

57th Inaugural Lecture

EṢÙ, THE INDIVIDUAL, AND THE SOCIETY DANOYE OGUNTOLA-LAGUDA, PhD

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The Vice Chancellor, sir!

I stand before you today to present the first 2017 Inaugural Lecture of the Lagos State University, the 56th in the series of inaugural lectures of the University, the 16th of its kind from the Faculty of Arts, the fourth from the defunct Department of Religions, the first from now the Department of Religions and Peace Studies. Since I am not aware of any inaugural lecture at home and abroad that has Esu as either its topic or part of its topic, this inaugural lecture is, therefore, the first of its kind in the universe. The emphasis here is inaugural lecture. I must also note, ladies and gentlemen, that I (the lecturer of today) am the first “home grown” product of this University to present an inaugural lecture having obtained all my degrees from this University and having risen through the ranks, from Graduate Assistant to Professor, in this University.

The Vice Chancellor, sir, and all guests seated here, it is instructive from the topic of today’s lecture that the thrust of the presentation is ESU; and this is not an error as already known to some of my colleagues and former students seated here. To have chosen a different topic would amount to a betrayal of expectation. Eṣù forms the nub of my entire teaching and research career, and this is evident by the name, ESU DANIEL, that I earned since the early days of my career among students and colleagues. This name has brought me fame and taken me to all corners of the globe. As the topic of this lecture stands, the task is to present to you what is unknown (or hidden) about the known; and how this unknown about the known is exhibited by individuals and the society to advance or destroy human existence. This supposition calls for an illustration. At the mention of Eṣù, a great percentage of all in this auditorium have an idea or thought of what it connotes, denotes, or represents; this thinking constitutes the known. If an individual introduces her/himself as Esubiyi, Esugbemi or Eṣù Daniel in this age and time, the probability is very high that a greater number of us here will have the thought of either to further question the fellow about her/his name

if we are bold enough or to find a way of dissociating ourselves from such individual. Either of these attitudes is the result of the unknown about Eṣù which appears in the given name.

Eṣù is the name of a divinity among adherents of Yoruba religion anywhere in the world; the divinity is very significant in the practice or observance of Yoruba religious experience (see Laguda, 2005). Outside being the name of a divinity in the crowded Yoruba Pantheon, the term Eṣù remains popular among all categories of people regardless of age, religion, gender, or social status, and this is the consequence of the attributes of Eṣù often misconstrued or manipulated to suit oneself. Over the years, I have spent time and energy to research on Eṣù. Outcomes of that research formed the basis of many of my published works; as a matter of fact, my expertise on Eṣù adequately explains the positions that I have upheld in my various publications.

In this lecture, I will explore very briefly a discourse on Eṣù to reawaken and renew our thoughts about the entity as well as demonstrate the often neglected fundamentality of Eṣù in any philosophical discourse that attempts to render satisfactory explanation of human experience. Given this exploration, I will explicate the significance of Eṣù in the existence of both the individual and the society; and thereafter underscore how individuals and society exhibit Eṣù negatively. In order to fulfil the rationale of inaugural lecture, I will end this lecture with a look at some of the global problems currently facing humanity -- violence, terrorism, poverty, diseases, illiteracy, corruption, etc,- and the fundamental role of Eṣù in finding solutions to these problems.

The Concept and Conception of Eṣù: Our Yesterday

Detached of all meanings, the notion, ‘Eṣù’, is the name of a deity/divinity among pantheon of gods in Yoruba theology. As a matter of fact, Eṣù is the name of one of the primordial divinities in this pantheon; among others, we have Orunmila (the wisdom divinity) Ogun (divinity in charge of iron and war) Obatala (creative divinity). To the people, Olodumare is the origin and source of all beings including the divinities. Therefore, Olodumare created Eṣù as one of his lieutenants.

The deity, Eṣù, is a male by gender. However, he is capable of taking up the appearance of any other gender or entities as he pleases. In Yoruba religion, Eṣù is the inspector of rituals, sacrifice, and worship – the primordial duties assigned to him by Olodumare (Dopamu, 1996). He is also the special relation officer to Olodumare among the divinities (Kayode, 1984). Eṣù, therefore,

stands out among existing divinities in Yoruba theology because he has the will-power to approve or disapprove of all worships and rituals directed to Olodumare and/or any of the other divinities (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979). This primordial function earned Eṣù the unfortunate appellations and/or misconceptions identified with him (Laguda, 2005); some of these appellations/misconceptions I shall later touch on in this lecture.

Among the divinities, Eṣù is very close to Orunmila. Relying on oral traditions, both Eṣù and Orunmila are close friends (Abimbola 1976); and this is evident in the shrine of *Babalawo* (Ifa priest) where the emblem of Eṣù is always kept close to that of Orunmila. Although, there is no consensus among scholars on the exact relationship that exists between Eṣù and Orunmila, some of the suggested relationships include the view that (1) Eṣù is the right hand divinity to Orunmila (Idowu, 1996), (2) Eṣù runs errands for Orunmila (Idowu 1996), (3) Eṣù taught Orunmila the act of divination (Dopamu, 1996), and (4) while Orunmila declares the will of Olodumare to the world and those who choose to ignore these directives are punished by Eṣù and, in return for this service, Orunmila always provides sacrifice which is the food upon which Eṣù feeds (Dopamu 1996).

It is important to note, from the suggestions stated above concerning the relationship between Eṣù and Orunmila, that the nature of Eṣù is compromised as he is not a character that plays subordinate roles to other divinities. It is true that there is a close interaction between Eṣù and Orunmila. As a matter of fact, when Eṣù tricks people into committing trouble, it is Orunmila that always comes to the rescue by prescribing appropriate sacrifice. This is a clear indication that the two divinities work in collaboration. *Oworinmeji (Odu Ifa)*, as cited by Dopamu (1996), explains this relationship better with the following excerpts:

*Bi teniyan yoo ba sunwon
Araye ki le ba je
A dia fun Orumila,
Nijo ti yoo ba Eṣù sowo po
Ti Eṣù ni oun yoo ma ba tire je*

If the fate of a person is good,
The people of the world cannot stop it.
Ifa divination was performed for Orunmila
On the day he wanted to trade with Eṣù
And Eṣù said that he would continue to spoil his work.

Just like any Odu Ifa, the story behind the Odu cited above is that Eṣù got one hundred and twenty thousand cowries which Orunmila had saved and promised to use to trade for him. But because

Eṣù wanted Orunmila's work to be spoiled, he bought an old woman with the money and brought her to Orunmila. Within three days, the old woman died. In the story, Eṣù is a friend to Orunmila even though it appears he has evil intentions. At the onset, Eṣù fought Orunmila but later became friends with one another. The *Odu* also shows that Orunmila has the powers to curb the mischief of Eṣù; and this is Eṣù is the troublemaker and enemy of mankind whose power and mischief can only be curbed by Olodumare through Orunmila (Dopamu,1996). This does not suggest that Eṣù and Orunmila are contraries as mostly suggested by some scholars.

