

The Human Being, God, and Moral Evil

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Abstract

The evidence of human wickedness in the world is so transparent that no rational person can dispute its reality. This paper approaches the question of the human person from an African philosophical perspective and explores the relation between the apparently free-acting human being and God conceived as the creator of the world and the ultimate cause of the human being. The paper will proffer answers to the following question: to what extent can the human being be absolved of blame for the evil they perpetrate in a world conceived in African traditional religion and thought as the creation of a high deity who could have foreseen the negative bent of human nature and should have made human nature inclined to goodness all of the time? The paper will make novel contributions to the debate about human nature in African philosophical discourse by recasting the human being as a *homo melancholicus*, or melancholy being, whose evil inclination in the world can best be understood in the context of a tragic vision of reality.

Keywords: Human being, God, moral evil, freedom, omnipotence, omniscience, *homo melancholicus*, free will, determinism, destiny

Introduction

This paper approaches the question of the human person from an African philosophical perspective and explores the relation between the apparently free-acting human being and God conceived as the creator of the world and the ultimate cause of the human being. In much of the literature on African ethics, metaphysics, and religion, the human being is presented as an entity that possesses physical/material and spiritual and rational dimensions with inherent powers of choice.

This unique capacity to make rational choices, ideally, would motivate the individual to act in a socially responsible manner that eventually leads to the actualisation of a maximal moral state. That is, in an ideal situation, the capacity to make rational choices will increasingly correspond to the making of moral choices that in turn actualise a sufficiently moral world where goodness is maximised and wickedness minimised. The maximal moral state has been linked with the attainment of full personhood by the African philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti who

distinguishes between the ontological and normative senses of the person. An ontological sense of personhood regards the individual simply as inherently a person by virtue of being a human being with the power of choice derived from the possession of an active reason. The normative sense, which Menkiti favours, relates the inherent power of choice with the full range of sociality and, consequently, morality. Full personhood “is not given at the very beginning of one’s life, but is attained after one is well along in society” (MENKITI 1984, 173). However, if personhood in the social-normative sense involves a long moral journey signposted by stages of improvement, or, conversely, degeneration, then it is obvious that the term full personhood cannot be exhausted by expanding the definition of a human being beyond the ontological sense to the social-normative sense. This paper will build on Menkiti’s insight and argue from the perspective of consolation philosophy (AGADA 2015, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c) that the *full person* is a perfectly moral individual. Since the world is not populated by full persons, full personhood becomes a maximal moral state that is never attained in a lifetime but represents an ideal state that humans can seek to realise. The fact that the human power of choice does not often tally with moral outcomes and, in fact, often manifests actively in wicked deeds reveals the limitation of this power in a moral sense and questions the reality of free will in the actual world. Here the idea of free will is associated with morality as a phenomenon of the rational human being. The human power of choice is so constrained by diverse factors and so frequently expresses itself in the performance of wrong, wicked, and outright diabolical activities that full personhood is never reached. Indeed, the human being comes across as a being that is at once both a, seemingly, free moral agent and a socially (GYEKYE 1995, 2010), physically (ATTOE 2022a), biologically (AGADA 2022a), theologically (OKERE 1996; GBADEGESIN 2004; BALOGUN 2007), and psychologically (AGADA 2022a) determined entity.

In this paper, I focus attention on an African version of theological determinism that often comes under the label destiny. Theological determinism is broadly the view that events in the world and the paths of humans follow an unbranching course set by God. This view, also called predestination, has been explored at some length in, particularly, Yoruba and Akan religious and philosophical thought. According to the African notion of predestination, or destiny, a supreme deity, or God, lesser deities, or gods, and related spiritual entities and principles determine what becomes of a person in their lifetime (GBADEGESIN 2004). The African notion of predestination is markedly different from the Christian notion which usually focuses on salvation. Predestination in the African context focuses on the conditioning power of God and lesser deities that are believed to derive their powers from God. If God is conceived narrowly or broadly as the source of life-influencing destinies that more or less constrain the inherent human power of choice, and he is regarded as an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator (see, for example, MBITI 1969, 1975; IDOWU 1973), how is it that he did not create human beings in such a way that they will always positively exercise their power of choice? A positive exercise of the power of choice would result in the reality of a world without moral evil or, at least, one with minimal evil. If, on the other hand, God is a limited creator-deity or designer

as African decolonisation scholars have recently asserted (see, for example, WIREDU 1998), is the human being solely responsible for their evil actions? Or is there a larger picture of reality that presents a gloomy state of affairs, whereby moral evil must be regarded as a necessary part of the way the world is structured? In what sense are human beings responsible for their evil deeds in a deterministic world?

In answering the allied questions posed above, this paper will be divided into four sections. Section 1 addresses notions of the human person in the African philosophical literature. Section 2 revisits the debate on determinism (predestination) and free will in the African philosophical literature. Section 3 argues that a limited God cannot be blamed for the reality of moral evil. Section 4 introduces the idea of *mood* and demonstrates how human beings can be morally responsible for their evil deeds in a tragic, deterministic world.

The Human Being in African Philosophical Thought

Philosophical anthropology has noted the human being's unique capacity to act in ways that project the actuality of freedom. Freedom, or the exercise of free will, is problematised in this paper from the standpoint that defines it as an individual's capacity to have acted differently than one did in a specific situation. To exercise free will, then, would mean to deliberately choose a course out of more than one available courses (cf. VAN INWAGEN 1975). Before grappling with the tension between the notions of predestination and free will in African thought I will briefly highlight the nature of the human being with a view to establishing its moral dimension.

