



## Soul as the Sole Determinant of Human Personality in Plato and Yoruba Traditional Thought

Bosede Adefiola Adebowale<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Ph. D, Department of Classics, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.  
 \*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

The soul, as a concept, has been a subject of philosophical inquiry in ancient, medieval and modern history of ideas. There is no universal agreement on the nature or purpose of the soul. Thus, the term “soul” has been given various definitions according to the philosophical theories and cultural perspectives in which it is defined. Soul, according to many religious and philosophical traditions, is the “self-aware essence” unique to a particular living being. In these traditions, the soul is believed to incorporate the inner essence of each living being. Both Plato and the Yoruba consider the soul as the immaterial element that, together with the material body, constitutes the human individual. Plato in *The Republic* presents a tripartite soul which harmonious interaction produces an esteemed human personality. This Plato’s idea mirrors the notion of the Yoruba that a man’s soul is the reflection of his personality. The word ‘soul’ has been investigated from divergent thematic perspectives — invisibility, intangibility, immortality and reincarnation — but this paper sets as its task to examine the Platonic and Yoruba presentations of the soul as the sole determinant of human personality.

**Key words:** Soul; Human Personality; Plato; Yoruba

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### INTRODUCTION

The Greek word  $\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$  (psyche), translated as soul in English, is originally derived from a Greek verb which

means “to cool”, or “to blow”, denoting animating principle in man and animal. Although the root of the word translated as soul denotes life in general, the term “soul” in Classical and modern context carries the meaning of an undying, immaterial essence that continues in conscious existence after death. The Homeric Age marked the beginning of different stages in the meaning of the term “soul” and other Greek words, such as *θυμος* (breath), *πνευμα* (Pneuma), and *νοϋς* (mind), began to be used to represent the idea of soul.

The pre-Socratic philosophers present different ideas of the soul. For instance, Thales, who was the first philosopher of historical record, explains his philosophical thought of soul in a term known as panpsychism, which is a philosophical view that the soul is a universal feature of all things, and primordial, from which all others are derived. Thales believes that the soul is the motive force. He uses as an example, magnet, which can move iron or metal. He claims that owing to this, the magnet possesses a soul. Anaximander gives the soul an aeriform structure, while Heraclitus depicts it as a fire. Pythagoras, on the other hand, describes the soul as a harmony of perfect mathematics ratio and declares the soul to be immortal, maintaining that the highest purpose of humans should be to purify their souls by cultivating intellectual virtues, refraining from sensual pleasures, and practising special religious rituals. Democritus sees the soul as constituted of atoms. Both Plato and the Yoruba conceive the soul to be a spiritual entity that determines the personality of an individual.

### 1. PLATO’S MYTH OF THE SOUL

With the various developments in the Greek context of the word ‘soul’, Plato views and describes the soul from different angles, proffering different theories in explaining what the soul is, ranging from its immortality to its function as the keeper of the person and as the moulder of human

personality. In the *Laws*, he defines the soul as “self-movement” and “self-initiating motion” (896a-b). Plato describes man as being constituted of body and soul and considers the soul to be an independent, substantial reality and the essence of a person since the soul is prior to body, body secondary and derivative. Plato proves this through the process of elimination. There are three suppositions, one is that the human person is essentially a soul or a body or a combination of body and soul. The body does not rule itself; therefore, it cannot be a body. And if the body does not rule itself it cannot be in combination of the body and soul ruling. The soul rules over the body, then, the soul is the essence of the human person. He considers the soul as the governor of the body “in the real order of things”, while the body is subjected to its governance (*Laws*, 896c). He further describes the soul as a being that decides how man behaves. He takes this essence to be an incorporeal and eternal occupant of human being.

Sanford asserts that Plato, in *The Republic*, describes the soul as the “carrier of individual personality”. Plato extended this theory to the whole world, believing that the world has a soul because the world moves itself. Beyond this, God is of the nature of the soul because God is the Self-mover par excellence (Sanford, 1991, pp.75-76). In the *Timaeus*, Plato talks of the soul of the world which, though consists of the Same, the Different, and Existence, is described as “invisible and endowed with reason and harmony, being the best creation of the best of intelligible and eternal things” (*Timaeus*, 36d-37a, Robert Gregg’s translation). The human soul is described here as originally complex but not partite as is the case in *The Republic*. Plato further explains that it is the

Demiurge, who is co-eternal with the Forms and the Chaos, that is, the four elements: fire and earth linked by air and water, set all these in order, and then out of these he constructed this present universe... containing within itself all living creatures both mortal and immortal. (*Timaeus* 32a-b, 69c)

The human being is one of the three classes of mortal beings created partially by the gods that were created by the Demiurge. The gods created the body, which is mortal, whereas the soul was placed in the body directly by God (*Timaeus*, 42e-43a). The soul is referred to as the guiding principle and the divine part. The individual souls are made out of the same stuff as the world soul, although it is explained that this stuff was not as pure as it was before and each soul is assigned a star (*Timaeus*, 41b-d). If a person lived well, upon the death of the body, the soul will return and dwell in his home star. If not, then the soul will not be re-incarnated (*Timaeus*, 42a-c).