To understand the relationship between Eṣù and the other divinities, it is important to note that Eṣù is respected by other divinities, while his activities are checked by Olodumare through Orunmila. This is because Orunmila seeks to bring man closer to Olodumare by prescribing sacrifice; Eṣù makes sure that such rituals are done to precision. However, those who refuse to offer the prescribed sacrifice(s) are punished by Eṣù, on behalf of Orunmila and Olodumare, who has given him the role. This punishment is mostly regarded as evil by humans.

However, this is a negation of the fundamental basis of Yoruba cosmology, which suggests that Olodumare is the creator of all things and determinant of man's fate in the world. The question therefore is, why would Olodumare create Eṣù to be evil? The intention of Olodumare may be difficult to explain but the fact remains that he is seen as a good and perfect Being who cannot create evil. Since he created Eṣù, thus, the divinity cannot be evil. That other divinities are afraid of Eṣù could be understood within the framework of the role that Eṣù plays between other divinities and Olodumare. Thus, the saying *Eṣù ota Orisa* (Eṣù the adversary of Orisa) should be taken metaphorically. We may be right to conclude that:

It is also understood that while in Christianity and Islam there is the structural opposition between God and the Devil, which is the forces of evil that constantly confront God's work to destroy it, there, is no such structural opposition in the African concept (Yoruba concept). In fact the Yoruba Eṣù could not adequately represent the Christian Devil or the Islamic *Shaytan*; Eṣù in Yoruba is not opposed to God's work (Babayemi).

The Worship of Eṣù

Eṣù is an important divinity central to the liturgy of the Yoruba religion as a result of his role as inspector of worship and ritual. Indeed without his approval, Olodumare accepts no act of worship. Thus, his worship becomes imperative. The worship could be spontaneous or organized. When people pray that *Olorun, maje ari ija esu* (may God never let us face the wrath of Eṣù), they are

only trying to show that Eṣù's wrath is not desirous. However, the Babalawo will have to carry out his own worship in an organized manner.

In Yoruba land Eṣù is universally worshipped. This is underscored in the fact that each compound must have *Oju Eṣù* (Eṣù altar) which is situated outside the compound and those who do not have it will face the wrath of Eṣù (Fadipe). This demonstrates that the shrine or altar of Eṣù is usually outside of compound, town or village and this is because he has no character, thus "his house must be made for him in the street" (Lucas, 1948). The shrine is often symbolized by stone slab, a slanted piece of rough laterite struck into the ground; it could also be a mud or wood effigy. The worship of Eṣù, just as it is with any other divinities in Yoruba land Yoruba land is ritualistic and follows a set pattern which must be rigidly followed. Any worshipper that falls out of tune will be sanctioned by Eṣù.

Eṣù is patronized not only to avoid evil but also to seek his protection and benevolence (Idowu, 1996). This perhaps explains the annual festival held in his honour by farmers in Ile-Oluji. The head of a compound must perform the worship thus: he must pour palm oil on the emblem of Eṣù daily or else face the wrath of the divinity. This could extend to all members of that compound. Asari Opoku(1978) shares the opinion that the Yoruba people interact with Eṣù to avert his malevolence which can only be curbed by Olodumare. Apart from the fact that Eṣù is worshipped across Yoruba land, his portfolio as inspector-general of worship and rituals makes it imperative that he is constantly propitiated by the people. This role of Eṣù in Yoruba worship system is an indication that he is the most patronized divinity in Yoruba land (Dopamu,1996). This is because for any worship and sacrifice to be accepted by Olodumare and other divinities, Eṣù must first approve it after taking his share of the sacrifice.

Eṣù is always the first recipient when offerings and sacrifices are made to other divinities (Opoku, 1978). Thus, whether one engages in the worship of Orunmila (wisdom divinity) or Obatala (creative divinity) or any other divinity, one must give Eṣù his dues; otherwise such worship will not achieve the desired result. This explains why *Babalawo* (Ifa priests) have the altar or shrine of Eṣù in their pantheon of gods at all times.

There are no dedicated priests or priestesses to the worship of Eṣù as known with other divinities. However all priests and priestesses dedicated to other divinities certainly engage in the worship of Eṣù. This is what informs the understanding that:

Nearly every Orisa to which priests or priestesses are attached has an Eṣù or Elegbara linked with it, for example the Eṣù of Oya (river goddess) is Aye and is in the form of the horn of a buffalo. Aye is used for taking Oaths and it is filled with water that has to be drunk by people taking Oaths. We also have Elegbara Sango (Eṣù Sango) (Fadipe, 1978).

Worship elements of Eṣù include, (*Owo ejo*) cowries, (*Akuko edie*) cocks (*Obuko*) he-goats, (*Aja*) dogs (*Agbo*) ram, (*Obi*) kolanuts, (*Orogbo*) bitter kola, (*Igbin*), snail, (*Eko*) cooked pap, (*Epo*) palm oil, and others.

According to Musiliu Akinsiku (a *Babalawo* in Lagos), the first thing in the line of worship is to invoke Eṣù through his cognomen, then offer all the available elements of sacrifice (worship) on his altar, one after the other. Eṣù is then asked if the sacrifice has been accepted or otherwise. This is often done through divination.

With all sense of apology, let me appreciate my immediate family members before I continue with this lecture. On this note, I must appreciate my wife, who has been my pillar of support. She has provided comfort for me and has been part and parcel of my philosophical water. I must confess she does not belong to my kitchen, she is part of my life and she is the manager of me and my academic. My children are many. I have been blessed with good and morally balanced Girls and boy. Olabusoye(Orisa, herself) Olawunmi(omo daddy) Adetola(oomo Oba) and my Chairman, Ayoola. These kids give joy to me and make me the happiest dad on earth. I must appreciate the support of my Uncle, Rasheed Laguda, who has always been there to father me all through my life. My siblings-Oladuni, Omowunmi, Omolaso Oladimeji, Olamilekan and Akinfemi have all supported my career in many ways that time will not allow me to describe here. I thank you all for the approval to appreciate members of my immediate family. Now the lecture continues

Today: Misconceptions about Eṣù

In literature, Eṣù has a history of being popular with all kinds of negativity compare with positive perceptions. A concise survey of some of these writings will do justice to this view. Wande Abimbola(1976) does not claim that Eṣù is the Devil or Satan; however, he argues that Eṣù is a malevolent divinity who has hypocrisy, lying, slander, falsehood and other vices as his attributes. He underscores the evil nature of Eṣù when he writes that:

Standing between the evil powers and the good powers is the mischievous figure of Eṣù. Indeed, Eṣù is prepared at anytime to favour any human being or

supernatural power according to his own whims and caprices influenced by whether or not the person or power concern has performed the prescribed sacrifice.

Fadipe (1978) submits that Eṣù is a ubiquitous character who is evil. In his thesis on Eṣù, Dopamu (1996) submits that the deity is an enemy to mankind: “the invisible foe of man.” Asari Opoku (1991) categorized Eṣù as the most dreaded deity in Yoruba land, he claimed, “Eṣù is worshipped not to attract his mercy and favour but to avert his malevolence”. To make matter worst, the deity Eṣù has been equated with Satan and Shaytan by translators of the holy books of Christianity and Islam respectively.

