Comparative Analysis Of The Human Soul In Yoruba Philosophy And Transcendental Philosophy

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Abstract

This research paper conducts a comparative analysis of the human soul in Yoruba philosophy and Transcendental Philosophy (Hikmat al-muta'aliyah), exploring their similarities and differences. Yoruba philosophy emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans and the spiritual realm and the immortality of the soul. In contrast, Hikmat al-muta'aliyah, as discussed by scholars like Mullā Ṣadrā and Allameh Tabatabi, focuses on the soul's metaphysical aspects and divine connection. Through library-based research using a descriptive, analytical, and critical approach, the study compares key texts and ideas from both traditions to uncover their philosophical principles regarding the soul. Key distinctions arise in their discussions of the non-material world and the soul's origin, while both traditions agree on viewing the soul as an immaterial, independent entity and a philosophical foundation. Ultimately, this comparative study aims to enrich our understanding of the human soul from various cultural and philosophical perspectives, highlighting universal aspects of existence as well as unique nuances in each tradition's interpretation.

Keywords: Human Soul; Yoruba Philosophy; Transcendental Philosophy; Ifa Divination; Ideal world.

Introduction

All living beings exhibit fundamental life behaviors like breathing, eating, reproducing, adapting, sensing, moving, and thinking. These behaviors arise from physical elements and a concept called the "soul," which varies in complexity among plants, animals, and humans (Najafabadi, 2012). Understanding the soul is crucial in natural sciences, theology, and philosophical inquiry, as no philosopher has overlooked this topic. Anthony Quinton (1962) notes that the soul has been regarded as both a source of vitality distinguishing living beings from inanimate objects and a seat of consciousness. Crombie distinguishes the soul/body concept in three contexts: religious (survival after death), psychological (interaction of psychological and physiological aspects), and ethical (spiritual versus carnal needs) (Crombie, 1963; Olshewsky, 1976).

Plato describes the soul as a vital entity with origins in a greater universal soul, emphasizing its importance and rationality while asserting it is distinct from matter and can only be grasped through reasoning. The soul experiences internal, circular motion, initiating an eternal, wise life, and can take on various forms (Najafabadi, 2012). Aristotle views the soul as the life-giving principle of the body, categorizing souls hierarchically, with plants having a "nutritive" soul but lacking sensation, which he reserves for animals (Goetz & Taliaferro, 2011; Sorabji, 2015).

Ibn Sina adopts Aristotle's notion of the soul as the essence of living beings but differentiates it by arguing that the soul does not possess a form but is a perfection of the body. He likens the soul to a king, existing as a separate perfection that commands and utilizes the body as a tool, allowing it to achieve its functions (Ibn Sina, 1986).

Yoruba People

The Yoruba people, a major sub-Saharan ethnic group primarily in Nigeria, make up 21.4% of the country's population, accounting for about 45,668,000 individuals (World Data, 2023), mainly in Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun (Falola & Childs, 2005). In Benin Republic, they represent 12.2% of the population, totaling 1,586,000, with their

presence extending from southern Nigeria to the Weme River and into the Atakpame region (Falola & Childs, 2005). Yoruba communities are also found in Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and the diaspora (Akyeampong, 2000; Usman, 2008).

Yoruba Philosophy

Yoruba philosophy, as articulated by Prince Yemi D. Ogunyemi (2018), is a narrative, cultural, and folk philosophy that explores the nature and origins of both physical and spiritual realms. It comprises narratives and customs aimed at understanding the universe's essence and causes (Ogunyemi, 2015). While it is a branch of African philosophy, it specifically centers on the Yoruba people, their environment, and existence. Practiced by Yoruba scholars, it acknowledges Oduduwa as the founder of the Yoruba nation and philosophy (Agai, 2015; Kamau, 1976). Topics encompass literature, folklore, proverbs, love, wisdom, religion, metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, ontology, and anthropology. Yoruba philosophers investigate the physical and spiritual worlds through three key elements: Ori, Ifa (Orunmila), aphorisms, and proverbs.