According to Gyekye (1995, 1999), the human being is an entity with material and spiritual dimensions, a body animated by the *sunsum*, which translates as spirit or mind in English and an *ōkra*, which translates as soul. Since Gyekye closely identifies the *sunsum* with the *ōkra* one will be right to interpret the *sunsum* and *ōkra* as constituting the sphere of conscious existence as distinct from the sphere of material existence. In this paper, I will use the terms 'material' and 'physical' interchangeably to cover tangible and non-tangible phenomena that are describable in the language of physics, for example a chair, electrons, and numbers. I will use the term 'spiritual' to cover phenomena that cannot be adequately comprehended using descriptive physical language, for instance, consciousness and entities like God and gods.

The material-spiritual distinction does not mean that there are two worlds. The distinction rather connotes two spheres, two dimensions of reality that complete each other. Gyekye (1995, 72–73) underlines this fact when he notes that:

“The Akan universe, essentially spiritual, is endowed or charged with varying degrees of force or power. This force or power is *sunsum*, usually translated as “spirit” all created things, that is, natural objects, have or contain *sunsum*...*Sunsum*, then appears...a universal spirit, manifesting itself differently in the various beings and objects in the natural world.

If Gyekye is positing two worlds, it is hard to see how *sunsum* as consciousness can underlie material entities since a material type in one world will be ontologically different from a consciousness type in another world. Gyekye's understanding of the human being as a unity of the physical and the spiritual is shared by scholars like Mbiti (1969), Okere (1996), Edeh (1999) and Ijiomah (2014) who write about the human being as an entity constituted by material and spiritual principles, with a natural and supernatural orientation. While Wiredu (1983) has favoured an entirely physicalist understanding of the human being, he also emphasises this being's conscious dimension and the unique power of thinking and choosing. Making a choice involves deciding whether something is good or bad, true or false, seemly or unseemly, etc. It involves not only knowledge but also moral judgment. Consequently, the human being is a moral being. This being is always a self-interested entity whose actions either promote the wellbeing of other conscious entities or injure them.

In the Afro-communitarian literature the human being is cast as a moral being born into the community of moral selves. This being is required to commit itself to the attainment of full personhood in a condition of mutuality, with the individual contributing to society's wellbeing while the society in its turn protects the individual (see MBITI 1969; MENKITI 1984; KAPHAGAWANI 2004; IKUENOBE 2018; GYEKYE 2010). Menkiti famously used the term full personhood in his endeavour to articulate a normative Afro-communitarian understanding of personhood which goes beyond the bare definition of a person as a rational being to encompass the full range of the moral potentials of rationality. Thus, Menkiti situates the person in a community of other persons united in the quest for a maximal moral state of existence that benefits everyone. While Menkiti believes that this moral state is achievable within the social framework, or community, I interpret full personhood as an ideal that motivates human moral behaviour and is itself unattainable in a person's lifetime. Menkiti (1984, 73) states specifically:

That full personhood is not perceived as simply given at the very beginning of one's life, but is attained after one is well along in society, indicates straight away that the older an individual gets the more of a person he becomes.

Yet, increasing age does not absolutely guarantee moral maturity and the positive channelling of the innate power of choice towards the improvement of the lot of other persons in the community. Indeed, it is certain that no one individual attains moral perfection in their lifetime since full personhood is a quest, a journey, without a defined terminus. Sooner or later the most morally advanced human being will make a moral error. Such an individual may flare up in anger over some provocation from another individual or entertain bitterness towards another in their heart and wish them evil, or become jealous of another even for a moment, etc. As small as these kinds of moral blemishes are, they nevertheless underline the claim that full personhood is unattainable.

Additionally, the human being often chooses a path that leads to the multiplication of bad and even terrible deeds. Indeed, evidence abound throughout history that reveals the human being's disturbingly massive capacity for wickedness. The human being consciously plots murder on small, medium, massive, and planet-wide scale; it steals, wreaks destruction, promotes violence and exploit its own kind and other kinds. It deploys its intellect in the production of weapons of mass destruction and creates economic elites that acquire unimaginable wealth at the expense of the vast majority. It is this wickedness resulting from the human being's choice of the wrong path that I call moral evil (cf. BEWAJI 1998; VAN INWAGEN 2006; BALOGUN 2009).

It is easy to place all the blame on human beings for the wickedness they unleash on themselves and even on other living things. The human being appears to be a free moral agent. Yet, it seems that the capacity for rational choice is itself conditioned by biological, physical, emotional, and psychological constraints. A man loves three women B, C, and D, and decides to marry B after reviewing the prevailing state of affairs. In the beginning, he appears free to marry any of the three women. He does not marry B who he prefers because B flatly rejects him. He also fails to marry C because C has AS genotype just like him. After much thought he decides to marry D. While he has indeed exercised the power of choice, it is obvious that this decision was conditioned by circumstances not of his making. His decision is indeed his own, but it is yet a constrained decision. He settled for D because B and C were beyond his reach.

A striking feature about the exercise of 'free will' is the fatalistic atmosphere that encompasses this capacity. Once a supposedly free choice has been made an irreversible sequence of events follows that sometimes leads to disenchantment with the irreversible choices already made. After A marries D he can in the future divorce D, but he cannot unmarry D in a manner that reverses that singular event of his marriage to D. That event is already history and irreversible. Before it occurred A was supposedly free to choose a different course, but after it occurred A was not free to have chosen a different course. Therefore, A was never really free. The fatalistic atmosphere that surrounds the process of choosing increases the suspicion that making a choice is by no means an exercise of free will. So, it will appear that the idea of freedom is a useful fiction. The power of choice does not exclude the sway of determinism. But, can determinism be absolute, such that humans must be deemed not responsible for their actions? In answering this question, I will start by dwelling briefly on some African responses to the problem of freewill and determinism (specifically theological determinism or predestination).