With the advent of Christianity and Islam into the religious space of the Yoruba people, the understanding of Eṣù changed. Eṣù erroneously became affected by these religions’ conceptions of the Devil or Shaytan as appeared in their holy books. Samuel Johnson (1927) avers that Eṣù is Satan – the evil one, the author of all evils. Daramola and Jeje agree with Johnson (1975). Thus, Eṣù been misconceived as evil personified, because of those who translated the scripture of Christianity and Islam into the Yoruba language. That the people accepted the translation does not mean that the translation is accurate. A fallacy that is often repeated may take on the toga of truth.

To Christianity, the Devil is against the salvation plan of God. He tempts people and leads them astray against the plans of God for mankind. The erroneous identification of the Devil with Eṣù is further strengthened by the translation of the Bible into the Yoruba language. Eṣù is taken as the equivalent of the Devil and Satan. With this, there is the Yoruba Christian misconception of Eṣù. The same is true about the Islamic conception of Shaytan. The Quran admonishes Muslims always to avoid the evil machinations of Shaytan. Therefore, due to the same problem of scriptural translation, Yoruba Muslims equated Eṣù with Shaytan and came up with the Yoruba Islamic misconception of Eṣù.

In Yoruba mythology though, Eṣù is presented as a trickster who attempts to play with the emotions of humans, thereby exposing their greed. This is demonstrated in many myths in Yoruba theology, cosmology, and cosmogony. In one such myth, narrated by Bolaji Idowu (1996), Eṣù caused hatred and disharmony between two housewives. The myth states:

There was a man who had two wives, both of whom he loved equally and who were on the best of terms. So peaceful was the house in which they lived that they became their neighbour’s models

of conjugal harmony and people thought that nothing could disturb the happy relationship which existed among them.

Eṣù knew about this and did not like it. So he laid a trap for them in one of his usual crafty ways. He made a very beautiful cap, turned himself into a trader and went and displayed it for sale in the market. But he took care not to sell it to anyone else until one of the two wives came to the market and was attracted by it, so much that she immediately bought it.

Joyfully she took it home and presented it to her husband. The husband was so pleasantly surprised that he unwittingly showed his appreciation and gratitude in a way which made the other wife jealous. But she said nothing.

She waited with mounting uneasiness for the next market day. When the day arrived she went very early to the market in search of a gift a much better one at all cost for her husband. Eṣù was ready with another cap compared with which the first one paled into insignificance. Triumphantly, the second wife bought this cap and carried it home for her husband. The effect was magical. The stage was set for keen rivalry between the two wives, each striving to outdo the other in the dangerous game of winning the husband's love . . . [W]hen Eṣù was satisfied that the mines had been sufficiently laid and that the disastrous explosion would inevitably take place, he abruptly ceased going to the market . . . (Idowu 1996). Thus frustration set in for the wives and the next wife to visit the market was filled with rage; confusion overtook the family and peace became a thing of the past.

The import of this myth demonstrates that Eṣù is not happy when things are going smoothly. He thrives where there is discord, distrust, chaos, war, malice, and catastrophe. For me this is unlike the Eṣù of Yoruba traditional religion, but more like the Satan that tempted Jesus Christ in the Christian Gospel (Matthew 3). However, the infiltration of this kind of conception into pristine traditional Yoruba thought explains the paradox often seen in the misconceptions and worship of Eṣù today. From the myth, it appears that there seems to be an apparent confusion as to the personage, activities, and functions of Eṣù in Yoruba traditional religious theology. Philosophically speaking however, this suggests that Eṣù is by nature to remind us – the humans – that the Supreme Being should always be remembered even when happy.

Eṣù and A Better Tomorrow (Positive Perceptions)

Following from the (mis)conception of Eṣù, it is important to note that modern scholarship in Yoruba traditional religion has grappled with the task of determining the real characteristics and activities of Eṣù in the Yoruba religious landscape, purged of the misconceptions that attended the advent of Islam and Christianity. It is also imperative to determine the value of these conceptions on social, economic, literary, moral, and political conversation(s) in scholarship on subject matter Eṣù.

Before Christianity and Islam arrived in Yoruba land, Eṣù was worshipped by the people as a divinity who must be properly propitiated for Olodumare to be at peace with humanity. Thus, the worship of Eṣù is universal among Yoruba whether in Africa or in the diasporas. The universality is due to the belief that all rituals and worships directed to Olodumare through all divinities must pass a critical inspection by Eṣù who is the personage in charge of rituals and worship. As the bailiff of heaven, even divinities are afraid of Eṣù as he is well- trusted by Olodumare (Laguda 2002).

In contemporary times, the people's understanding and worship of Eṣù has dwindled. No thanks to the influx of the two dominant foreign religions in Yoruba land - Islam and Christianity. The interpretation given to this character has greatly affected his worship. It is now common to hear sayings such as *Eṣù ma se mi, omo elomini o se* (Eṣù do not influence me, try another person), *Eṣù lo un ti* (It is Eṣù that is influencing him), *Eṣù loun"se* (It is Eṣù that is punishing him) *ise Eṣù ni* (it is the work of Eṣù), whenever men sin against Olodumare or violate society's ethical codes. However, in Yoruba religious traditions Eṣù is not the cause or origin of things; it is Olodumare who is considered to be a perfect being (*oba ase kan maku*). Thus, origin of evil or good cannot be the work of Eṣù. On this issue Bewaji(2003) submits as follows:

Olodumare can use both good and bad in the process of ensuring justice. In doing so, Eṣù is instrumental in a large measure. He carries out the will of Olodumare most of the time He can favour or disfavour one, depending on the moral probity of the individual concerned. If Olodumare ordains the laws...and someone breaks them, what better officer can enforce the law than the legitimate custodian of the law? This is what Eṣù does.

On the whole, the theology and worship of Eṣù in Yoruba land have come under severe misconception especially due to the influx and conversion of the Yoruba to Islam and Christianity. The character of Eṣù has become more controversial in view of the name's usage as a translation of Devil and Shaytan in these religions. These characters are evil personified. Thus, many Yoruba today believe that Eṣù is evil and those who worship him are evil incarnates. However our study has shown that the Yoruba ancestors did not conceive Eṣù in this light. To them Eṣù is a divinity of Olodumare, who is the cause and origin of all things and beings.

The above misconceptions notwithstanding, Eṣù has also enjoyed some positive remarks in the works of some scholars; in particular, repudiating part of these misconceptions about Eṣù. Most notable among the few scholars is Bolaji Idowu. Idowu demonstrated to the contrary on the character and value of Eṣù. He pointed out that Eṣù is not the same as the character of the devil expressed in the Christian Bible and Shaytan of the Islamic Quran. These characters are depicted as outright evil beings that are always in constant opposition to the salvation plans of God for mankind. The nearest comparison to Eṣù in the Christian Bible, he posited, may be seen in the story of Job where God allows the devil to put the faith and loyalty of Job to test (Job 6:1–10). The implication of this comparison is that Eṣù has the permission of Olodumare (God) to put human faith and loyalty to test. Therefore, he is not against God's plan.