According to Plato, man possesses two souls. One is immortal, which is created by the creator himself; while the other mortal, is fashioned by the gods, the offspring of the creator. The latter is subject to “terrible and irresistible affections” (*Timaeus*, 69c). The mortal soul is placed in the breast and thorax, while the immortal soul inhabits the head. The mortal and inferior soul is subdivided into

two parts occupying different parts of the body. Plato says: “That part of the inferior soul, which is endowed with courage and passion and loves contention, they placed nearer the head, midway between the midriff and the neck” (*Timaeus*, 70a). This part of the mortal soul is allied with immortal soul, which is to direct the other part of the inferior soul, the appetites, and put it in constant check. The same idea of the two souls, one for the good motion and one for the bad, is expressed in the *Laws* by the Athenian spokesman of Plato thus:

Hence we are driven, are we not, to agree in the consequence that soul is the cause of good and evil, fair and foul right and wrong in fact of all the contraries, if we mean to assert it as the universal cause?... And is this done by a single soul, or by more than one? I will give the answer for both of you. By more than one. At least we must assume not fewer than two, one beneficent, the other capable of the contrary effect. (*Laws*, 896d- e)

Plato proceeds to symbolize the form of the soul in the famous Chariot allegory, which can also be called myth of the soul. A soul, Socrates says, is like

the union of powers in a team of winged steeds and their winged charioteer. While the gods have two good horses, everyone else has a mixture: One is noble and good, while the other has the opposite character and his stock are opposite. (*Phaedrus*, 246a-b)

The souls being immortal, and without the bodies, patrol all of heaven as long as their wings are in perfect condition. But when a soul sheds its wings, it comes to earth and takes on an earthly body “which seems by reason of the soul’s power to move itself”. Then the structure of the soul and body composed becomes a living being (*Phaedrus*, 246e).

In his narration, Plato explains that, in heaven, there is a procession led by Zeus, who looks after everything and puts things in order. All the gods follow Zeus in this procession with the exception of Hestia—the Greek goddess of home and hearth. With the state of the horses and charioteer, it is easy for the gods to control their chariots, but other charioteers must struggle with their bad horses, which will drag them down to the earth if it has not been properly trained (*Phaedrus*, 247a-b). As the procession makes its way upward, it eventually makes it up to the high ridges of the heaven, where the gods take their stands in a circular motion and gaze at all that is beyond heaven. What is outside of heaven, says Socrates, is quite difficult to describe, lacking colour, shape, or solidity, as it is the subject of all true knowledge, visible only to intelligence, the soul’s pilot. The gods, delighted and nourished by reason and knowledge, feel wonderful. They go round until they make a complete circle. On the way, they are able to see Justice, Temperance and Knowledge, and other things, as they are in themselves, unchanging. Having seen all things and feasted on them, coming all the way around, they sink back down inside the heavens.

In order to become human, a soul must look at the truth. This, however, is not easy. Some souls see some things and miss the others, having to deal with their horses;

they rise and fall at varying times. Other souls, while straining to keep up, are unable to rise, and, in noisy, sweat discord, they leave uninitiated, not having seen reality. Any soul that catches sight of any of one true thing is granted another circuit where it can see more. Eventually, all souls fall back to earth. Those that have been initiated are put into varying human incarnations, depending on how much they have seen. Those who have seen the most incarnate as philosophers, while those who have seen less follow as kings, statesmen, doctors, poets, prophets, manual labourers, sophists, and tyrants. At this point, the Souls begin the cycle of re-incarnation, which, according to Plato, generally takes ten thousand years for a soul to grow its wings and return to where it came. But philosophers, who have chosen such a life for three consecutive times, grow their wings and return after only three thousand years. This is because they have seen the most and always keep the memory of what they have been as close as possible, and maintain the highest level of initiation.

## 2. PLATONIC CONCEPT OF THE SOUL AS DETERMINANT OF HUMAN PERSONALITY

In *Phaedo*, Plato argues the immortality of the soul. However, in *The Republic*, he changes his dimension, analysing the soul from another perspective. In *The Republic*, Plato puts forward a new theory of the human soul, comparing the soul to an ideal society. He describes an ideal society has having three parts: the Guardians, who are the ruler of the state; the Auxiliaries, who support the ruling class; and the Workers, that can be regarded as the productive class, which includes merchants, farmers and other money makers. With this ideal state, Plato presents a tripartite soul; namely: The rational, which is termed *logos* (το λογιστικον), the courageous or spirited (το υμητικον), and the appetitive (το νπιμητικου). Plato believes that an ideal society or state starts by fulfilling ordinary human needs with perfect harmony as its objective which can only be achieved by having the most intellectually able citizens in charge. According to Plato, if each of these three parts of society plays its role perfectly well, the whole society will work well like a well-oiled machine and produce a just and ideal state.

