

The Coherence of the Belief in the Existence of Evil in Traditional Yorùbá Theology: A Process-Relational Analysis*

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Due to its domineering Western and Christian influence, philosophy of religion, as a discipline, is hesitant or reluctant to entertain arguments on similar subjects from non-Western and non-Christian traditions even when these traditions may have answers to problems or issues in the discipline. Of these problems, the present research will limit its scope to theodicy. Whereas the problem continues to encounter endless debates and attempts to reconciling a loving, powerful and knowledgeable Deity with the existence of natural and moral evils in the world, the lack of coherence in that tradition of thought cannot be said for “Yorùbá theology”. Through the method of philosophical and hermeneutical analyses, the effort of this research is to unpack the process underpinning of “Yorùbá theology” which helps in formulating a coherent understanding of the reality of evil in the presence of a good, loving and wise “Olódùmarè” that is void of Satan/Devil. On this note, this research submits, having used Yorùbá process theology as paradigm, that the debate over the problem of evil in mainstream tradition of philosophy of religion may be resolved if non-Western and non-Christian traditions are invited into the discourse.

Keywords: *Yorùbá Theology, Process Metaphysics, Olódùmarè, Theodicy*

Introduction

Èṣù, one of the primordial divinities, has been erroneously rendered in the “process of making” the Yorùbá version of the English Bible as the direct equivalent of Devil/Satan. We concede to scholars such as Olusegun Oladipo, John Ishola Bewaji, Oladele Abiodun Balogun, Sophie Oluwole and a host of others that have made impressive efforts, through rigorous process of decolonization, the futility of such conceptual imposition. The

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aggregate consequence of their reflections is that the case of *Èṣù* is an instance of using the wrong concept in the wrong context – the context of Africans has no place of a Satan/Devil working against God. In spite of their efforts of correcting this misleading and distorted portrayal of *Èṣù*, none of them has offered to foreground the metaphysical or ontological background responsible for the coherence in the existence of God, the reality of evil in the absence of Satan/Devil, usually perceived as the originator of evil among Africans. The onus of this research then is to add to the existing debate and also fill this yawning gap. On this note, it is helpful to point out from the outset that this study does not seek to pursue the origin of the “Fall of Man” in *Yorùbá* theology from God-Satan perspective in classical theology, for two reasons. Firstly, we agree with the aforementioned scholars, the proposal that *Èṣù* is not the biblical Satan/Devil and hence not the *source* of evil. For us, the discrepancy has been resolved conclusively with valid and sound arguments. Secondly, we do not consider it just, seeking a peoples’ (the *Yorùbá*) perception of reality from the revelation of another (Hebrew and Arab). It assumes the former has no knowledge of divine matters. This almost paradigmatic attitude of assessing the philosophic components of religious cultures in Africa from Western and Christian assumptions accounts for one of the reasons why the relevance of philosophy of religion as a discipline has been questioned in recent times.¹ Therefore, this research tenders that it is appropriate to discover the truth as set out by the progenitors of the *Yorùbá* culture, through an engagement with their *Ifá* literary corpus.

In addition to the foregoing, we discern that the resolution made by the aforementioned scholars lacks a heuristic analysis of the *Ifá* corpus, *why* evil persists in the actual world. Throughout their treatises, none of them provided the metaphysical groundwork for the reality of evilness. Hence, we hypothesize that a metaphysical groundwork for *Yorùbá* theology has yet to be provided. It is this metaphysic that will inform the place of God and evil in the theology of the people. In this essay, we uncover through hermeneutical analysis of the *Ifá* corpus, the passage that is suggestive of the persistence of moral and natural evils in the actual world.

¹ See Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2008), Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) and Timothy D. Knepper, “The end of philosophy of religion?” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 1 (2014): 120–49.

For the realization of the foregoing tasks, we commence with a detailed engagement with God, as conceived in classical theology. There, we summarily state some of the metaphysical inconsistencies in that theology. The aim is to show that traditional theism uses an inadequate strand of metaphysics to explain divine action or agency in the actual world. Afterward, the study unleashes the persistence of evil and the metaphysics that justifies its coherence in *Yorùbá* theology.