Funso Aiyejino (2009) examines the appropriation of Eṣù in African and Caribbean literatures and posits that Eṣù is the deity of freewill. He reaches this conclusion based on the usage of the character Eṣù in popular drama and literature in these cultures. He cited the works of Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Ama Ata Aidoo, among others. John Bewaji (2003) condemns the comparative attempts by scholars on the person, nature, and activities of Eṣù. To him, these scholars are only looking for ways to defend the incursion of their "new faith" (i.e., Christianity or Islam) into pristine Yoruba traditional religion. He writes:

the comparison would have provided an intellectual justification for an initially gratuitous and malicious translation of Eṣù as Devil or Satan and the attendant introduction of the problem of evil in an alien cultural and religious environment... it would have provided the first accurate treatment of an issue of interest across many disciplinary investigation.

He makes the submission above in reaction to Dopamu's comparative work on Eṣù. To him there is nowhere in Yoruba mythology or philosophy where "Eṣù is wilfully and maliciously disobedient or proud to Olodumare". Also, if evil perpetrated by other divinities will not make them evil as Idowu argues, why does it make Eṣù evil? Olodumare is believed by the Yoruba to be the source, origin and cause of all things, including evil. Thus Eṣù is not evil and cannot be the cause of evil.

E.O. Olukoju(1977) puts the controversy into perspective and concludes that those who are engaged in this comparison are only contradicting themselves. For him, Eṣù is like any other Yoruba divinity. Therefore he submits that:

Eṣù should be interpreted as the divinity of inspection or the divinity of Puritanism or the divinity of conformity ... just like all other divinities are interpreted according to their individual duties in the maintenance and control of the universe

In Yoruba land, people as well as the divinities are afraid of Eṣù. This is because of his malevolent tendencies, which are not entirely peculiar to him. He is difficult to worship or predict. Dopamu and Awolalu argue that just "when you feel Eṣù is satisfied, he could descend on the person, thus people worship and make offering to him on a daily basis". It is also true that Eṣù is dreaded by other divinities. Dopamu and Awolalu guide our understanding in this respect when they cited the myth below:

It was said once that Sango, the thunder divinity of Yoruba land boasted that there was no divinity he could not subdue. But Eṣù asked him promptly whether he included him and Sango immediately replied apologetically that he could not have been included

The above myth shows how divinities respect and fear the person of Eṣù. This situation is because Eṣù is capable of promoting good and evil at any time and also because the deeds and works of all the divinities are under his regular inspection.

Idowu also affirmed that divinities dread the antics and might of Eṣù. According to Idowu, this is because Eṣù possesses a "*power which none except Olodumare can curb*". This power is identified by Dopamu(1996) as *Ase*, which is the divine and potent power with which the divinities need to carry out their supernatural function. According to oral traditions Sango once boasted that there was no divinity that he could not subdue. Eṣù promptly challenged him "*Does that include me?*" to which Sango replied apologetically "*But why, surely you could not have been included*".

It is a common phenomenon in Yoruba land to hear the people pray; *Eṣù ma se mi, omo elo mi ni o se*. (Eṣù do not tempt me, try another person), *Eṣù lo un ti* (It is Eṣù that is instigating him). This shows that Eṣù could lead people astray from the general norms of the society. Thus wicked persons, anti social elements or non-conformists are children or adherents of Eṣù- *Omo Eṣù*. It is also believed that Eṣù is *Ota Orisa* (Eṣù the adversary of other divinities). According to Idowu, the actions and inactions of other divinities are under his inspection. He reserves the right to make reports about their deeds to Olodumare as he wishes.

Champions the cause of the evil powers; he is their patron, prince, ruler director – general and he can use any of these evil powers as he wishes.

At individual levels, people attribute their difficulties and failure to this divinity, Eṣù has some benevolent attributes. He guides and protects his devotees from any misfortune. Through him Olodumare blesses his devotees. It is true that Eṣù has the power to report people's immoral activities to Olodumare (that will attract punishment and sanction on offenders). Even divinities dread him for the same reason. This will explain why the Yoruba exhibit *prima facie* distrust towards the personage of Eṣù.

Although he has the potentials to be malicious, cause confusion, complicate situations, it is not enough to attribute all evils in the land to him or compare him with the New Testament concept of evil or Devil. Our conviction is based on the fact that all Yoruba divinities punish their devotees with sickness, misfortunes, ill luck, death, when they commit sin against Olodumare, miss worship, or carry out rituals wrongly. This perhaps informs the thinking of Bolaji Idowu(1996) that Eṣù is “*not the personal embodiment of evil standing in opposition to goodness*”.

From the above discussion, we can see that the general belief of the Yoruba is that Eṣù - just like any other divinity- was created by Olodumare for the purpose of assisting the *Numinous* in the day-to-day administration of the world. His portfolio concerns worship, rituals and sincerity of men and the divinities. It is a general consensus among scholars of Yoruba Religion that Eṣù is the inspector - general of rituals and worship. It is the reason that one of his appellations is *Olopa Olodumare lae – lae* (the eternal bailiff of Olodumare). Hence, Eṣù could be malevolent as well as benevolent, although some people believe that he is involved with the former than the latter.

Eṣù is a primordial divinity in Yoruba land and was created by God to be His lieutenant in the area of moral discipline, worship, purity and sincerity. We agree that Eṣù could punish immorality with

some discomfort. This may be considered evil, but at the same time has underlying good intentions. His attitude towards men depends on the attitude of the believers to sacrifice (whether they perform the prescribed sacrifice or otherwise). Therefore, the activities of Eṣù are functions of the underlying principle of promoting balance in relations of individual with self, individual with society, individual with non-physical beings and the Supreme Being, and society with non-physical beings and the Supreme Being. As a matter of fact, it is better to say that Eṣù is neither malevolent nor benevolent? Depending on assigned or statutory duties and the consequences or outcomes of such duties for the individual or society, he is labelled as either malevolent or benevolent.

To the people some of the punishments for these immoral acts will be witnessed on earth hence the popular sayings: “*bi orun se ma ri aye la o ti mo*” (the world will determine the hereafter) and *Idajo kan o si lorun, aye lo wa* (there is no judgment in heaven, it is on earth). If these beliefs are true then Eṣù cannot be blamed for man’s inadequacies in his attempt to worship his creator. Further Eṣù does not, in Yoruba conception, possess a kingdom of his own in opposition to that of his creator, Olodumare, as witnessed in the Christian conception of the Devil and Satan.

If as we observe in other religions in Yoruba land (Islam and Christianity) the punishment meted out to man by God does not diminish its good and moral nature, the question could be asked: Why is Eṣù blamed for his divine duties which are caused by Olodumare? Or why do people project the “wicked” acts of Eṣù and neglect his benevolent attributes.

To a Yoruba person, evil is normal in the society. This explains the saying: “*ti bi, ti ire loun rin*” (evil and good goes hand in hand). What is more, nothing happens in this world without the knowledge of Olodumare, thus even when evil comes, it is explained in the aphorism: *inu ire ni ibi wa*, (there is good in evil, and there is evil in good). Thus, the source of evil is not a problem to the Yoruba people. The Christian attributes of Olodumare of omniscience and omnipotence only “accentuate the fact that the problem of evil in the Judaeo-Christian religion (as well as Islamic traditions) is alien to Yoruba ancestors”.