On the Notions of Destiny and Free Will

A number of African philosophers have teased out contours of the relationship between freedom, determinism, and the will of God considered as the ultimate cause of the world. The research work of Hallen and Sodipo (1986), Gbadegesin (1991, 2004), and Balogun (2007) in the area of Yoruba traditional thought establishes *ori* as that which determines a human being's personality and is simultaneously the determinant of destiny. As the determinant of personality, *ori*

is integral to the structure of the self and as the determinant of destiny it is the link between the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality, and human reality in particular.

The positions of Gbadegesin and Balogun are particularly interesting. Gbadegesin analyses the Ogbegunda oral text and the Ifa Corpus of the Yoruba and notes the cultural rootedness of the idea of *ori* as destiny and, therefore, the determinant of a person's destiny. In the Ogbegunda text individuals go up to heaven to receive their destinies from the god Obatala, one of the deities answerable to God (Olodumare) in Yoruba religious thought (GBADEGESIN 2004, 313). In the Ifa Corpus, the gods are depicted as conferring *ori* on humans who adopt a kneeling position, a clear indication of the passive role of humans in the scheme of things. Despite the place of a God-allocated destiny in the lives of individuals, Gbadegesin notes a paradox in Yoruba thought, whereby a supposedly fixed destiny can be changed by individuals through sacrifice to the gods and individual effort. The fact that the Yoruba are inclined to blame people for their amoral and immoral conduct rather than their *ori* lends support to the idea that the Yoruba hold a compatibilist perspective that upholds only a weak sense of destiny (predestination), rather than a strong sense that affirms inexorable universal necessity (GBADEGESIN 2004, 321).

The *ori* is conceived by Balogun as possessing physical and spiritual qualities. On the one hand, it is part of the structure of the self and is united with the body and on the other hand it is a kind of individual guardian angel/spirit, a kind of personal god which precedes a person's worldly existence and bears their destiny. God is the ultimate giver of destiny, which he communicates to the individual through their *ori*. Tension between determinism (predestination) and free will arises in the Yoruba framework because while destiny is regarded as unalterable, the individual possesses the power of choice which they can exercise to alter their destiny, for instance through individual effort and appeasement rituals that may influence the will of God and the *ori*. The tension leads Balogun (2007, 123) to suggest like Gbadegesin that Yoruba thought recommends the compatibility of free will and determinism. However, he notes, strangely, that human responsibility is not undermined because "*Ori* is limited to issues of material success. *Ori* has nothing to do with moral character, and as such it does not affect all of human actions and/or inactions" (BALOGUN 2007, 125).

To justify soft determinism, the idea that free will and determinism may be compatible after all, Balogun attempts to separate the notion of destiny from the human power of choice. He thus ties the fate that *ori* imposes on the individual to the mere fortune or misfortune of an individual in a lifetime. The snag here is that fortune and misfortune are often outcomes of the decisions humans make and, therefore, are not often separable from moral conduct. A financially corrupt politician who becomes rich by embezzling government funds and who later has his assets confiscated may blame destiny for his perceived misfortune and curse his *ori*. The politician has suffered a material misfortune involving loss of all his ill-gotten possessions and a long jail term. The fact that *ori* is blamed for the turn of events seem to undermine Balogun's claim that the determination of *ori* is restricted to bare material circumstances. The politician's misfortune cannot be

understood without reference to his bad and, in fact, immoral choices. Here one sees the politician absolving himself of blame and shifting the moral burden to his *ori*. If God has determined the course of future events in an individual's life through the *ori* it stands to reason that the moral choices the individual will make are constrained choices.¹

But if Gbadegesin and Balogun trace an individual's destiny to God through lesser deities answerable to God, the outstanding Ghanaian philosopher of Akan extraction, Gyekye, asserts that destiny comes directly from God and that it is always good, although human power of choice can pervert that which was given as a wholesome endowment. According to Gyekye (1995, 114), predestination only covers the "broad outlines of an individual's life, not the specific details." With this manoeuvre he hopes to establish the compatibility of determinism and free will. The thinking is that if minute details of a human life are not conditioned, there is room for rational, independent action. To drive home this point, he distinguishes between events and actions. Events cover the natural causality we see in nature posited as mind-independent while actions refer to causal sequences initiated by human beings as rational agents (Gyekye 1995, 120). But as Okello (2003), has noted, Gyekye fails to show how the event-action distinction reconciles free will and determinism given that Gyekye generalises that every occurrence has a cause in the Akan universe. Gyekye is forced to claim that in the page of destiny some things and actions in a human life are determined while others are not. Reflecting on this claim, Okello notes:

[S]ome things a person does do not represent a page from the 'book of destiny.' One would, by implication, deduce that...there are other things a person does which could represent a page from the book of destiny...is Gyekye not suggesting that some human actions and choices are determined? (2003, 83)

The page of destiny is like a ledger with fully filled credit (fortune) and debit (misfortune) columns. Since all actual or possible credit and debit transactions are in the same ledger, it amounts to a contradiction to say that some transaction details will be smuggled into the ledger without fraud alarm being raised. In other words, compatibilism is impossible going by the way Gyekye presents the idea of destiny.