God as a Coercive Agency in Classical Theology: Why Process Theology Matters

Traditional theism has impressed upon civilizations, the idea of a God that is all-powerful, all-knowing and ever present – the entity who created the world *ex-nihilo*.² This entity (God) has angels and soon after one of them *Lucifer* “rebelled” against it and has come to be known as *Satan*, the one who deceives humans to commit sin against *God*. This notion of *God* and *Satan* is not alien to Islam as it pervades the Judeo-Christian world-view, but implied here is the “struggle” between *God* and *Satan*, good and evil.³ Hence, Satan is responsible for the evil that entered the world. The episode of the apple that was eaten by Adam and Eve accounts for the Fall of Man and the origin of evil in the world. What has God done about evil? What is the nature of God in traditional theism? How does this God interact with the world? We will attempt to answer these questions shortly.

The traditional understanding of God as the unchanging and passionless absolute is derived primarily from the Greeks who upheld that “perfection” implies complete “immutability” or lack of change.⁴ This is an idea that has been termed as perfect being theology. On the main thrust of perfect being theology, Michael Murray and Michael Rea chorus:

Within philosophy, perfect-being theology traces its roots at least as far back as Plato, who identifies God with the supreme reality, which he labels “the Good” and Aristotle, who characterizes God as “the best substance.” These traditions converged in powerful ways to inform

² Michael J. Murray and Michael C. Rea, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 6.

³ Emmanuel Ofuasia and Babajide O. Dasaolu, “Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Critique of Metaphysics: Implication and Relevance for African Philosophy,” *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10, no. 7 (2017): 82.

⁴ Martin Onwuegbusi, “God in Whitehead’s Process Metaphysics,” *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (2017): 256.

the writing of some of the most important theologians in each tradition: Philo of Alexandria and Maimonides in Judaism, Al-Kindi and Avicenna in Islam, and Augustine, Anselm, and St. Thomas Aquinas in Christianity.⁵

As Aristotle, the philosopher whose metaphysics has been most influential in traditional theism hints, God thinks only of himself which renders his perfection intact. To think of any other diminishes this perfection. For Aristotle, God, the first mover, who is an immaterial substance must enjoy bliss. His activity for Aristotle must be intellectual and the object of his reflection must be the best possible. Hence, “it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking upon thinking.”⁶ In conclusion, Aristotle argues: “we say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continues and eternal belong to God; for this is God.”⁷ The God that thinks of nothing but himself is far from the kind of God widespread among the Abrahamic monotheisms. Theirs is a God that actively engages the world unlike the deistic stance implied in Aristotle’s God. In similar ways, Aristotle’s teacher, Plato too holds that God, out of his perfection cannot be changed by other things or by Himself.

The fusion of Greek thought with classical theology to explain away the reality of evil is obvious in the reflections of St. Augustine. For him, evil is the absence of that which is good. His attempt to rescue a good God from initiating evil led him to pronounce thus: “But, if you know or if you believe that God is good (...) then God does no evil.”⁸ What is implied here is that God created the *possibility* but not the *necessity* of evil. By necessity of evil, what Augustine means is that the world can still function without evil as the blissful and immaculate era of the Garden of Eden reveals. Even when God could have prevented evil in the universe, it was allowed because God knew it was better to allow evil than to exclude it absolutely.⁹ For Augustine evil persists in the world owing to *privation*

⁵ Murray and Rea, *Introduction*, 7–8.

⁶ Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” in *Introduction to Aristotle*, eds. Richard McKeon, William D. Ross (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 1074b.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 1072b.

⁸ St. Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Francis E. Tourscher (Philadelphia: The Peter Reilly Co., 1937), 1.

⁹ Faris D. Whitesell, *The Problem of Evil as Treated by St. Augustine* (Master of Arts Thesis, Loyola University, 1937), 38.

and *pervasion*.¹⁰ Privation is the absence or denial of something whereas pervasion is the corruption of something. The former is primordial and ontological from creation whereas the latter which is anthropological derives from human sinfulness and freewill.