The relationship between Eṣù and man cannot be over- emphasized. It is obvious that man is searching for his lost glory when he lives with comfort as provided by Olodumare before he fell into sin. This search is often done through worship. Since Eṣù is the inspector of worship and ritual, man must seek his support so that the import of his worship will be achieved. Again, the worship

of divinities as a means to an end in Yoruba land has earlier been mentioned. Thus when Eṣù is worshipped it is simply to get the favour of Olodumare as seen in material blessings, procreation, and longevity. Children are named after Eṣù in gratitude for his role as intermediary during worship, not as the source of the blessing. Therefore, we have such name as Esubiyi Esugbayi, Esuseyi, among others.

The belief of the Yoruba is that man must be in constant communion and interaction with all spiritual entities that control and govern his existence on earth. The failure to do so invites the wraths (mostly executed by Eṣù) of those entities.

However, faced with the problem of man's fallibility and the reality of evil in the activities of man vis-à-vis his relation to Olodumare, a scapegoat is seen in the person of Eṣù (who is the divinity in charge of sacrifice and worship in the Yoruba pantheon but often seen as deceitful, treacherous and wicked among other attributes). The question as to how culpable Eṣù can be in the face of the determined "*fate*" of man and the paradox created in the fact that man can attempt to alter his "*fate*" positively, as well as possess the freedom to act as he wishes, is the focus of our next section in this lecture.

However, let me appreciate my mentors, teachers, friends, and colleagues at this point before moving to the next section of today's lecture. I am indebted to two great academic giants who shaped my life and gave me basic lessons on how to be focused and climb the ladder of our profession. Professor, Ibigbolade Aderibigbe(University of Georgia, Athens) and Professor, Siyanbola Oyeweso who taught me the nitty gritty of academic engagements and politics of administration. To these two Academic icons I owe my academic career. Thank you sirs for those days of lean pockets, for those days of rigorous academic engagements and editorials works that has spanned over two decades . It is also important for me to appreciate my teachers, Prof. Lakin Akintola(hi brother), Prof. Christopher Oshun, Prof. Dapo Asaju, Dr. Ariri Chidomere, Dr. Misbaudin Raheemson, among others. These guys moulded me through their lectures and delivery patterns in class.

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agreed. I also want to appreciate my ABE-IGI connection. This is a big tree right in the middle of the land scape of Faculty of Arts. Under this tree, we shape academic publications, respond to government policies, critic University administrations and shape Union response to issues on our Campus. To this Abe-Igi, we owe many of our academic landmarks. The guys here are: Dr. Henry Hunjo, Dr. Segun Adeyeri, Dr. Olanrewaju Shita Bey, Dr. Parfait Ojomo, Dr. Yomi Bello, Dr. Bashiru Animashaun, Dr Wale Lawal, Mr. Oyekan Oluwaseyi, Mr. Kehinde Coker, and Dr. Afisi among others. My guys even though I now seem far away, I am always with you in spirit as we celebrate all our endeavours. I must mention the friendship of Dr. Habeen Sanni (Baba Yellow himself) who has been my friend for almost four decades. I appreciate you and your family especially your mum and Shakirat Sanni (my wife). Alagba Abu Elemoro Martins, Awogboju Onibudo, Stephen Oshinowo, Olokun Kamajalodun, among other members of Ijinla Fraternity, I appreciate your prayers and support. To my Masonic brothers, I greet you and wish you well.

Discourse on the Determined “Fate” of Man

Determinism is a philosophical doctrine that explains that everything, including human actions and activities have been preordained and therefore goes beyond the capacity of man to force a change or create alternatives. This will suggest that there is a cause of all events and given this case, all events must necessarily follow. In this doctrine the element of chance and freedom of choice and will are denied. Therefore, events cannot be affected by what man does or the choice he makes. In Yoruba theology and philosophy, determinism is expressed in a related concept of predestination. This is a concept that posits that man’s activities on earth are determined by a supernatural cum divine force, which is greater than man. This force in Yoruba religion is Olodumare who is conceived as the designer and sustainer of human destiny. John Mbiti(1982) submits in this regard that Olodumare “*ordains the destiny of his creatures, especially that of man*”. The import of this belief is that Olodumare is the main principle behind the people’s belief in predestination as expressed in his attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and transience. Further, He is the source of all beings in whose controlling the life of man resides.

To properly articulate Yoruba concept of predestination and determinism we have to rely on oral traditions as expressed in myths, proverbs, prayers, aphorisms and euphemisms. These are veritable sources through which the non-scriptural religion of the Yoruba could be studied.

According to Yoruba mythology, man in Yoruba religion is created by Olodumare with the assistance of his creative divinity, Obatala who is responsible for moulding human forms with clay (*amo*). Having completed his assignment, Olodumare will then put the essence of man, *emi*, into the body. This is what makes man a living being. Thus, man in Yoruba is made up of physical and spiritual components. The physical components of man include *Oju* (eyes), *imu* (nose), *owo* (hand) *enu* (mouth) *ese* (legs) among others, while the spiritual and intangible components of man include, *emi* (soul), *okan* (seat of intelligence) and *iye* (memory). Having been created, man goes before his creator to collect or receive his destiny. This process is conceived within three seemingly contradictory terms: *akunleyan* (that chosen while kneeling) *akunlegba* (that which is received kneeling) and *ayanmo* (that which is affixed on man). Adegboyega Oragan(1998) added two other terms to describe this process. These are *Adamo* (that which is affixed at creation) and *akosile* (that which is written down at creation). Whatever portion is given to man or chosen by man is doubly sealed by Olodumare and Onibode (heaven's gatekeeper) and is therefore irreversible. This is explained in a Yoruba aphorism as follows:

Akunleyan ni ada ye ba
Akunle yan ipin
Adaye tan, oju nkan ni

That which is received kneeling is that which is found on getting to the world

We knelt down and chose a portion, we got to the world and became displeased and impatient

Akunlegba lo wa lowo eda
Ko sogbon owo
Ko sogbo omo

That which is chosen kneeling is what the creator hold,
 There is no other means of possessing money
 There is no other means of possessing children

Ayanmo o gbo ogun
 (That which is affixed to one cannot be rectified with medicine)

A variation of the myth stated above suggests that all destinies are put under the custody of *Ajala* (custodian of destinies) and man in his pre-existence goes before the custodian to make a choice of destiny. This is explained in a story given by a Babalawo thus:

Three friends, Oriseeku (the son of ogun) Orilemere (the son of Ija) and Afuwape (the son of Orunmila) were to go to Ajala to choose their destiny. They were warned not to stop en route to Ajala's house. Afuwape consulted his father and divination was performed for him with three bags of salt and three cowries and some of these items were given to him as gift for Ajala. His two other friends went straight to Ajala's house and because he was not available, they went into his store and choose bad destinies, while Afuwape met Ajala who was cooking and presented him with salt to season his food, instead of the ashes he was used to. Afuwape also offset a debt owed by Ajala and in reaction to these gestures Ajala guided Afuwape to a good choice of destiny.