Transcendental Philosophy

Transcendental Wisdom, or Hikmat Muta'aliyah in Arabic, was pioneered by Muhammad Bn Ibrahim Bn Yahya Al-Qawami Sadr al-Din Shirazi, known as Mulla Sadra or Sadr al-Mutallihin. The term "Sadrai" refers to Mulla Sadra's disciples and students interested in his philosophical methods. Prior to Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah, four major schools of thought existed in the Islamic world—Peripateticism, Illuminative philosophy, Mysticism, and theology (Kalam). Mulla Sadra's unique approach instigated a significant scientific revolution in Islamic philosophy, shaping its history, now recognized as the Transcendental Wisdom school (Motahhari, 1996). The term "Al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah" was originally coined by Ibn Sina in "Al-Ishara" for his philosophical school, now associated with Peripatetic Philosophy (Ibn Sina, 1997). Transcendental Wisdom blends intuitive and mystical experiences with rationality to address philosophical problems (Tusi, 1996; Ibrahim & Gorjian, 2023). Like its predecessors, it discusses special and general theology. Mulla Sadra introduced new topics, such as the "Primacy of Existence," which helped resolve various philosophical disputes, including those between philosophy,

mysticism, and theology (Kalam) (Mulla Sadra, 1981; Obudiyyat, 2014).

1. Literature Review

Scholars from both Yoruba Philosophy and Transcendental Wisdom have examined the human soul individually, but no comparative analysis between the two traditions exists. This research presents the first such comparison. Therefore, a review of relevant scholarly works is necessary. Saadatmand (2024) explores the "Unity of the Soul (nafs)" in Hikmat al-muta'aliyah, discussing Mullā Ṣadrā's views on unity of existence and the soul-body relationship. Qoriah and Khair (2020) analyze Mulla Sadra's spiritual humanism, emphasizing the immaterial aspects of existence and contrasting it with Western materialistic views, arguing that Sadra's humanism can help individuals realize their potential amidst contemporary crises. Obudiyyat (2014) discusses philosophical anthropology in Mulla Sadra's Transcendental Philosophy, focusing on Body, Soul, and their relationship. Mohammadi (2022) investigates Mulla Sadra and Imam Khomeini's perspectives on the soul, finding that they agree on its connection to the body and its progression towards spiritual perfection through various developmental stages.

Regarding Yoruba concepts, Alabi (2018) presents a dualistic view of the human person, suggesting a culture-relative approach to the mind-body problem that recognizes both material and immaterial aspects of existence. Adebowale (2014) examines the significance of the soul in defining human personality in both Platonic and Yoruba thought. Anthony et al. (2021) explore the Yoruba belief that humans consist of a physical body and a spiritual soul, informed by religious mythology. Lastly, Gbadegesin (1991) analyzes traditional and contemporary African philosophy, focusing on concepts like personhood and morality from a Yoruba perspective.

2. The Concept of the Soul (Emi) from the Perspective of Yoruba Philosophy

To understand the concept of the soul in Yoruba philosophy, it is essential to explore the non-material realm.

2.1 Aye Emi a e ri (non-material world)

In Yoruba belief, the soul's essence resides in this realm, which is home to various spiritual beings, including Olodumare (God), Emi (soul), Okan (heart), Orisa (gods), aje (witches), and Baba nla (ancestors) (Gbadegesin, 1984). Some sources also identify spiritual entities like emere, elegbe, abiku, and iwin (Ogunboye & Fuller, 2000).

Olodumare is the supreme deity, a spiritual being above the sky (ibid). Emi serves as the life-giving principle that animates the body (Gbadegesin, 1991). The okan, while physically part of the body and responsible for blood circulation, also symbolizes emotions and psychic energy in a non-material sense (ibid). Orisas, acting as intermediaries between Olodumare and humans, assist against threats to life and property (Gbadegesin, 1984). The aje, or witches, are considered spiritually powerful human beings divided into three categories: Aje dudu (malevolent), Aje pupa (deadly), and Aje funfun (benevolent) (Adeleye, 2020). Ancestors are viewed as former human beings who transform into immaterial beings after death, gaining divine status (ibid).