The Augustinian tradition has semblance with the treatment of evil in the process tradition only for the former's retention of the idea that God created the world *ex-nihilo* (creation theology), that God is a perfect being (perfect-being theology); and that the world needs God but not the other way round (providential theology). These three starting points of traditional theism or classical theology were discerned from Greek thinking. From these accidents, the idea of an all-powerful, knowing and seeing God filtered into classical theology. Reacting to this infiltration, Alfred Whitehead relays: "[...] the deeper idolatry, of the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman imperial rulers, [which] was retained. The Church gave unto God, the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar."¹¹

Traditional theism holds dear the metaphysical backdrop of a perfect nature of God. However, the implication of importing this feature into traditional theism attests to a God enmeshed in His perfection with little or no consideration for whatever is not God. Traditional theism has managed to wield influence in the face of this inconsistency. It has conjured a God that has the capacity to affect the world at will. One way that traditional theism justifies 'divine coercion' is what has been termed as divine action. A very good way to illustrate divine action and how it is retained in traditional theism is through miracle.

In the Hebrew Bible, a miracle is designated by the words *nes* or *oth*, both meaning *a sign*. In the words of G. N. Schlesinger: "The major function of a miracle is to serve as a spectacular manifestation of God's direct intervention in promoting a divine plan, and thus to inspire religious sentiments."¹² David Hume defines a miracle as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the deity, or by interposition of some

¹⁰ Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press 2001), 6–7.

¹¹ Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, eds. David R. Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 343.

¹² George N. Schlesinger, "Miracles," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper and Philip L. Quinn (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 398.

invisible agent.”¹³ Following David Hume, Christopher Hitchens sees a miracle as “a disturbance or interruption in the expected and established course of things. This could involve anything from the sun rising in the West to an animal suddenly bursting into the recitation of a verse.”¹⁴ Elsewhere, we read that a miracle is “a supernatural event regarded as due to divine action.”¹⁵ A brush through the sacred texts of the Abrahamic monotheisms reveals that:

Beyond establishing and superintending the overall course of history, God acts at particular times and places to achieve specific ends; this is particular providence. The narratives of the Hebrew Bible, for example, portray God as engaging human beings through a series of revelatory and redemptive actions in history. God calls Abraham and his descendants into a covenant relation; God rescues the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and gives the law at Sinai; God raises up kings and prophets; God acts in myriad ways to judge, sustain, and redeem this people through all the vicissitudes of their history. Christianity and Islam incorporate much of this history of divine action, and because each tradition develops these stories in a different way, they generate distinctive understandings of God’s purposes and identity.¹⁶

The foregoing has not only shaped the course of human history but also how humans think of the world. However, why is it that God in traditional theism no longer relates to the world, in the same capacity God used to in the revealed texts? Why is it difficult to experience vividly divine action from God with absolute clarity and certainty that nothing else, not chance, but God is responsible? These questions are perennial and we do not boast to have answers to them. However, it is not to be denied, the idea that God is behind some actions incites curiosity and scepticism and in the extreme – atheism.

The coercive agency in traditional theism is succinctly captured in the human definition of what counts as a miracle – “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the deity, or by interposition of some invisible agent.”¹⁷ Impliedly, transgressing the law of nature reveals

¹³ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2007), 94.

¹⁵ Bernard S. Cayne, *The New Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Lexicon Publishers, 1992), 637.

¹⁶ Thomas F. Tracy, “Divine Action,” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 309.

¹⁷ Hume, *Enquiry*, 217.

the coercive agency of God in traditional theism. Theists will retort that since God created the world, He has absolute power over “[...] all that is not God.”¹⁸ It needs to be hinted however, that this understanding of God

[...] further suggests God’s establishment of an eternal order in the world. In this regard, God is seen as the all-controlling power, the Omnipotent, such that the present order exists only because God wills it so. In that case, obedience to the divine will is seen as a means of complying and preserving the status quo.¹⁹

This obedience is calculated to initiate eternal bliss divergent of the suffering and evil characteristic of the actual world. However, coercive agency or divine action runs into some metaphysical hitches.

For us to see these hitches, we begin by distinguishing persuasive power from coercive power. When the former involves the recognition of the freedom of an entity to act or not act, conform or not conform, to so and so, the latter does not. For instance, if a woman explains to a child close to her, the benefits of staying away from a kerosene lantern this is persuasive power. Coercive power would simply involve dragging the erring child away from the possible source of pain. Process theology proposes that God works persuasively and finds the idea of an all-powerful God coercive depicted by traditional theism as an inadequate depiction of the world’s *modus operandi*. Hence, since God uses persuasive power, He sets before all entities, human and non-human, animate and “inanimate”, the ideals of harmony, love and dignity, leaving them to either choose to or not to. It is the frustration of this ideal that accounts for the presence of evil in the universe. We will make this point more obvious in a latter part of this inquiry, using the traditional *Yorùbá* theology as cue. For the moment, we concern with the persuasive nature of God which has been depreciated by classical theologians, as to be faithful to the metaphysical orientation of substance that is used to explain the faith. The consequence is not far-fetched – the use of an inadequate metaphysical scheme to explain God.