¹ There appears to be a way out of the conundrum for Balogun. He can abandon the compatibilist framework entirely and either affirm the truth of theological determinism or the truth of free will. The former option is explored in this paper. The latter option may see Balogun suggesting that what the concept of destiny entails on second thought is not any kind of initial conditioning but rather a divine operation of foresight consistent with the power of omniscience. Thus, God sees the future course of things and all outcomes of human moral choices from the very beginning and is satisfied. He refrains from constraining human free will. This second line of thinking will be explored in a future work

Gyekye notes that God-allocated destinies are always good *ab initio*. This implies that God is benevolent. He always wishes what is good for human beings. Gyekye's stance, like the positions of Gbadegesin and Balogun, favours a compatibilist perspective. Attoe rejects the compatibilist perspective and asserts that the universe is a thoroughly deterministic totality, in which a current state of affairs can be traced backward up to a first (primordial) cause if the complete information of causally related chains of events is available. He notes: "As a universe motioned by interactive relationships, one cannot but trace a certain [every] outcome to a previous state of affairs. If this is the case...then one must admit that this world is a fully deterministic one" (ATTOE 2022a, 83). There is no room for free will in the world, according to Attoe. The operation of rigid determinism eliminates moral responsibility which, for Attoe, is an illusion we have on account of the mistaken belief that our thoughts escape the mechanical conditioning we see in the behaviour of physical objects. For Attoe, since the world is a physical, interactive network of causes that are traceable to a first physical cause (which he calls an impersonal materialist God), no phenomenon in the world lies beyond the range of material determinism, including thought.

I suggested earlier that notwithstanding the human being's unique power of choice, the decisions this being makes are constrained by its physical, social, and psychological environment, which indicates that humans are not free. The ability to choose is thus the exercise of a rational power that is impeded by existential struggles in the field of human experience (see section 4). An interesting dimension is added to the discourse on human freedom when God is conceived as the creator of the world and human beings.

There are two broad views of God in the African philosophy of religion and African traditional religion (ATR) literature, namely: (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent (see, for instance, IDOWU 1973; MBITI 1975; GYEKYE 1995). (2) God is limited in power and is not wholly good (see, for instance, BEWAJI 1998; WIREDU 1998; OLADIPO 2004). Defenders of both views generally agree that God is a creator-deity or at least a designer (of humans and the world). If one goes with the first view, God should not only have allocated good destinies to humans but he should have created them with the ability to always channel their power of choice towards the performance of good deeds.² If this was the case there would be no moral evil. The reality of our world, which exhibits signs of serious blemish, makes the second view plausible. If one goes with the second view, then something is wrong with the world itself that makes it impossible for moral perfection, or full personhood, to be attained by humans.

On God's Transcendence, Limitation, and Moral Evil

If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent it is within his power

² From a libertarian perspective, the idea of choiceless humans may appear obnoxious. Yet, it seems that a world where there is no free will but in which humans act with moral perfection and are happy is preferable to a world like ours where humans supposedly enjoy the gift of free will and act wickedly. It is possible that morally perfect but choiceless beings in a perfect world will be so constituted that the absence of free will is not regarded as a deprivation.

to create humans to always act morally, such that moral evil will be non-existent in the world. The transcendence view of God has been defended by early scholars of ATR like Mbiti (1969), Idowu (1973), and Metuh (1981). Philosophers like Gyekye (1995), Metz and Molefe (2021) have endorsed the transcendence view of God as a legitimate traditional African conception of God. Since traditional African thought recognises the potent role lesser deities play in the scheme of things, defenders of the transcendence view typically invoke the ultimacy thesis to preserve God's unrivalled powers. This thesis acknowledges the ubiquitous influence of the lesser deities in the world but subordinates them to God, such that without the powers delegated to them by God they lose their potency. Idowu (1973, 135) presents the ultimacy thesis very clearly:

I do not know of any place in Africa where the ultimacy is not accorded to God...the religion (ATR) can only be adequately described as monotheistic. I modify the 'monotheism' by the adjective 'diffused', because here we have a monotheism in which there exists other powers which derive from Deity.

Thus, not only is God the highest deity in the universe, according to the transcendence view but he is also the supreme being in this universe and is, therefore, describable in terms that correspond to the traditional theistic attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence.

But when the reality of moral evil is taken into account and any right-thinking person contemplates the dimensions of human wickedness, which is constantly on display in the world, one must wonder if the transcendence view is indeed correct. If God is omnipotent and omniscient it is within his capacity to eliminate moral evil by creating human beings in such a way that they always will their acts ethically. This is not too much to ask of an all-powerful and all-knowing creator. If this being is unwilling to eliminate moral evil, he cannot be omnibenevolent (in the sense of all-good). Given the great suffering that the perpetration of wicked deeds inflicts on victims, an omnibenevolent God must be interested in removing the conditions that make wickedness possible. But it is clear from what goes on in the world that there is a certain silence of the universe with regard to the moral and existential condition of humans, and God himself seems to be as silent as the universe. Wicked deeds continue to proliferate even as humans have to endure the accompanying suffering. Each human being appears condemned to find their way through the treacherous terrain of life and survive as best as they can.