2.2 Emi (Soul)

According to Prof. Segun Gbadegesin, understanding "emi" is integral to the religious aspect of Yoruba thought. Emi is the spiritual essence, the active life principle that animates a lifeless body (Gbadegesin, 1991). Created by Olodumare, emi is infused into the human body as a divine breath, distinguishing it from the physical body, which is made from clay. Emi remains the determinant of existence; when withdrawn, life ceases. Thus, having emi signifies being a child of the deity, deserving protection from harm. The term elemi (one who has a soul) serves as a reminder against maltreatment, extending to animals and plants, which are also believed to possess a soul created by Olodumare. Emi gives life to the body, indicating whether a person is alive or dead (ibid).

It is important to differentiate between emi (soul) and eemi (breath). Eemi manifests the presence of emi; once infused, the body begins to breathe. Eemi represents the "breath," while emi is the "breather" within a person. Common phrases about the deceased, like "Emi re ti bo" (his soul has slipped off), reflect this distinction (Oyeshile, 2006). Philosophically, two claims arise regarding the nature of the soul: first, that emi cannot be spiritual if it occupies a physical body; second, that the soul is not an

independent entity but a force, questioning its existence outside the body. These philosophical challenges prompt further exploration of how Yoruba philosophers address them, necessitating a clear definition of emi (soul) in this context.

2.3 Nature of Emi (soul)

The Yoruba dictionary translates spirit as emi, spiritual as ti emi, matter as ohunkohun ti a le fi oju ri, ti a si lefi owo kan (whatever we see with our eyes and touch with our hands), and material as nkan tiara (anything that which pertains to the body) ((Gbadegesin, 1991). Yoruba philosophy understands emi as a portion of Olodumare's divine breath. Since Olodumare is also understood as spiritual that portion of this source of being which is given to the human being must also be spiritual. It is also recognized that it is the possession of emi that makes humans children of Olodumare. Therefore, the spirituality of the soul depends on the nature of its source (Olodumare), and by proving the nature of the creature of the soul, the nature of the soul is proved as well (ibid).

2.4 Emi as a Non-material Being and a Space Occupier

The primary challenge is how a spirit can exist in space while maintaining its spiritual essence. Prof. Segun Gbadegesin noted that Yoruba traditional thinkers did not find this problematic. Yoruba philosophy does not address the coexistence of emi as a spiritual entity within physical space. To tackle this, Gbadegesin presented two approaches.

The first suggests that "emi," as a spiritual entity, may simply refer to an invisible being, which dictionary definitions support. This view posits that emi is imperceptible to ordinary sight but may have quasi-physical attributes, making its occupancy of space plausible, similar to the concept of free spirits (iwin, oro) in folklore. Witches' emi (aje) are also seen this way, believed to fly to nocturnal meetings. For this interpretation to hold, it must also apply to the supreme deity, as emi is considered part of Olodumare.

The second approach dismisses the inconsistency by understanding emi as a spiritual entity capable of changing forms, unlike a material entity. It can take on a physical nature when needed and revert back, making it neither physical nor quasi-physical. This changeability stems from its spiritual nature. While

Olodumare is sometimes depicted as interacting with humans in Ifa divination poetry, this is also interpreted through the deity's spiritual essence. The ability of some individuals to 'see' and communicate with spirits does not imply these spirits possess physical properties, as they are believed to exist beyond ordinary space (ibid).

2.5 Emi as an Independent Being outside the Bodily Frame

A key claim concerns whether "emi" exists independently from the body. If "emi" is seen as a force infused into the body by Olodumare, it may be viewed merely as a principle that activates the ara (body), rather than a distinct entity. However, Yoruba philosophers disagree, noting the difference between "emi" and "eemi" in the language. Eemi is empirically identifiable, while "emi" signifies more than just breath. When Yoruba say emi wa (there is life), they imply more than mere breathing, highlighting the religious perspective of a person's existence. If the deity is seen as spiritual and independently existing, then the independent existence of "emi" outside the ara should be acceptable. Additionally, if "emi" activates the body, its consciousness could also be conceived outside the ara, akin to the consciousness of a spiritual deity without a physical form. Thus, the lack of a physical body should not negate the consciousness of "emi," which is considered an aspect of the deity (ibid).