The nature of God as persuasive agency is present in the *Bible* and *Al-Qur’an* even when these attributes are usually de-emphasized. From stories such as parting the Red Sea and Jesus’ resurrection, classical theology concludes that there are no limits to God’s power. God’s will is

¹⁸ Murray and Rea, *Introduction*, 7.

¹⁹ Onwuegbusi, “God,” 256.

unstoppable and unchangeable. But these stories are exaggerated over instances where God seems to negotiate with Abraham about the destruction of Sodom.²⁰ Abraham convinces God not to destroy the city if a few righteous citizens could be found. Similarly, in *Exodus* God seems willing to be convinced by Moses not to destroy the Israelites. The Bible also contains stories about God changing his mind, as when God decides not to destroy Nineveh once the people repented. Such passages suggest God's will is not necessarily set in concrete but is flexible. They suggest God takes notice of human actions and responds appropriately. Instead of seeing God as rigidly pursuing a predetermined course of action through sheer power, they suggest God is willing to act, observe, and act again in light of human response. God's overall goal may be fixed, but God is willing to change strategy in light of human obedience or stubbornness. The consequence of the negotiating and "change of heart" aspects of God for process theologians reveals that humans and all entities have some freedom available to them to either conform or not to the ideals put in place by the primordial nature of God.

The use of substance metaphysics by classical theologians depicts God to be immutable and unaffected by events in the world. For this reason, Christians are fond of singing: "You are the Lord. You changeth not [...]." Some Pentecostal Christian denominations in Africa, during their sessions of praise and worship, go as far as affirming that they have seen God when they sing: "Since I was born and now that I'm getting old, I have never *seen* the Lord changing." Whatever they mean by *seen* is an exercise in conceptual clarification, far from our purpose here. The implication is that God is unaffected by the events of the world since "God is absolute and entirely independent of the world."²¹ However, the persuasive nature of the Abrahamic God, as we have illustrated, has revealed that this outlook cannot be the case. God affects and is also affected by the world. The fact that the world and God are interactive means that "it is true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God."²²

The metaphysics of substance, which had been employed by traditional theologians, since the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, obviously has

²⁰ Samuel M. Powell, "The Promise of Process Theology," in *God Reconsidered: The Promise and Peril of Process Theology*, ed. Al Truesdale (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2010), 21.

²¹ Onwuegbusi, "God," 256.

²² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

done more harm than good to an appreciation of divine agency.²³ It falls short, failing to provide a comprehensive rationale for not only the origin of evil, but its persistence in the actual world. How and why, should the consumption of one apple, just one apple by Eve and Adam, lead to the tumultuous chaos in the world from the Garden of Eden to the bombs detonated in Paris, Mogadishu and Timbuktu? Classical theology depreciates aspects of the revealed texts that portray God as a persuasive agent. In addition, Aristotelian (or substance) metaphysics has been taken canonical by traditional theologians to argue that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present, thereby initiating the philosophical problem of evil. If there is any vexing topic in philosophy of religion which has both cast doubts over the existence of God and led to atheism in the West, it is problem of evil.

All of the above points attest to the urgency that traditional theology needs to be reviewed from the perspective of process metaphysics as to appreciate the place of humanity and God in the grand scheme of things in the universe.²⁴ We will now foray into *Yorùbá* theology to unclad *Olódùmarè*, as a persuasive agent and the origin and ‘management’ of evil therein. The aim is to show that the theological anomalies and the metaphysical inconsistencies present in the theologies of the Abrahamic monotheisms have no place in traditional *Yorùbá* theology.

Odù Òtúúrúpòn on the Origin of Moral and Natural Evils among the Yorùbá

Odù Òtúúrúpòn is one of the *odùs* (chapter) that make up the *Ifá* corpus which was handed down to humanity by *Òrúnmìlà*, the exceptional

²³ Ofuasia, “On the Dearth of God in Aristotle’s Substance Metaphysics,” *Philosophia: E-Journal of Philosophy and Culture* 15, (2017) 145–61.