The limitation perspective in African philosophy of religion emerges to tackle the problem of omnipotence and evil by purporting to eliminate the problem

altogether.³ Proponents of this view include Wiredu (1998), Bewaji (1998),

Oladipo (2004), Fayemi (2012), and Ofuasia (2022a). They defend the compatibility of the amount of moral evil in the world with the existence of God. They do not defend atheism in response to the apparent silence of the world. Instead, they articulate a perspective that decolonises the concept of God and establish what they presume to be an authentic African understanding of God. This perspective presents God as a limited creator or a designer. God is limited by the multiplicity of other beings that are present in the world and pre-existing matter itself.

Writing about the limitation of God's powers by other entities in the world, Oladipo (2004, 360) notes, with emphasis on Yoruba cosmogony:

If omnipotence implies 'infinite powers,' then to say that Olódùmarè is omnipotent is to say that He is almighty in the sense that He is not subject to any constraints in the exercise of his powers. However, it is doubtful that Olódùmarè can be said to be all-powerful in this sense. A crucial consideration in this regard is the acknowledgment, by the people, of other powers and principalities—divinities, spirits, magic, witchcraft, and so on. Some of these powers and forces are treated as ends in themselves. Hence, the people endeavor, through sacrifice, to be on good terms with them in recognition of their powers to aid or hinder human activities.

The suggestion that evil arises necessarily as part of the structure of the world, which may well exist tenselessly, is captured by Wiredu (1998, 29–30) in this provocative passage:

God is the creator of the world, but he is not apart from the universe: He together with the world constitutes the spatio-temporal "totality" of existence. In the deepest sense, therefore, the ontological chasm indicated by the natural/supernatural distinction does not exist within Akan cosmology... The notion of creation out of nothing does

³ The literature on African Traditional Religion (ATR) and African philosophy of religion clearly reveals two dominant conceptions of God, with one conception upholding traditional theistic view of God as a perfect being and the other favouring the understanding of God as a limited deity, as suggested earlier. Agada (2022b) has argued that there is an antinomy of God's existence in African religious thought that consists of the conflicting propositions of the transcendence and limitation frameworks. While the transcendence framework defends belief in the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent (in the sense of all-good) God, the limitation framework defends belief in the existence of a limited God. Agada (2022b, 46) notes that there is "[E]vidence of a transcendent moment in Yoruba traditional thought that clashes with the non-transcendent moment. By the term transcendent moment, I mean the plausible traditional, theistic interpretation of traditional Yoruba and, by extension, African thought about the nature of God. The non-transcendent moment corresponds to the interpretation of the nature of God within the metaphysical framework of limitedness."

not even make sense in the Akan language... In the most usual sense creation presupposes raw materials. A carpenter creates a chair out of wood and a novelist creates fiction out of words and ideas. If God is conceived as a kind of cosmic architect who fashions a world order out of indeterminate raw material, the idea of absolute nothingness would seem to be avoidable.

Oladipo's stance seems to shift blame from God to entities capable of real malevolence. But it is not very clear how an evil spirit can be responsible for the wicked acts of a human being. An evil spirit is not a creator-deity. However, it may be asserted that malevolent spirits are powerful enough to make human beings do wicked things that they normally will not do. This possibility not only further constrains free will but also lends credence to the suspicion that something is fundamentally wrong with a world that evolves malevolent spirits that take delight in misleading human beings. Wiredu's analysis stems from his famous commitment to a physicalist understanding of the world. He is suspicious of a supernaturalist perspective and insists on a spatio-temporal conception of reality. In Wiredu's thought, the notion of God's transcendence is ruled out *ab initio* since reality is fundamentally spatial. For him, spatio-temporality characterises matter, and matter has always existed. Thus, either God began to exist at the same time as the matter constituting spatiality began to exist or God evolved after matter began to exist. Either way, this matter limits God who can only be properly described as a designer, who produces new forms, for example human beings, from matter. This is Wiredu's view and it opposes the transcendence view.

The African traditional religion literature overwhelmingly presents God as the creator of the world and human beings. Bewaji (1998, 7), notes that: "Olodumare is the origin of the universe..." Even when Wiredu questions the concept of a creator, he still acknowledges that God is a designer. He only has a problem with the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* rather than the very idea of creation. A designer who produces new forms from already existing material can be regarded as a creator even if the glamour of omnipotence and omniscience is lost. If a limited God created a world where evil flourishes and also created human beings in a way that allows them to misuse their willing capacity, must he not be blamed for the reality of moral evil? Fayemi (2012) has suggested that God and the lesser deities that assist him in running the world bear responsibility for moral evil. Does this not mean God is evil, if he lets evil thrive in a world he created? If God is good, as he is portrayed in much of the literature, he must be limited in power and knowledge and is, therefore, unable to stop the moral evil perpetrated by human beings in the world. If God cannot be blamed for the reality of moral evil and human beings are not free, how can human beings be said to be morally responsible agents? This question will be answered in the next section.

Human Being as *Homo Melancholicus*

I noted earlier that notwithstanding the operationality of the inherent human power of choice, this phenomenon cannot be described as free will because the power of

choice is constrained by physical, psychological, biological, social, etc., factors. There is indeed a willpower which manifests itself in acts that are either good or bad and upholds the notion of moral responsibility, but this willpower itself is not free. A possible freedom of the will cannot consist merely in the capacity of an individual to have acted differently than they did in a particular situation. Free will consists rather in willpower that is not constrained by the factors mentioned above. The reality of the will is not denied since it is the absolute condition for human action. However, the freedom of the will is denied from the perspective of consolationism which I will briefly articulate in this section. This perspective presents the human condition as a tragic one and human freedom as an illusion. The perspective is different from what the student of Western philosophy is familiar with. In much of Western philosophy, the debate on free will and determinism revolves around what people do in fact and what they are able to do. While determinists believe that what people do and what they are able to do is the same thing and that peoples' doings are conditioned by a variety of factors, advocates of free will contend that the doings are ultimately voluntary and rational choices made under adequate epistemic conditions (for in-depth analysis of deterministic, libertarian, and compatibilist theories see NOWELL-SMITH 1948; SMART 1961; LEHRER 1966; VAN INWAGEN 1975; DENNETT 1981). In other words, free will is believed to involve the capacity to have acted differently.