2.6 Okàn (heart)

In Yoruba, "okan" has a dual nature; it refers to the physical heart that circulates blood while also being seen as the source of emotional and psychic reactions. To encourage someone, one might say Kii lokan (strengthen her heart). A person who is easily upset is called alaelokan (one with no heart), and when someone is sad, it's said that okan re ti daru (his heart is disrupted). This suggests that emotional states are linked to the state of one's okan.

The question arises whether okan serves as the center of conscious identity, similar to the English concept of "mind." Yoruba philosophers highlight the ambiguity of the Western notion of mind, which has both technical and non-technical meanings. In non-technical terms, it refers to "that which feels, perceives, wills, thinks" and can be a material entity, while in technical terms, it

contrasts with matter, veering towards an immaterial essence of thought.

This prompts an inquiry into whether "okan" can be seen as the source of thought, particularly in the non-technical sense of "mind." It is proposed that something non-physical may exist beyond the physical okan, responsible for conscious identity. Prof. Gbadegesin translates "okan" as heart, linking the physical heart's function to thoughts and emotions, and posits that the relationship between physical heart activity and mental states requires scientific understanding.

He references the English philosophical conception of the heart as the seat of spiritual or conscious life, noting that various emotional states like bravery, fear, or joy are attributed to "okan" as the source of such conditions—not just the physical heart's function.

Gbadegesin suggests that in Yoruba thought, "okan" can be associated with the source of thought, similar to the non-technical sense of mind. He discusses "ero," the Yoruba word for thought, linking it to "okan" and proposing a dual nature for the heart. While the physical heart circulates blood, it also has an invisible counterpart that houses conscious activities, resembling the English conception of the mind. He differentiates between "opolo" (brain), which is linked to logical reasoning, and "okan," associated with consciousness and emotional responses (ibid).

2.7 Different Between Emi (soul), Eemi (breath), and Okan (heart)

Emi	Eeemi	Okan
Non-material.	Material.	Material and Non-material
Its existence depends on Olodumare.	Its existence depends on emi.	Its existence depends on emi.
The breather.	The breath.	In its physical nature, it is a breathing element.

Table1: Different Between Emi (soul), Eemi (breath), and Okan (heart)

3. The Concept of the Human Soul from the Perspective of Transcendental Philosophy

The concept of the soul in philosophy before Mulla Sadra differs from its role in his work. Pre-Mulla Sadra philosophers studied the soul within natural sciences, linking it to the physical body. In contrast, Mulla Sadra introduced a new framework, dividing philosophy into four parts: general matters, natural sciences, specific metaphysics, and psychology. He termed these sections as journeys, dedicating the fourth to the soul. Thus, understanding the soul in this tradition requires exploring the non-material realm.

3.1 The Ideal World

Transcendental philosophy describes the ideal world, or non-material world, as a realm of relative immateriality between the material and intellectual worlds. It lacks physical matter but possesses effects such as color, dimension, and shape (Sadra al-Din Shirazi, 1984). This ideal world exists above the material and below the intellectual realms (ibid). Shahid Mutahari notes that it lies between pure intellect and nature, being abstract in power, motion, time, and place, yet not in dimensions (Motahari, 2020). Lahiji characterizes it as akin to sensations in quantity and rational entities in luminosity (Lahiji, 1993).

Suhravardi was the first philosopher to explicitly focus on the ideal world, supporting its existence through intuition and reasoning against mystical and theological views (Corbin, 2014; 2006; 1992; Mezbah, 2016). While Transcendental Philosophy acknowledges this realm, it differs from Suhravardi on specific details. Sadraian interprets the existence of this world based on his principles, with debates about its nature. In this philosophy, the beings of the ideal world are considered intermediaries; while having form and quantity, they are not confined to any place or direction (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1999).