²⁴ idem, “Unveiling Ezumezu Logic as a framework for Process Ontology and Yorùbà Ontology,” *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 8, no. 2 (2019b): 63–84; Santiago Sia, “Creative Synthesis: A Process Interpretation of Causality,” *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy* 36, no. 8 (2007); Santiago Sia, *Religion, Reason and God: Essays in the Philosophies of Charles Hartshorne and A. N. Whitehead* (Frankfurt a. M.: P. Lang, 2004); Robert C. Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (Pennsylvania, Templeton: Foundation Press, 2008); John Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956); Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984); David R. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976).

personae adorned with the knowledge of deep and hidden things by the Higher God, *Olódùmarè*.²⁵ Hence, through the employment of the ‘epistemic closure,’²⁶ passages of the corpus may be treated as *Olódùmarè*, speaking through *Ọrúnmilà*. In the words of Ola Longe *Ifá* “[...] was originated and codified by *Ọrúnmilà*, who lived in *Ìle-Ìfẹ̀*, several centuries ago.”²⁷ Although there are various accounts concerning whether *Ọrúnmilà* actually lived as a human, this research will admit for its analysis, the position of Longe that he did. We need to also explain that the *Ifá* corpus is the storehouse of traditional *Yorùbá* practices and beliefs. The corpus has 16 major chapters (*odùs*) with verses (*esẹ̀*). In addition to the 16 chapters, there are also 240 chapters.²⁸ The verses are written mostly as poetry but with plots suggestive of prose.

Ifá had hitherto been perceived as nothing but a divination system, religious book bearing almost no significance to contemporary living. However, recent scholarships from Sophie Oluwole, Omotade Adegbindin, Emmanuel Ofuasia, have assisted not only to divulge the philosophy present in the corpus but indicate its relevance in contemporary times. It is from this springboard that we seek to unclad a theology that supersedes the widespread and dominant varieties imported from Rome and Medina. The Abrahamic monotheisms’ effort to justify the origin and persistence of evil in the world, we have already argued to be metaphysically incoherent. We will now reveal the traditional *Yorùbá* version. Specifically, in *Odù Ọ̀tùúrùpòn*, we find:

[...] Divination was held for eníyán (malevolent forces)
 Same for ènìyàn (humans)
 As both descended from heaven to earth
 Both of them were asked to offer sacrifice
 Eníyán (malevolent forces) swore that on reaching the earth,
 He would be destroying the lots of ènìyàn (humans),
 Ènìyàn (Humans), too, vowed that, on reaching the earth,

²⁵ Ofuasia, “*Ifá* Divination as an Exercise in Deconstructionism,” *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 38, no. 3 (2019): 330–45.

²⁶ Epistemic closure principle works in a similar way as transitivity principle in formal logic, in the following sense: If I give A some money and A gives B out of that same money, it follows that I gave B some money.

²⁷ Ola Longe, *Ifá Divination and Computer Science: An Inaugural Lecture* (Ibadan: W. Giradet Press, 1998), 15.

²⁸ Sophie B. Oluwole, “African Philosophy as Illustrated in the *Ifá* Literary Corpus,” *Imodoye: Journal of African Philosophy* 2 (1996), 1.

She will be do as she pleases
Both refused to offer sacrifice.
The two reached the earth and,
Whenever ènìyàn (humans) gave birth to a child,
Eníyán (malevolent forces) would kill it
All the things that ènìyàn (humans) laboured for
Were all destroyed by the eníyán (malevolent forces) [...].²⁹

There is no better *odù* in the entire body of the *Ifá* corpus that discusses the origin of evil and its persistence than *Òtúúrúpòn*. However, before delving into the analysis, it is pertinent to differentiate *Eníyán* from *Ènìyàn*. Just like many English words with same spelling, but different pronunciation and indication [for instance, the heteronyms: refuse (verb) and refuse (noun)], the foregoing *odù* portrays similarity in *Yorùbá* vocabulary.