The fact that constraining factors are operational and influence decisions means that there is already always an existential struggle ongoing in the field of experience which denies the will freedom. At this juncture I introduce the idea of the human being as a *homo melancholicus*, or melancholy being. *Homo melancholicus* is the entity that finds itself in a deterministic world of yearnings and pursues consolation from moment to moment. Consolation is the only marker of meaning in a silent world, that quality measured in terms of joy which the human being actualises in the field of experience and which runs through all the activities of an individual, be these activities intellectual or emotional (see AGADA 2015, 2020, 2022a). The idea of consolation is articulated within the framework of consolationism, "a tightly knitted network of metaphysical themes which condense the universe and its manifestations in the doctrine of mood" (CHIMAKONAM and OGBONNAYA 2021, 41). Analysing the consolationist system further, Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021, 49) aver that consolationism captures the:

[C]ondition of a reality that is expressed tragically and the conditioned beings that constitute this reality. Reality is expressed tragically because it is incomplete in the sense that evil—both physical and moral—adheres intimately to this reality even as the human mind cannot clearly identify the reason for the emergence of the universe and the purpose of human beings in this universe.

Given the final decisiveness of the epistemic factor, human existence assumes a tragic dimension in a world where meaning-making consists merely in the pursuit of the emotion of joy (see ATTOE 2022b; OFUASIA 2022b) and related states like contentment, satisfaction, excitement, etc.. The epistemic factor reminds us that despite the internal purpose we find in our quest to actualise joy in our various intellectual and emotional engagements, we have no reliable knowledge about why we were born and why the world itself has to exist and be observed by us. When our daily struggle for meaning and survival in the face of physical and moral evil is combined with this fatal epistemic deficiency, human existence must be acknowledged as tragic just as talk about free will becomes untenable (see AGADA 2022a). The universe is a totality of yearnings of diverse entities. These yearnings clash and condition events, such that the mere power of choice is only a function of knowledge (and a severely limited knowledge for the matter) rather than a capacity independent of the ever-present yearnings that condition human existence.

A man must eat to survive, but sometimes he has no money and he steals. A ritual killer has no money or does not have enough and kills another human being in the hope that the deed will bring him wealth. A man succumbs to lust and commits the crime of rape. It is easy to straightaway condemn the evil doers as weak-willed. Yet, the very idea of a weak will compromises the notion of a free will by indicating the existential struggles surrounding the individual which the will often cannot overcome, even in the face of harsh punishments meted out to weak-willed actors by state institutions like the judiciary.

While the human being who carries out evil deeds is guilty by reason of knowing beforehand that he or she is doing something bad, the evil deed is to a large extent conditioned. Thus, while the human being is not free, they are guilty as self-interested beings with the knowledge of right and wrong. The man who commits the evil of rape is self-interested and pursues his joy in the effort at maximising sexual pleasure. He cannot be guiltless. That the march to personhood can be aborted⁴ shows that the guilt of *homo melancholicus* is of a peculiar kind. This is the case because even where this being knows that it is doing something bad, its moral willpower fails it and it persists in doing evil. Why is this the case? The problem lies in the very fact of existing. Whatever exists as yearning necessarily realises both good and evil. I call whatever exists with the capacity to yearn a product and function of *mood*. *Mood*, then, is the essence of all things and the interface of mind and matter. God is constituted by *mood*; so is the human being, and the seemingly non-living thing. That which is capable of activity reflects a moody essence and can realise evil in its operative sphere. Thus God, human beings, animals, etc, are capable of doing evil. Since the capacity for evil is a structural capacity of the world, everything is guilty. The universal sway of *mood* means that yearning is fundamental and defines all entities. The ubiquity of yearning makes for a deterministic world, one in which proximate and remote impulses and desires act as causes. Though determined by the yearnings that

⁴ Menkiti (1984) notes that personhood is attained over a lifetime and enlarges as the human being advances in age. Instructively, people can fail in the journey towards personhood, as when they continually decline in moral awareness instead of increasing.

constitute human nature—the impulses and desires that analysis of the human psychological, physical, and biological structures uncovers—the human being is yet a guilty being since it already exists in a universe of yearning and knows what is good and bad for itself.