The myth narrated above suggests that man in his pre-existence is a rational and conscious being who is capable of choice. It equally shows that man is responsible for his choice of destiny and that consultation with Orunmila, the wisdom divinity, is a necessity for the actualization of a good destiny. The second myth is at variance with the first one, where a man goes reverently before Olodumare to choose, receive or get his destiny affixed on his personage. To Wale Olajide, this difference has "led to a certain pertinent conceptual confusion"

To some scholars of Yoruba Religion and philosophy, it is *Ori* that goes before Olodumare to choose, receive or get his destiny affixed. Another group of scholars believe that *Ori* is the destiny itself. Bolaji Idowu gave more than one interpretation and role to *Ori*. *Ori* could be seen as the bearer of destiny, destiny, guardian angel and personality soul. To him, after the moulding of man Olodumare put the soul – *Ori* into man to make him a living being. It is this *Ori* that goes before Olodumare to make a choice or collect its destiny before proceeding into the world to fulfil its content. Thus we can say that *Ori* is the bearer of destiny. He further agrees that destiny is known as *Ipin-Ori*, which has been contrasted to be ipon ri (*Ori*'s portion or lot). It is interesting to note that Idowu explains that destiny is sometimes designated as *Ori*. Dopamu and Awolalu(1979), posit that *Ori* is destiny and it is *Ori* that is shared in pre-existence by Olodumare. Adegboyega Orangan(1998) is convinced that *ori* is the personality soul and guardian angel who has the responsibility of accompanying an individual on his earthly journey. This is exemplified in a popular Yoruba prayer that *ori ni ma sun lo* (my head should not sleep), *ki ori sin o lo* (may *ori* go with you). Thus Orangan writes that:

Ori is the personality soul... It is the spiritual guardian or man's double which is associated with him from birth through the rites of passage of life. It guides, protects and advises him in a lowly voice about his fortune. It is also the pathfinder or the forerunner on the earthly bush to lead man to his fortune.

The above was based on the Yoruba prayer *ori mi lana ire ko mi* (my guardian angel, show me the path of fortune) Wande Abimbola(1976) also agrees that *ori* is the guardian angel. To him, *ori* has the responsibility to ward off evil and shield man from all forms of misfortune, since it is the personage that chooses destiny in heaven (in pre-existence). Wande writes further on this issue that:

Success or failure in life depends to a large extent on the type of *ori*, which an individual chooses in Isalu orun (heaven). *Ori* therefore is the element, which represents human destiny. The choice of good *ori* ensures that the individual concerned would lead a successful and prosperous life on earth, while the choice of a bad *ori* condemns the individual concerned to a life of failure

Thus, we can say that Wande conceived *ori* as the destiny, which is expected to guide and direct man's activities on earth. This goes to support the Yoruba prayer for a bride:

Mo ri lo
Ma mu ewa lo
Ojo le wa lo
Ori mi ba ni gbe ile oko

Let *ori* be your guide
Do not trust in beauty
Beauty will depreciate daily
It is *ori* that sustains' one in matrimony

Segun Gbadesin(1984) suggests that *ori* directs the actions of man and or determines the type or the “*sort of life a person would lead*” on earth. Thus *Ori* is destinies personified and at the same time the guardian angel. M.A. Makinde(1983) is convinced that *ori* is an immortal component of man. It is an entity that:

Performs a metaphysical function. It presumably leaves the body after death and goes back to heaven where it was originally moulded waiting to be used by soul at another cycle of reincarnation. This means that unlike the physical body *ori* does not perish on earth (at death)

He further argues that the “*initial choice of a destiny by a person before Olodumare is the choice of an entity ori*”. Although the position of Makinde is paradoxical, however, it creates a situation where a metaphysical subject becomes an empirical object. The question is: how do we determine the entity called *ori*?

From the above, it would seem that Idowu is correct in giving more than one interpretation to *ori*. However, our observation is that **to the Yoruba people *ori* represents destiny and can be called destiny.** *Ipin-ori* or *iponri* is the process of sharing of destiny. It could also mean destiny. Thus they can be used interchangeably. It should be noted that the common belief among the Yoruba people is that *ori* is the destiny.

Our discussion so far has shown that *ori* is an important entity in the Yoruba conception of man. This importance is expressed in the worship of *ori*. Idowu gave two basic reasons why this is necessary. First, *ori* needs to be worshipped as the essence of the personality or the guardian angel so that it will lead man to the right path in the effort to fulfil the content of his destiny. This is predicated on the fact that no destiny is essentially bad since they are all from the same source, Olodumare, who is Pure and Holy. Second, *ori* needs to be constantly worshipped to seek its favour and protection. This is expressed in *odu ifa ose tura* where man was rebuked for the worship of *ado* (gourd, often used for medicine). The *odu* goes thus:

*Oloyoo ti o fo ri ara re,
Sile ti on bo idi ado,
Sugbon ori mi gbe ni,
ado o gbe ni,
nje ori la ba bo ti a
ba fi Orisa sile,*

*Oloyoo who neglect his own
ori and made offering to idi ado.*

But it is *ori* that favours one; *ado* does not. It is rather *ori* that should be worshipped and Orisa left out

Further *Odu Ogunda meji* explains the significance of worship of *ori* thus:

*Orunmila ni ta ni a ba bo?
won ni ka sure ka bo egun ile
Orunmila ni ko to eni a ba bo
wo ni ka pa ori da,
ka bo Orisa oja,
Orunmila ni ka to en a ba bo
won ni ka su osuka ribiti
Ka gbe ebo aye ka orita
Orunmila ni ko to eni a ba bo
Nje mo je wo obun,
ki o da so ro mi,
ki o te mi,*

*Orunmila ni ori nikan
le to eni a ba bo*

Orunmila asked,
who among the gods should we propitiate?
They answered we should make
Sacrifice to Eegun cult
Orunmila said he is not a worthy
god to be propitiated.
They said we should desist from
giving preference to ori instead
a recognition should be given to Orisa-oja
Orunmila said he is not worthy to be offered sacrifice.
They answered, we should make a
round cloth to carry sacrifice to the
witches at the cross road,
Orunmila said they are not worthy to be offered sacrifice,
Orunmila I confess my ignorance,
Blessed, cloths me with wisdom, enlighten me,
Orunmila said, it is ori alone
that is worthy to be worshipped
and propitiated

It has been suggested that a Yoruba man is not bothered about the source of evil, because to him Olodumare creates all things (good and evil) for the benefit of mankind. This is explained in the saying, *ti bi ti ire lo un rin* (good and evil go together). Further all things happen because Olodumare permits them, this is encapsulated in the euphemism that says:

*A dun se bi oun ti
Olodumare a fi owo si
Aso ro se bi
Bi oun ti Olodumare o fi owo si*

Easy done as what Olodumare ordained
Difficult to accomplish like that which Olodumare forbids.

The confusion generated by these conceptions is further compounded in the paradox created by the fatalistic tendencies expressed in the Yoruba concept of destiny. In the process described above, after a choice of destiny has been made or it is affixed man goes before *Onibode* on his departure to earthly existence, where he is given the water of forgetfulness and his destiny sealed. This implies that the destiny is unalterable. But a paradox is created when we examine the practical life of the people where it is believed that destiny could be altered positively or negatively. The former is expressed in sayings such as earlier cited that:

*Akunleyan ni ada ye ba,
Ada' ye tan oju kan ni,*

We knelt down to choose our destinies.
But when we arrived on earth,
we became impatient.