Sadraian uses various terms for this world, including descending purgatory (barzakh nusuli), conjunctive imagination (khiyaleh munfasil), and solitary spirits (aalam ashbah mujaradeh) (Vahdatipoor, Kohansal, & Hoseyni, 2018). The ideal world serves as a mediator between the divine (intellectual world) and the material, embodying a spiritual essence similar to materiality but distinct due to its luminosity. It is a space where the material and spiritual interact, making it neither purely natural nor solely

intellectual. This world interprets unseen events and true dreams and facilitates miracles and blessings (Arshadi & Vasaei, 2009). Transcendental philosophy categorizes it into ascending and descending, as well as conjunctive and disjunctive ideal worlds. (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981; Reza, 2021)

Allameh Tabatabai argues that the ideal world serves as crucial evidence for its status as one of the three worlds due to its intermediary role connecting the abstract intellectual world with the material world. Since the intellect is purely abstract and matter is purely physical, an intermediary is needed to maintain their relationship and prevent a gap, as per the principle of higher possibility (qaedeyeh imkan ashraf). This world is thus referred to as "ideal" or "intermediate" (Tabatabai, 2008).

3.2 Defining the Soul

Transcendental philosophy aligns with earlier thinkers in defining the soul as the initial entelechy of a natural body, which enables the body to actualize its potential (Khamenei, 2003). The soul is thus an indivisible, immaterial substance that animates the body for perception and motion (Kohandel, 2015). However, Sadraian argues that this definition merely describes the soul's attributes and its relationship with the body, distinguishing between its intrinsic and additional statuses (Mesbah, 1996).

He contends that previous philosophers' definitions treat the soul's connection to the body as an added attribute rather than foundational (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1983). They view the soul as separate from the body, yet their perspective leads to a contradiction regarding the soul's attachment. Sadraian questions how an independent soul can connect to a specific body and critiques the notion that accidental attributes can determine the essence of the abstract soul, which should not depend on a body (ibid).

He asserts that the soul's connection to the body is essential, emerging from a specific body rather than attaching incidentally. Sadraian addresses the detachment of the soul at death by proposing different soul levels (Yusefi & Salek, 2018). The soul evolves from a vegetative to an animal and finally to a rational human soul (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 2004).

Transcendental philosophy also attributes souls to all living beings: plants have a vegetative soul, animals possess motive power and perceptual faculties, while humans have theoretical and practical intellects (Kohandel, 2015). Consequently, each species cannot exist without its corresponding soul, with acquired traits seen as secondary (Mezbah, 1996).

The human soul is considered a divine essence, with a metaphysical likeness to God's actions, reflecting a distinct universe within (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 2003). The soul governs the body and its senses, which operate obediently to the soul's will (Haq, 1972). Sadraian views the soul as a dynamic entity, continuously evolving, and needing materiality to develop its unique human capabilities, distinguishing it from plant and animal souls (Taheri, Javareshkian, & Kohansal, 2021).

3.3 Creation, Emergence, Proof of the Existence, and Immateriality of the Soul

In transcendental philosophy, the soul is seen as a material, accidental entity that originates from matter. Initially, the soul is not connected to the body but comes from a higher realm, functioning like a mineral's form that preserves matter. Over time, it engages in activities and reproduction, gaining sensory and motor capabilities, and is sometimes called the vegetative or animal soul (Mahmoud & Qarameleki, 2003). The human soul requires matter for existence, utilizing the body's potentiales like a hidden fire in stone. The human body inherently requires a higher soul beyond the vegetative and animal types to fully develop its capabilities (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 2002).

The human soul undergoes two stages: an initial stage of growth alongside matter and a higher stage of elevation, remaining somewhat dependent on material ties until spiritual elevation is achieved (Javad, 1974). Sadraian argues that proving the soul's existence does not necessitate distinguishing it from the body, as both share the same existence. While the soul and body are initially inseparable, the soul persists beyond the body’s destruction. Initially, the soul represents a "potentiality" for the body that is actualized through material motion, leading to its eventual independence and path toward perfection (Khamenei, 2003).

The speaking soul (Nafs natiq) is dynamic, evolving from an imperfect state to one of greater essence, contrary to Ibn Sina's idea of it as a static entity. Sadraian posits that the soul's progress involves transformation and evolution, advancing toward receptivity to active reason (Mahmoud & Qarameleki, 2003). Regarding the soul's emergence and immateriality, Sadraian notes various observable effects in plants, animals, and humans, which originate not from material forms but from inner forces known as "nafs" (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1990). He provides five key pieces of evidence to support the existence and immateriality of the soul (Javad, 1978).