Eníyán is the euphemistic term for witches and evil spirits. They are the malevolent forces. *Ènìyàn*, on the other hand depicts humanity. With this clarification, evil, for the *Yorùbá* persists since the malevolent forces have vowed to keep destroying whatever humans attained. In a nutshell, whereas moral evil is traced to the limitations and deviation of *ènìyàn* from *Olódùmarè*, some of the natural evils that are rampant are attributed to the handiwork of *eníyán* – malevolent forces. What are these forces? Are they diametrically opposed to the will of the Higher God, *Olódùmarè*? The remainder of this study is committed to a process review of the relationship between *Olódùmarè* and evil in the actual world.

***Olódùmarè* and Evil: Intersections of Process Theology with Traditional *Yorùbá* Theology**

In order to respond well to the questions raised in the preceding section, the first thing here is to explore the parallels of Process Theology and traditional *Yorùbá* Theology.

Process theology is an offshoot of process metaphysics codified by Alfred N Whitehead. One of Whitehead's quests was "[...] to develop a metaphysical scheme in which every element of human experience can be explicated or interpreted."³⁰ In his exposition, Whitehead believes that the existence of God as an ordering entity is an important element that cannot be overlooked:

²⁹ This *ẹsẹ Ifá* was recited to me by Ifá priest, Semiu Akinbode Shokunbi during our interactive session at Oko-Oba, Agege Lagos on September 11, 2022.

³⁰ Onwuegbusi, "God," 247.

[...] it is not the case that there is an actual world which accidentally begins to exhibit an order of nature. There is an actual world because there is order in nature. If there were no order, there would be no world. Also, since there is a world, we know that there is an order. The ordering entity is a necessary element in the metaphysical situation presented by the actual world.³¹

The above implies that in process theology, the question whether or not God exists is not a subject of disagreement. This assertion is striking if we remember that:

The existence of Olodumare is not geotactic, nor is it dependent upon any human whim. This, perhaps, explains why no elaborate arguments of proofs are thought necessary for the existence of God in Yoruba religion. The starting point of wisdom among the Yoruba is the acceptance of the *de facto* existence of Deity.³²

In process metaphysics all things that exist are actual entities. Even God is an actual entity who is guided by the same metaphysical principle as any other entity. A detailed disclosure of these principles has been undertaken elsewhere.³³ Nevertheless, it is worth stating that the metaphysical principles that undergird relationship among beings in process thought is becoming and interdependence. A little elaboration concerning how these metaphysical principles work is pertinent at this juncture.

In process theology, God is seen to be dipolar with primordial and consequent natures. In the former state, God provides possibilities for all entities to choose from since all actual entities have subjective aims. Hence, “[...] the subjective aim is constituted by the complete conceptual envisagement of all eternal objects laced with the urge toward their realization in the actualities of the world.”³⁴ Another term for eternal objects is possibilities. These are options open to all actual entities to admit into their essence or not. The reaction of the choices of eternal objects chosen by actual entities informs the consequent nature of God. On Whitehead’s

³¹ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 104.

³² John Bewaji, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge: A Pluricultural Approach* (Ibadan: Hope Publication, 2007), 369.

³³ See Emmanuel Ofuasia, “An Argument for the Non-Existence of the Devil in African Traditional Religion,” *Filosofia theoretica: Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 11, no.1 (2022): 57–76; idem, “Unveiling Ezumezu Logic as a Framework for Process Ontology and Yorùbá Ontology,” *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 8, no. 2 (2019).

³⁴ Onwuegbusi, “God,” 253.

terms, God's consequent nature "[...] is the physical prehension by God of the actualities of the evolving universe."³⁵ Conversely, conceptual prehension depicts the primordial nature.

God in process theology is not laced with absolute adjectives or attributes. Hence, since God is not all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present, the philosophical problem of evil does not arise. These attributes have been argued to be lacking for *Olódùmarè* as well. Evil in process theology is a consequence of persuasive agency wherein actual entities either conform or not conform to eternal objects persistently initiated by God for their prehension and self-determination.³⁶ In other words, through his persuasive power, God gently lures creatures in the face of any moral situation towards that actualization of the best in that occasion. God offers the choices to them, with claims to rightness and moral goodness. However, since God is persuasive, He does not completely determine that manner by which the individual uses his freedom in response to God's persuasive lure. It is on this account that the individual is responsible for what he chooses to actualize.³⁷ If it is the case that God wants what is best for the world, and there is evil in the world, process theology says the evil is a result of deviation from what God intends for the world. Evil surfaces "as a result of the individual deviating from what God intends for him, which is in fact the best."³⁸ Although process theology is more complex than what is exposed in the foregoing, we have only simplified it as such for the task here. When we place the foregoing side by side with traditional *Yorùbá* theology, there is an almost perfect fit.

