly, a Christian who chooses to live in the core northern part of Nigeria has acquiesced to the possibility of being killed in a suicide bombing or through a gunshot from the dreaded Boko Haram sect. Hence Oke (2001, 135) is probably correct in subscribing to the existentialist doctrine that "man is always the ultimate cause of his own suffering and misery", much as this point is highly debatable.

In sum, evil comes as a result of either facticity or possibility. When it comes as a consequence of facticity, it occurs to individuals based on the structure of the world and their relation to it - according to their proximity to evil-laced fact. This explains why when a natural disaster, such as an earthquake or a tsunami strikes, it affects some while sparing others: no such evil affects all (even death does not occur to all at the same time!) On the other hand, when evil is a product of possibility, it results from what people do or fail to do. The former is instantiated by situations in which people get involved in auto crashes owing to careless driving or over-speeding, whereas the latter manifests in cases such as when failure in examinations results from lack of adequate preparation, or unemployment from faulty educational planning. Whatever the case, however, the human person remains the measure of what is good and what is evil, and the judge of his or her condition as good or evil as he has made them.

The question now is: can God be completely exonerated from evil given his role in the creation of individuals into different existential circumstances? This question is really a difficult one. Nevertheless, from the ontological point of view, it could be answered correctly in the negative. If God created human beings into families, sexes and nationalities, it seems whatever evil accrues from being in these existential spaces is God's doing. However, having



found themselves in such facticity, the onus lies on individuals to *choose* a life best suitable for their fixed existential conditions. It is the individual's duty to find meaning in an otherwise meaningless world. While it might be logically impossible to change one's facticity such as parentage, sex and nationality, one can determine, or to use the existentialist term, choose, whether such facticity will be a good or an evil. For instance, being born into a poor family, which is an evil of a sort, may not be a reason for dying poor: the choice either to remain poor or to break the cycle of poverty within the family lies squarely on the shoulders of the individual in such a situation. From this we can infer that neither God nor the gods are to blame for the human individual's woes.

### **Conclusion**

On a general note, one may conclude, given the inevitability of evil from the Yoruba existentialist point of view, that the problem of evil mainly arises from the human person's displeasure with his or her natural state, which he or she sees as an impediment to the realization of a life of deep self-gratification. This, in other words, is "man's feeling of not being at home in the world where he must nonetheless have his home, and which in fact, is his home" (Oke 2001, 136). It is simply what could be called the human person's desire to attain perfection in his or her body, mind and environment. In his or her body, he or she desires to attain perfection through the exclusion of ailments; in his or her mind, the expunction of prejudice, confusion, anger, hatred, a sense of inferiority to others of the same race or of other races, among others; and in his environment, the elimination of catastrophes from Nature and disasters caused by the moral culpability of fellow human beings. These are the dreams of humankind; and it is to the achievement of them that they strive tirelessly through interpretative media such as science, arts, religion and morality. Nietzsche writes the following with regard to the achievement of these dreams:

... sounds ... as if they promised to invent a mode of life which should refrain from all organic functions. "Exploitation" does not belong to a depraved, or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the *nature* of the living being as a primary organic function; it is a consequence of the intrinsic will to power, which is precisely the will to life. Granting that as a theory, this is a novelty - as a reality, it is the *fundamental fact* of all history: let us be thus far honest with ourselves! (Nietzsche 1994, 382).

The attitude Nietzsche expresses above is arguably describable as an unconditional contentment with, not withdrawal from, the existential condition of the human reality. In Islam, such an attitude is referred to as total submission to the will of Allah. Since the Yoruba do not subscribe to the idea of God as the source of evil, they find an alternative explanatory route in the concept of *Kadara*, that is, the ultimate force that gives direction to each individual life. Hence on the basis of the Yoruba understanding of evil and my own reflections on it, I am of the view that in the face of the innumerable evils associated with the human condition, the best existential approach to life is to face, with stoic courage, whatever challenges one is confronted with. This is what the Yoruba refer to as the acceptance (*gbigba*) of *kadara*. For, *Eda ti ko gba kadara a gba kodoro* (he who does not accept his lot will, as a necessity, accept that which is worse).

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