3.4 Different Between Soul and Mind

An important aspect to clarify is the concept of "nafs" and its relation to "ru'uh" in transcendental philosophy. Allameh Tabatabai identifies three distinct meanings of "nafs":

1. Attribution to "nafs": "Nafs" is used contextually, indicating that without modification, it lacks specific meaning. For instance, in statements like "Zaid came by himself," it serves an emphatic purpose (Tabatabai, 1997). This usage is likewise ascribed to God, as seen in Quranic verses (e.g., 6:12, 3:28 & 30).

2. Individual human being: In the second context, "nafs" denotes an individual, representing a being made up of both body and soul, sometimes without a specific reference, as in Quran 7:189 and 5:32, where it implies "a singular human being."

3. Human soul: The third meaning signifies the essence of the human soul. Allameh argues that vitality, strength, and cognition are rooted in "nafs," essential for human existence (Tabatabai, 1997).

The second and third meanings of "nafs" are rarely applied to non-humans, such as plants, which are not called "nafs al-nabat." Additionally, while angels and jinn are alive, "nafs" in these senses is not used for them in the Quran, despite their assigned responsibilities (Tabatabai, 1997). The third meaning aligns with the soul and is often discussed in this context. Many philosophers, including Allameh, use "nafs" and "ruh" interchangeably, noting that "nafs" can also refer to "ruh" (Tabatabai, 1997; A group of researchers, 2011). In these discussions, the third interpretation of "nafs" is intended.

4. Comparative Analysis of the Human Soul

The aim of this section is to highlight the similarities and differences between the two traditions. The main distinctions are evident in their discussions of the non-material world and the origin of the soul, while both traditions agree on viewing the soul as an immaterial, independent being and a philosophical foundation.

4.1 Similarities

i. Soul as an Immaterial Being

Yoruba philosophers assert that the soul is an immaterial entity, interpreting the "emi" as a fragment of Olodumare's divine breath, which highlights its spiritual essence. As Olodumare is viewed as spiritual, the part given to humans must also be spiritual, making them offspring of Olodumare. Thus, the soul's spiritual essence is linked to its divine origin. This perspective parallels that of transcendental philosophers, who argue that the diverse effects observed in plants, animals, and humans cannot stem from material form (hyle), which is potential but lacks actuality. Instead, they posit that an immaterial force, known as "nafs," within the body is the source of these effects. However, Sadraian philosophy provides stronger evidence for the soul's existence and immateriality than Yoruba philosophy, with five key pieces of supporting evidence outlined initially.

ii. Soul as an Independent Being

Another key similarity between the two philosophies is their view of the soul as an independent entity from the body, though they approach this concept differently. Both traditions agree that the soul exists separately from the body; while the body relies on the soul for survival, the soul does not depend on the body for its existence. In both views, the departure of the soul signifies the death of the body. Yoruba philosophers emphasize the religious aspect of personhood, arguing that if a deity is considered spiritual and independent, the same applies to the "emi," which can exist outside the body ("ara"). They contend that the "emi" animates the body, and its consciousness persists independently, similar to that of a spiritual deity without a physical form. Transcendental philosophers also regard the soul as an independent essence, initially manifesting in physical form and evolving through

substantial motion into different forms, including the vegetative, animal, and human souls. In this tradition, the soul is inherently connected to the body from the beginning, with their relationship being complementary. The soul requires various tools for perception while in the realm of nature, relying on sensory organs to achieve complete awareness. Thus, the soul's dependence on the body is essential only for attaining perfection through this coordination.

iii. Philosophical Foundation

Yoruba philosophy is rooted in three fundamental elements utilized to explore and elucidate the causes and essence of phenomena impacting the physical and spiritual domains. These elements consist of: Ori, Ifa (Orunmila), aphorisms, and proverbs. Similarly, Transcendental Wisdom, akin to Yoruba Philosophy, relies on three crucial elements for reference or argumentation in philosophical dialogues. These elements encompass: Intellectual reasoning, revelation (intuition), the Holy Quran, and tradition, albeit with variations in content, principles, and outcomes. Hence, intellectual reasoning can be likened to Ori in Yoruba philosophy, as the source from which intellectual pursuits emanate. Revelation (intuition) can be compared to Ifa divination, where mystics receive divine revelations similar to how Orunmila did with Ifa and then imparted them to their followers (disciples) through guidance. The Holy Quran is akin to Ifa itself, a sacred text serving as a guide for the philosophers. Ultimately, tradition can be equated to aphorisms and proverbs, intellectual pearls of wisdom passed down from Yoruba ancestors.