In *Odù Òtúúrípòṇ*, just like any other *Odù* in the *Ifá* corpus, it is glaring that *Olódùmarè* is a persuasive agency. The failure of humans and the malevolent creatures, to conform to divine persuasion by the offer of sacrifice accounts not only for the lack of coercion in how *Olódùmarè* operates but also the use of freewill on the part of creatures, hence, evil in the world.

A local nomenclature for the malevolent forces among the traditional *Yorùbá* is *Àjógún*. They are numerous in number but as ably relayed by Oludamini Ogunnaike "are led by eight warlords: *Ikú* (Death), *Àrùn* (Disease), *Òfò* (Loss), *Egbà* (Paralysis), *Òràn* (Trouble), *Èpè* (Curse), *Èwón*

³⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 46.

³⁶ Ofuasia, "Unveiling Ezumezu Logic," 64.

³⁷ Onwuegbusi, "God," 258–59.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 259.

(Imprisonment), *Eye* (Affliction).³⁹ The fact that they are legion has been confirmed by Bolaji Idowu who cites an *Oḍù Ifá* vers thus:

Praise to the 400 divinities of the right hand (the benevolent)
 Praise to the 200 divinities of the left hand (the malevolent)
 Praise to the 460 divinities
 Who line the very road of Heaven.⁴⁰

In process terms, we can say that *Eníyán*, *Ájógún*, and similar tags for the malevolent forces are actual entities that have sworn not to be persuaded by *Olódùmarè* to “[...] the rightness in things and moral goodness which as calls to duty and obligations are revealed objectively [...] when faced with situations that require moral judgments”.⁴¹ And *Olódùmarè* being a persuasive agency lacking the absolute characterisations of might and knowledge can do absolutely nothing about this. This is why from the beginning of the world, according to traditional *Yorùbá* theology, there has always been chaos. It calls for no marvel when the people pronounce – *Tibi tire la d’ayé* (The world evolves from the admixture of evil and good).

Once an entity makes a choice at a particular spatio-temporal, even *Olódùmarè* lacks the power to alter that choice. However, future possibilities may be provided as choices to be actualized as to rectify or damage the consequence of an initial choice. Regardless of choice, *Olódùmarè* does not coercively break the metaphysical and scientific laws that govern the universe as replete with *Yahweh* and *Allah*.

Technically, the malevolent forces are not opposed to *Olódùmarè* as Satan to *Yahweh/Allah*. Actually, they are entities that persistently fail to be persuaded by the lure of *Olódùmarè*. Humans too are culpable as *Oḍù Òtúúrúpòn* portrays. The origin of evil and why it persists in the actual world are then obvious. For the traditional *Yorùbá* “both ire (goodness) and ibi (evilness) are not separated as two distinct realities, but rather seen as one of two sides.”⁴² It is more like a binary and not a dialectical. It is in this light that the philosophical problem of evil does not in the first

³⁹ Oludamini Ogunnaike, “Sufism and Ifa: Ways of Knowing in Two West African Intellectual Traditions,” (PhD diss., Graduate School of Arts & Sciences - Harvard University, 2015).

⁴⁰ Bolaji E. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 67.

⁴¹ Onwuegbusi, “God,” 258.

⁴² Kazeem Fayemi, “A Hermeneutico-Reconstructionist Method as a Synthesis of Wiredu’s and Oluwolé’s Methodological Orientation in African Philosophy,” (PhD diss., Olabisi Onabanjo University, 2012), 324.

place occupy the intellectual mind of the traditional *Yorùbá*. Chidozie Okoro expands that “the African metaphysical system is integrative on the ground that its dualistic nature allows for a plurality of views [...]. Traditional Africans also conceived phenomenon in a cosmological double of «spirit force» and a «material essence».”⁴³

In addition to the fact that traditional Yorùbá theology recognizes and admits the reality of evil and the existence of the Higher God, Olódùmarè, there is no room for atheism – the attendant failure of reconciling the existence of God with the realities of the actual world as replete in classical theology. Traditional Yorùbá theology does not seek to adorn God with superlatives such as absolute power and knowledge. In fact, the Higher God in Yorùbá theology learns from other entities, human and non-human that are subordinate in the ontological hierarchy. A clear instance is perceived in an *ẹ̀sẹ̀* (i.e. verse) within *Odù Ìwòrì’ Òsá*, rendered in the English language thus:

Atikarasete, the Ifá priest of Heaven
Divined and interpreted the teachings of Ifá unto Olódùmarè and the world
Since the people of the world turn to Olódùmarè for everything,
Crying out: “Baba, Baba, We have come! Save us!! Please save us!!!”
Olódùmarè answered: “What could this mean?
Those whom I have given power have refused to use it
Those whom I have given wisdom have refused to use it.
It has been decreed that the children who do not see their parents will
strive with inner strength”.⁴⁴

Olódùmarè as the above *ẹ̀sẹ̀* reveals is not in the business of miracles and wonders. The Higher God has given the “people of the world” the required power and wisdom for agency. *Olódùmarè* commands that they rely on their inner strength rather than seeking unnecessary or needless intervention from the celestial realm. Another *ẹ̀sẹ̀* within *Ọ̀yèkú Méjì* illustrates in clear terms the non-absolute character of *Olódùmarè* concerning knowledge reveals during consultation with *Ọ̀rúnmilà*, a subordinate. On Idowu’s authority:

[...] Olodumare Himself sought the means of immortality. In consequence, he was told to make some sacrifices to provide Himself with

⁴³ Chidozie Okoro, “Problems of Metaphysical Philosophy,” *African Nebula* 3 (2011), 125.

⁴⁴ Maulana Karenga, *Odù ifá: The ethical teachings* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1999), 216–17.

a large piece of white cloth. When the necessary rite had been performed, the white cloth was spread over Him so that He was completely covered. From that time, He became immortal.⁴⁵

Owing to the place of being a divine entity that does not wield absolute accidents, the belief in *Olódùmarè* and the reality of evil in the world does not call for unnecessary debate in traditional *Yorùbá* theology. Reasoning along this line too, and the *Odùs*, we have quoted hitherto, Sophie Bosede Oluwole appends:

The Yoruba thinker recognizes evil as real, but he does not regard its existence as proof of God's incompetence or His limited goodness, since He is not conceived as absolute in any of these sense in the first instance.⁴⁶

Having expended so much effort establishing the coherence of evil in *Yorùbá* theology, which absolves *Olódùmarè*, a critic may point out that there is a general belief among the *Yorùbá* that *Olódùmarè* is capable of doing evil. What needs to be understood is that there is no *ẹ̀sẹ̀* in the *Ifá* corpus which endorses such an outlook. Of course, the principle of epistemic closure may be used to counter this submission on the ground that since *Olódùmarè* is responsible for the existence of these malevolent forces then *Olódùmarè* ought to take responsibility for evil. Again, this counter-argument is faulty because it does not account for the fact that *Olódùmarè* is a limited being who has no semblance with the tendency of "fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman imperial rulers"⁴⁷, in the Abrahamic monotheisms. Natural and moral evils cannot be traced to *Olódùmarè* in the light of the freedom and subjective aims of individual entities, both animate and inanimate. The coherence of this outlook has been the overriding focus of this research.

Conclusion

The occupation of this article was to show that traditional *Yorùbá* theology has its justification for the origin of evil in the world in the face of a limited God. Thus far, we have been able to show that in traditional *Yorùbá* theology, given its proximity to process theology, not only offers how evil entered the world but why it persists. The metaphysics of process

⁴⁵ Idowu, *Olodumare*, 44.

⁴⁶ Sophie B. Oluwole, "Madonna and The Whore in African Traditional Thought," *Journal of Philosophy and Development* 1&2, no. 1 (1995a): 20.

⁴⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

which offers a better view of reality than the substance orientation has yet to be given proper attention by scholars versed in traditional *Yorùbá* theology. The provision of the metaphysics and its application to the *Yorùbá* thought system is one of the feats attained by the present inquiry. In spite of these, providing a justification for the origin of evil in traditional *Yorùbá* theology differs from classical theology, we must admit. Traditional *Yorùbá* theology needs to be given closer attention only to realize that it operates as “[...] a scheme in which every element of human experience can be explicated or interpreted.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Onwuegbusi, “God,” 247.