*Akunlegba lo wa lowo eda,
ko so sogbon owo,
ko sogbon omo*

Akunlegba is what the creature hold,
There is no means of possessing money,
There is no means of possessing children.

*Ayanmo ogbo oogun
Ori le le jo.*

That which is affixed cannot
be rectified with medicine,
it is ori that is liable.

The above goes to suggest that once a destiny has been sealed it cannot be altered. Even when human beings, owing to envy and jealousy, attempt to attack human personality, Olodumare makes it impossible. This is exemplified in the story narrated in *Odu Ogbe Ate* about one Labode, the child of Otunba that:

*Won ni gbogbo aye a maa bu ku,
sugbon Ajalorun a maa bu kuni*

It is said that the whole world
Does its best to thwart him.
But Ajalorun (Olodumare) will keep blessing him

Thus, no matter the effort of man the destiny as fixed cannot be altered.

However, in Yoruba daily life the people believe it that destiny could be altered or amended by spiritual agencies and man himself. This could be done positively through consultation with Orunmila who as the *Eleri-Ipin* (witness of destiny) has the power to reveal the content of destiny and rectify bad ones to good ones. The worship and consultation with Orunmila will also guarantee the preservation of a good destiny. In this regard, Idowu(1996) records a dialogue between an Ifa priest and a suppliant thus:

Priest *Ta lo ni eku?*

Suppliant	<i>Temi ni o</i>
Priest	<i>Ta lo ni eja?</i>
Suppliant	<i>Te mi ni o</i>
Priest	<i>Ta lo ni aaka?</i>
Suppliant	<i>Te mi ni o</i>
Priest	<i>Kilo mu won wa fun?</i>
Suppliant	<i>Kin lo wo lowo</i>
Priest	<i>Kin n kole mo le</i>
Suppliant	<i>Kin fatitan se ehin</i>
Priest	<i>Kin segun ota</i>
Suppliant	<i>Ki ri yin odi</i>
Priest	<i>Kin ni aiku ti segbon iwa</i>
Suppliant	<i>Lo hun ti mo se mu won wa</i>
Priest	Whose rat is this?
Suppliant	Mine
Priest	Whose are the fish?
Suppliant	Mine
Priest	Whose is the hedgehog?
Suppliant	Mine
Priest	Why do you bring them?
Suppliant	That I may have money upon money
Priest	That I may have children upon children
Suppliant	That I may extend the boundaries of my property
Priest	That I may be victorious over all foes
Suppliant	That I may possess longevity which is the acme of blessed wellbeing
Priest	Those are the reasons why I bring them

The above dialogue shows that man can attempt to alter or preserve the content of his destiny through worship of and consultation with Orunmila. The implication is that the Yoruba concept of destiny is not fatalistic.

Apart from Orunmila, destiny could also be amended or adjusted through the evil machination of *omo-araye* (evil ones). These include the witches, wizards, wicked minded people, and sadistic foes. The average Yoruba man is afraid of these groups of people because of their evil tendencies and the highest of these is the retardation or disruption of the course of human destiny.

The Yoruba people are still living in a spirit- filled world where spiritual elements are often dreaded for their capabilities to wreak havoc in the society. Idowu cited a Yoruba ballad about three birds whose fortune and fate were changed negatively by *omo araye*. The ballad goes as follows:

*E ma pe mi nipe agbe
Ka agbe to dalaro igbo
Ema pe mi nipe aluko
Ka aluko o to di olosun egan
Ema pe mi ni pe epe oburo
Ko oburo to da lawirin
Eye ni inu oko*

Do not telepathize me as you did *agbe*
So that *agbe* became the indigo coloured one of the forest
Do not telepathize me as you did *Aluko*
So that *Aluko* became the camwood coloured one of the wilderness
Do not telepathize me as you did *Oburo*
So that *Oburo* became the vagrant babbler of the groove

A sentence (strand) in *Odu Ogbe Edi* also emphasizes the role sadistic foes (*elenini*) could play in making the actualization of destiny impossible. It goes thus:

*Ori Kunle o yan wa
Elenini o je ko se*

Ori knelt and chose the portion
Elenini hindered it from its fulfillment

There are also saying such as *omo araye Ogun* (evil ones are warrior) and *A ye ni pa* [Aye is malignantly powerful).

It should be noted that the paradox mentioned above does not bother a Yoruba man. He has often accepted whatever happens in the course of his life as the wish of Olodumare as encapsulated in his destiny (*Ori*). He therefore accepts it without question. According to Idowu(1996), the Yoruba man:

Offers neither explanation nor rationale about it. It just means that, in an explicable way, what happens to a person may be simultaneously the result of *bi o ti gba a* (as he received it) and *afowofa* (that which he brings upon himself) and *oro aye* (earthly cause)

Therefore when faced with good fortune, the Yoruba man believes that it is due to the benevolence of his *ori* and the wish of his creator. When evil befalls him, he attributes it to manipulation of his destiny by sadistic foes.

From our discussion so far, we observe that it would seem on the surface that the Yoruba are determinists, especially based on some fatalistic sayings, aphorism and euphemism cited above. The paradox expressed in the alterability or otherwise of destiny suggests that the people cannot be strictly referred to as determinists, since they can still make efforts to rectify or adjust their determined lots through consultation with Orunmila with appropriate sacrifice(s) and offering(s). Therefore, the principle of “*what will be will be is not Yoruba in origin and orientation*”. To resolve this riddle Oladapo(1992) opines that destiny and determinism in Yoruba philosophy could be taken as a covenant relationship or an agreement between the creator (Olodumare) and his creatures.

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Fatalism is a doctrine that preaches that all events happen according to a fixed and inevitable destiny that cannot be controlled or changed by the will of an individual. In this doctrine deliberation is an illusion (Oluwole,1992). It encourages man to accept things as they occur without any arguments, questions, or alluding cause(s) of events to wickedness or moral responsibilities. To a fatalist there is no need to struggle against what has already been determined or caused by a superior power. Oluwole interprets fatalism, as a theory, which amounts to the claim that what must occur, must occur no matter our efforts. We cannot prevent or effect the occurrence of any event. This is another way of saying that events have no human casual connection. According to Oladapo (1992), fatalism contradicts moral responsibility and freedom of choice⁴¹. In the Yoruba religious conception of destiny discussed above one would be tempted to conclude that the people are fatalists who believe that once a destiny has been sealed by Olodumare and Onibode (gate keeper) it cannot be altered. This is credibly explained in their saying such as:

Ayan mo ogbo ogun
(that which is affixed to one
cannot be rectified with
medicine)
Akunle gba lo wa lowo, eda
ko sugbon owo,
ko sogbon omo

(That which is chosen kneeling is
what is the creature holds)
There is no other means of possessing money.
There is no other means of possessing children

Oluwole (1992) argues that the Yoruba are fatalistic and gives an example thus: x was told he would die of water. He determines neither to swim nor even go near water, X takes a sip of water at home, has hiccup and dies. He has been killed by water.