It is desirable at this point to more clearly explain what I mean by the term *mood*. Elsewhere I elucidated the term *mood* as describing the most fundamental reality:

[T]hat in which mind—as advanced consciousness—and body inhere, the all-pervading principle of conscious and subconscious beings that energizes or animates these beings...the ultimate origin of reason, emotions, affects, and dispositions of living and seemingly nonliving things, the marker of the eternal striving towards an unrealizable perfection in nature. (AGADA 2020, 110)

Mood is:

[T]he primordial mind-matter interface and the source of all intelligence and emotions in the universe...The idea of *mood* as a proto-mind implies that it is an event prior to what is commonly referred to as mind or the sphere of mental properties...*mood* as proto-mind is what produces mindness in things. It is also submitted that *mood* is a unity of the physical and the minded. It follows, then, that this fundamental principle is an event, the mind-matter interface, where the borders distinguishing mind from matter are constantly transgressed, such that it makes more sense to talk about phases of reality rather than wholly independent mind and matter spheres. (AGADA 2022a, 87)

As a metaphysical doctrine, the philosophy of *mood* seeks to identify a fundamental principle whose articulation can provide insight into why the world appears so incomplete, with moral evil a glaring dimension of this incompleteness. As an epistemological framework, the philosophy of *mood* navigates between a strong physicalist perspective that denies the fundamentality of conscious being and a strong panpsychist perspective that denies the fundamentality of material or physical being. The implication for African philosophy of religion and, in particular, the reality of evil is the comparability of the idea of *mood* to Wiredu's pre-existing stuff which limits all beings, including God. It is obvious that *mood* itself is not God. It is the ground of all things. As a limiting principle, it essentialises entities and renders them yearning phenomena. While discussing the relation between God and *mood* as a universal limiting principle that constitutes God's nature, I noted elsewhere that:

God is the highest embodiment of *mood*...mood constitute His essence and...He is subject to this essence. This means that God's qualities, whatever they may be, and we can only project anthropomorphically, are determined by *mood*, which is, therefore, prior to His existence even if contemporaneous with His essence...God is not *mood* per se, but He embodies it in a special way. The entity whose nature is defined by *mood* is surpassed by its nature. (AGADA 2022a, 108).

There is no contradiction when it is asserted that *mood* is prior to God's existence and contemporaneous with his essence. *Mood* is prior to God's existence when God is considered as an entity endowed with intelligence and personality. *Mood* is contemporaneous with God's essence to the extent that this limiting principle constitutes the nature of God who exemplifies it in the highest degree

The metaphysics of *mood* will then account for moral evil as the inevitable manifestation of yearnings that constitute the structure of reality itself as impulses, desires, motivators and causes at micro and macro levels. This manifestation of yearning is said to be evil because yearning is misdirected by weak-willed actors. Reality here means the totality of all actually existing and potentially existent things animated by *mood*. In a nutshell, nature is the universe of *mood* where there is neither pure consciousness (one that cannot affect physical reality or be affected by physical reality) nor pure matter (one that cannot affect conscious reality or be affected by conscious reality). Thus, I regard *mood* as a consciousness-matter event, a first occurrence in the universe which has no strict consciousness-matter boundary since both consciousness and matter evolve from *mood*, their primordial prototype.

In a deterministic world, impulses, motivators (actuating principles), and desires are causes, whether hidden or transparent. Such a world is not a blind totality because impulses, motivators, and desires become reasons as they gain clarity and coherence even as these elements indicate a goal that motivates striving. I call this goal—decidedly the product of speculation rather than epistemic certainty—perfection. It is unrealisable since the very nature of *mood* indicates perpetual incompleteness evidenced as perpetual striving. The doctrine of *mood*, therefore, describes a tragic universe. In this universe, God cannot be blamed for the moral evil perpetrated by humans because he is limited by *mood* which is all-pervading and, therefore, limits every entity, including God. One may point out that if I say that God is not responsible for human wickedness and yet maintain that whatever exists is guilty, there is a contradiction. Put more clearly, if I say that God cannot be blamed for the wicked deeds of human beings, how can I assert that he is guilty? What is he guilty of if he is not morally responsible for human wickedness? The guilt I refer to here is not tied to moral responsibility but rather to existential incompleteness.

The being that persists quantitatively and qualitatively, whether eternally or for a defined duration, in a universe of *mood* is guilty precisely because it is capable of doing evil by virtue of its essence, which is yearning. The being does not have to actually do evil before it is said to be guilty. It suffices that this being is a yearning being. Yearning encompasses an experiential field of actualities and potentialities. In this metaphysical framework, the notion of moral evil is exhibited as one that indicates wickedness as a phenomenon that is either actual now or soon to become actual.

I noted earlier that the compatibilist stance in the African philosophy literature reveals how problematic a free will account of moral evil is. If predestination, or destiny, is true, compatibilism cannot be true. What the compatibilist stance achieves is showing that moral responsibility is possible even when free will is denied. According to Gbadegesin, Balogun, and Gyekye, God (acting either directly or through the lesser deities under his control) establishes

the destinies of individuals from the beginning. The initial given constitutes an initial condition to which subsequent events in a person's life are tied. If these philosophers then turn around to suggest that only the broad outlines of a person's life, and not minute details, are conditioned by God, one can justifiably respond that the predestination stance is a libertarian stance in disguise. This is the case because it is not clear how the initial condition loses its conditioning power along the way, such that the presumed broad outlines of a person's life are separated from the assumed minute details. Either destinies are given by God from the very beginning, in which case determinism is true, or the idea of destiny is superfluous and should be discarded, in which case free will is real. Attoe (2022a) rejects the idea that there can be an initial causal state which later allows a break in the causal series to enable freedom. He asserts that if determinism is true, then free will cannot exist in a world where events can be traced to God as the guarantor of the initial causal state.⁵