4.2 Distinctions

iv. Non-material world

In Yoruba, the non-material world is referred to as “Aye emi a e ri,” meaning “an unseen world.” Yoruba philosophers believe this world is home to spiritual beings, including Olodumare (Almighty God), Emi (soul), Okan (heart), Orisa (angels or gods), aje (witchcraft), and Baba nla (ancestors), each with varying degrees of spirituality. Olodumare is the supreme deity, inherently spiritual, while Emi, as a creation of Olodumare, is a vital spiritual element but less so than Olodumare. Orisas serve as intermediaries between Olodumare and humans, assisting against evil. Ancestors, who were once human, transition to immaterial

beings upon death, gaining divinity. Additionally, figures like iwin, oro, and aje are believed to possess spiritual powers, allowing them to engage in nocturnal gatherings while their bodies rest. However, Yoruba philosophers do not provide evidence for this realm, focusing instead on the soul's immateriality.

In contrast, transcendental philosophy describes the non-material world as comprising two realms: the ideal world (aalam mithali) and the intellectual world (aalam aql). The ideal world, which is immaterial yet exhibits attributes of matter, serves as a bridge between the material and intellectual worlds. It is abstract in terms of power and motion but not in dimensions. Beings in the ideal world have form and quantity but are not confined to specific locations. This realm is known by various names, such as descending purgatory (barzakh nusuli) and the world of solitary spirits (aalam ashbah mujaradeh). According to Sadraian philosophy, the ideal world acts as an intermediary between the intellectual and material worlds, allowing for the transformation of spiritual into material and vice versa. It is a realm that validates unseen occurrences and dreams, manifesting many wonders and blessings. Transcendental philosophy also divides this realm into ascending and descending, conjunctive and disjunctive ideal worlds, demonstrating its existence through its intermediary role and the principle of higher possibility.

v. Creation and Emergence of the Soul

Yoruba philosophers and Professor Segun do not extensively explore the creation of the soul, briefly mentioning it in the context of body creation. They believe that Olodumare collaborated with certain gods, such as Orisanla (God of Creation), who shaped the body, and Ogun (God of Iron), who added details like limbs, before Olodumare infused the soul. Thus, the body precedes the soul, as Olodumare completed his work only after Orisanla formed the physical components, including the heart (Okan). In contrast, Sadraian philosophy posits that the soul initially originates from matter and is imprinted within it. At first, the soul is a natural form, akin to a mineral, preserving matter until it engages in activities and develops sensory and motor capabilities. It is considered a bodily force, sometimes called the vegetative or animal soul, emerging alongside the body and relying on it for existence, similar to a concealed fire in stone.

Transcendental philosophers argue that proving the soul's existence does not necessitate demonstrating it as separate from the body, as both share the same existence. The body's existence affirms the soul's existence since the soul functions as a faculty within it. Initially inseparable, the soul becomes distinct when the body is destroyed, yet it persists beyond that. While united in origin, the soul and body evolve into separate entities. The soul starts as a "potentiality" for the body, realized through material motion, and as it progresses towards perfection, it gradually becomes independent, ultimately detaching upon entering the spiritual realm.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the human soul in Yoruba philosophy and Transcendental Philosophy offers valuable insights into diverse perspectives on the soul across different cultures. By examining key concepts and frameworks within both traditions, the research highlights universal themes and unique cultural nuances shaping their understanding of the soul. While both traditions view the soul as an immaterial and independent entity, they reveal distinct interpretations regarding the non-material world and the soul's origin. This study underscores the importance of appreciating the richness of philosophical traditions beyond the Western canon. Engaging in such comparative analyses broadens our horizons, fosters intercultural dialogue, and deepens our appreciation for human thought and experience. Future research and interdisciplinary collaborations can further illuminate the complexities of the human soul, drawing from various philosophical traditions to enrich our understanding of this essential aspect of existence.

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