The above will suggest that “*what will be will be*”. However, it could be argued that the average Yoruba person cannot be rightly called a fatalist since man can still re-open the issue of the contents of his predetermined destiny through consultation with Orunmila and offering of sacrifices to his *ori* (destiny). The fact that evil ones or wicked ones could change the course of one’s predetermined destiny also calls to question the issue of fatalism in Yoruba religion and philosophy. The dialogue earlier cited between an Ifa priest and a suppliant is a good pointer to the efforts of man to enhance or change his destiny on earth. Also, in *Odu Ifa* cited above (for example, *Ogbe edi*, *Ogbe Ogunda*, *Ogbe Ate*, among others) we observe that destiny can be influenced or altered.

A critical appraisal of fatalism as a doctrine shows its compatibility with the doctrine of determinism. This negates the principle of hard work and encourages indolence. In the Yoruba religion man is encouraged to be industrious in order to achieve success in his sojourn on earth. Even where the content of one’s destiny is known in Yoruba land, whether good or bad, the personage is encouraged to continue to work hard to sustain and preserve his good destiny or to change the bad course to a more favourable course. To the Yoruba people indolence and laziness are not encouraged. In fact, it is often said that:

Ise lo ogun ise
Ise la fi di eni gi ga
Bi a ko ba ni ise lowo
Bi ole la’n ri
Bi a ba ri eni gbe kele
Ka te ra mo ise eni...

Work is the medicine of poverty
Work will make one prosper
Without work, we look like a lazy man
Without any one to rely upon

We should always work hard.

Although a Yoruba man is always ready to attribute his ill-fortune to his destiny but he will explain his struggle and efforts to attain success even when this seems impossible.

In our discussion so far, we have observed that the Yoruba concept of man is centred on the first cause of all beings, Olodumare, who is the origin and source of all creatures. Having created man, all necessary elements that will make his earth sojourn meaningful were placed at his disposal. However due to sin, man fell out with his creator and the concept of punishment and reward set in. Man can be morally praised or condemned based on his character. This is premised on the fact that he is a free agent that can choose to do good at the expense of evil to better his lot on earth and make his hereafter/after life worthwhile in heaven (*orun rere*). This can only be achieved if man is free to do or act according to his will. In spite of this freedom, a paradox is noticed when we consider the fact that the Yoruba people are determinists. But the kind of determinism they preach is compatible with freewill (libertarianism) which is philosophically considered to be the opposite of determinism. The question here is; what has Esu got to do with human and societal morality? Can a corrupt officer of States and Institutions blame Esu for his misconduct(s)? My response is NO. As determined being Esu lacked the capacity to make man do evil by coercion, however human beings cannot engage in evil acts by their own volition. The basic problem here is the inability to take responsibility for our actions or inactions. Further, it is because we, as human, want to protect the attributes of God as the powerful, knowledgeable and caring personage. The point am making here is that Olodumare is the cause of Evil, as creator of all things (animate or otherwise) and he should be liable for the deeds of his creatures who are also determined.

Before I move to the conclusion of this lecture, let me make out time here to appreciate my BOYS that have always been there for me through thick and thin. They have supported me in their noble ways and are still doing it not bothered by the toga of “OMO LAGUDA”. Dr. Shita Bey is the leader of this team. He has managed my life in such a magnificent ways that I may not have been delivering this lecture without his input. Lanre thank you. I will live by God’s grace to listen to your inaugural lecture. There are also Kolawole Adesuyi, Omolomo Tombora, Olarewaju Abaniwonda, Adeola Adejokun, Sunmbo Ogunranti, Kelechi Anunobe, Yomi Williams, Yomi Ibitade among others. In the town I have enjoyed the support of Akeem Onilegbale, Saheed

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Conclusion

As stated earlier, the influx of imported religious ideologies such as Christianity and Islam to Yoruba religious space has affected the traditional conception of Eṣù. The pristine traditional conception of the deity as noted in Yoruba traditional religion has been abandoned and positions of Christianity and Islam on the deity have become popular. To these religions, Eṣù is evil and works against the salvation plan of God for mankind.

He should therefore be avoided at all cost. He leads men astray and encourages them to do evil, thereby determining their negative actions and immorality. However, Yoruba Muslims and Christians are convinced that man is a determined moral agent who has come into the world to act according to the script as designed and sealed by Olodumare (God). Therefore, man cannot do otherwise since there are no alternative courses of action laid out for him.

The Yoruba concept of determinism posits a contradiction leading to a paradox for the people who conceive of Eṣù as the catalyst and cause of their evil deeds. The issue here has to do with the juxtaposition of activities of Eṣù (a creature of Olodumare) and immoral actions/ inactions of man leading to the popular dictum among Yoruba people today— *Eṣù loun se mi* or *Eṣù loun ti mi* (it is Eṣù that caused my actions/ Eṣù propelled me into action).

They even place their evil and immoral activities at the door step of Eṣù with the saying *Ise Eṣù ni* (It is the work of Eṣù). It provides a challenge for the conception of Eṣù in pristine Yoruba religion. The Yoruba in their traditional religion are not bothered about the occurrence of evil. To them what is evil now may become good in the long run.

In fact they often say *Ti bi tire loun rin* (Evil and good go together). The problem has to do with the attempt of Yoruba Christians and Muslims to locate a scapegoat for their moral weaknesses and absolve their God from evil activities. In Yoruba traditional thought all things including evil are possible only with the approval of God. Thus, they say:

Adun se bi oun ti
Olodumare fi owo si
Aso ro se bi ounti
Olodumare o fi owo si

Easy done as what Olodumare ordained

Difficult to accomplish like that which Olodumare forbids.

Therefore, evil is caused by Olodumare for good purposes. For example, labour pain experienced by a woman is evil only momentarily; after delivery of the child, joy and happiness always ensue. We can therefore argue that Eṣù is not evil in Yoruba traditional religion but the shift in conception is occasioned by the influx of Christian and Islamic ideologies into the theology of traditional religion to the extent that it is now difficult, if not impossible, to argue for a pristine Yoruba traditional ideology or even religion. A caused being (Eṣù) may not be the primary cause of immoral activities of men. Like all other divinities in Yoruba pantheon, Eṣù can be ambivalent (Laguda 2002). He punishes worship and ritual offenders according to the dictates of his duties as determined by his creator Olodumare.

If these punishments are considered to be evil then the prime cause of all things-Olodumare-should be liable for the actions of his divinity, Eṣù. This is akin to the observation of John Hick (1963) that God allows evil to exist in order to derive greater good from it. This was also Thomas Aquinas' solution to the problem of evil and God's existence in his five ways philosophy to demonstrate God's existence and righteousness in the face of evil. This summation of Hick and Aquinas may have informed the opinion of Gould et al. (2007) that there is a kind of logical necessity built into the concept of evil. Without it, goodness would be meaningless.

From the above premises, I wish to submit that Eṣù is not evil personified nor can he be the cause of evil. He also cannot be the catalyst of the evil deeds (actions or inactions) of men. Eṣù as a divinity of Olodumare has the onerous task of assisting the Numinous in the theocratic governance of the cosmos. His duties are determined by Olodumare and he has no option but to implement the directives of his creator. As the inspector of rituals and adjutant of sacrifices as well as worship, he may, in the course of his duties, incur the anger and displeasure of humanity as he punishes their ritual laxity and weaknesses. To blame Eṣù for the evil deeds of man is to create a paradox that may be difficult to explain.

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THANK YOU