⁵ My kind of determinism is different from the rigid determinism of the African philosopher Aribiah Attoe. Attoe (2022a) adopts a rigid deterministic framework and describes a mechanical causal system. I agree with him that there is no freedom in the world but I do not agree that rigid, inexorable determinism operates. The rigidity he focuses on, I think, follows from retrospective thinking. Once events occur they become irreversible and strict determinism seems to apply given irreversibility and the thinking that how things panned out is how they could have panned out. But this is true only in retrospect. My account of free will and determinism affirms the universal operation of yearning –impulses, conscious and unconscious activities at all levels, motives and dispositions. However, rigid sequences do not come into play because the universe of yearnings is an imperfect one where the varieties of yearnings often clash and create room for the emergence of uncertainty. In the particular case of human beings, consciousness is real and active; it is goal-directed. The reality of intentionality, a potentiality of *mood* that attests to intelligence as an evolvable quality in the world, means that before events occur through human agency they could have happened differently than they did. It is only after events occur that retrospective thinking persuades us that rigid conditioning was at play before the occurrence of specific events. In consolationist metaphysics, emphasis is on the incompleteness of the universe of yearnings rather than rigid causal conditioning. The incompleteness that defines yearning entities means that complexity and uncertainty subvert any possible rigid conditioning traceable through time and space to a first cause, as Attoe asserts. When we face the future there is no rigidity in the forward portion of Attoe's chain of interactions. We are faced with complexity, as Attoe himself acknowledges when he notes that: "This complexity, vast as it may be, does not reveal an indeterminate or probabilistic future, it only reveals the inability of the human observer to cognitively capture this complexity" (2022a, 87). Talk about the epistemological limitation of the human observer of nature involves talk about the incompleteness of the universe as a whole, for the human observer too is an essential part of nature and not an entity distinct from nature. Like the universe, *mood* constitutes the human being. Complexity and uncertainty no doubt indicate problems with rigid determinism; novelty is predicted in advance as an actualisation of potentials inherent in *mood*, as an additional instance of yearning in the world.

Given the contradiction that arises from affirming determinism (destiny) and at the same time affirming free will, I suspect that what the compatibilist philosophers are actually proposing is the compatibility of determinism and moral responsibility. Insight from consolationist thought can establish how moral responsibility is real in a deterministic world. As already suggested, all entities in the world are guilty by reason of the way they are constituted by *mood*. The human being, specifically, is guilty since it is naturally capable of evil. As a being that pursues the maximisation of the state of joy—whether successful in the quest or not—the human being knows what is good for itself. Certain knowledge of the ultimate purpose of human existence beyond speculation about perfection as the possible goal of life is not required for humans to know what is good for them and, accordingly, distinguish between good and bad. If humans have this discriminatory power that highlights their tendency to gravitate towards both good and evil for the benefit of the self, they are morally responsible for their actions as these actions negatively or positively affect their world. In this way moral responsibility is affirmed to be real in a deterministic world of yearnings. In a nutshell, moral responsibility is a function of knowledge rather than independence of constraining social, physical, and psychological factors, although constraining factors can be proposed as mitigating factors for morally irresponsible behaviour. The human being is, after all, an imperfect being.

To be morally responsible for an action it is sufficient for an actor to have known that they are doing something wrong for their own benefit. It does not matter that a rapist was compelled to commit rape because of their raging hormones. Knowledge of the wrongness of the act of rape is enough to confer moral responsibility. There is, of course, a poignant dimension to the human condition, whereby knowledge fails to save the doer of bad deeds who can point to deterministic elements that defeat willpower. I have, in this paper, captured this poignant dimension with reference to the tragedy of human existence.

On the question of God's relation with the world, the traditional theist may object that the limitation thesis proponents wrongly assume that we already have an adequate epistemic access to the world and the true nature of God. An adequate epistemic access to the world means that we know what constitutes physical objects beyond descriptive physical knowledge of how physical entities relate to each other. Epistemic access to God's nature means that we know what God really is beyond our current speculative posturing which is merely a human standpoint. It is true that humans have no such epistemic access and may well be wrong to deny the legitimacy of the transcendental conception of God. Nevertheless, the undeniable evidence of moral evil all around us justifies holding the view that if God exists he may be in some way limited. Therefore, as a response to the evidential problem of moral evil, the limitation thesis is not awkward even if it may someday be determined to be mistaken, when humans are able to gain adequate epistemic access to the way the world is structured and the nature of God. It may also be objected that the doctrine of *mood* is speculative. I respond that the speculative character of the doctrine does not invalidate its main premise which states that the incompleteness of the world that comes out clearly in the reality of evil indicates a fundamental lack at the core of being itself. The response to the theist's objection to the limitation thesis also applies here since the evidence of evil in the world cannot be denied.

Conclusion

My main argument in this paper all along is that a world like ours defined in terms of *mood* based on the behaviour of living and non-living things—characterised as yearning and ceaseless activity—is a deterministic world where moral evil arises necessarily. I began the journey towards the articulation of the human being as *homo melancholicus* by identifying African notions of the person and highlighting the desirability of the attainment of full personhood while, at the same time, noting the impossibility of attaining this ideal moral condition. I argued that determinism and free will cannot be compatible. I asserted that the human being must take responsibility for moral evil in the world since a limited God cannot be blamed for the wicked deeds of humans. Introducing the concept of *mood*, I argued for the compatibility of determinism and moral responsibility rather than the compatibility of determinism and free will.

When African philosophers like Gbadegesin and Balogun defend compatibilism, they in fact want to show how humans who are conditioned by a variety of factors are morally responsible for their deeds. If determinism is true to whatever degree, the will cannot be free. I argued in this paper that the attribution of moral responsibility derives its validity from human knowledge of good and evil. The very fact that a being without a free will can be morally responsible for its action points to a tragic kind of world where beings yearn for perfection but are, by virtue of their yearning essence, unable to attain perfection.

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