Having investigated how a just society functions with the harmony of the three social groups, Plato investigates a virtuous soul. Each of these parts of the soul, according to him, has a function in a balanced and peaceful soul. In order to prove that functions are performed by different parts of the human soul, Plato puts forward a principle which Annas terms the Principle of Opposites or Principle of Conflict (Annas, 1981, p.137). This principle shows that each of the parts of the soul has its own motivation and constitutes a faculty. Plato says:

The same thing clearly cannot act or be acted upon in the same part or in relation to the same thing at the same time, in contrary ways; and therefore whenever this contradiction occurs in things apparently the same, we know that they are really not the same, but different... Imagine the case of a man who is standing and also moving his hands and his head, and suppose a person to say that one and the same person is in motion and at rest at the same time- to such a mode of speech we should object, and should rather say that one part of him is in motion while another is at rest. (*The Republic*, 436b-d: M. A. Jowett's trans.)

With this principle, Plato emphasises the impossibility of a thing to be at rest and in motion at the same time as well as in the same part. Plato then analyses the three parts of the soul.

The first part of the soul is referred to as the *logos*, which Plato equates with the mind, *nous* or reason. It is also regarded as the intellectual part that seeks truth and knowledge. It has the responsibility of guiding and regulating life. It is also in charge of life in a way that is informed by wisdom and that takes into consideration the concerns of each of the three parts of the soul and of the soul as a whole (*The Republic*, 442c). This part, being the rational part, is able to do a logical calculation and bring about the good of the person as a whole and the overall Good, which Plato refers to as Virtue (*Meno*, p.73). In Plato's view, the power by which man reasons, learns and makes judgments and decisions lies with the rational part of the soul, which also serves as a source of motivation. Plato avers:

But surely it is obvious to everyone that all the endeavour of the part by which we learn is ever toward knowledge of truth of things, and that at least of the three is concerned for wealth and reputation. (*The Republic*, 581b)

Here, Plato says that desire to learn is part of the feature of this rational part of the soul. It can then be deduced from Plato's expression that reason is the motivation which drives man to learn and seek the truth. This aspect of the soul is considered by Plato as the ruling element because of its ability to reflect on the better (good) and worse (evil) as well as its "being wise and exercising forethought in behalf of the entire soul" (*The Republic*, 441b-e). In other words, for the soul to rule wisely, its command must be informed by knowledge.

The next part is called *thumos* in Greek. It is the spirited part which comprises emotional motive. This aspect of the tripartition of the soul, spirit, is a motivating force that generally accounts for self-assertion, ambition and love of honour, which makes man seek self-esteem by competing with others. Frustration of its desires gives rise to emotional responses, such as anger and indignation, and to behaviour that expresses and naturally flows from such responses. Socrates takes spirit to be a natural ally of reason; at least part of its function is to support reason in such conflicts as may arise between it and appetite (*The Republic*, 440ef – 442ab). It is the force that drives man

to acts of bravery and glory and, if it is left uncontrolled, it can lead to excessive pride, which was considered by the ancient Greeks to be the most ruinous of all vices.

From Plato's analysis, the reason or rational part of the soul corresponds with the guardians in an ideal society, while the spirited goes with the auxiliaries and the appetitive is likened to the workers, such as farmers and artisans. Although Plato identifies the spirited aspect of the soul as one that gives way to anger, he sees it as one which plays a very vital role in the soul. Just as the auxiliaries play important roles in supporting the guardians in an ideal state so the spirited part of the soul "is the helper of reason by nature unless it is corrupted by evil nurture" (*The Republic*, 441a).

The final part is called *eros*, which Plato equates with appetite or desire that drives man to seek out his basic bodily needs, such as food, drink and love (*The Republic*, 439d & 580e). It is an element closely connected with pleasure and satisfaction. According to the Platonic view of this part of the soul, when the passion controls man, it drives him towards hedonism in all forms. This part is independent of reason, which means that *eros* and *thumos* have no concern for the overall good and have in themselves no rational component. Plato portrays the appetitive part as being irrational because of its cravings or desires without qualification. For instance, Plato uses the example of thirst and hunger:

This being so, shall we say that the desires constitute a class and that the most conspicuous members of that class are what we call thirst and hunger? Is not the one desire of drink, the other of food? Then in so far as it is thirst, would it be of anything more than that of which we say it is a desire in the soul? I mean is thirst thirst for hot drink or cold or much or little or in word for a draught of any particular quality, or is it the fact that if heat is attached to the thirst it would further render the desire — a desire of cold, and if cold of hot... But mere thirst will never be desire of anything else than that of which it is its nature to be, mere drink, and so hunger of food. (*The Republic*, 437d-e)

With Plato's description of the appetitive part of the soul as described above, it would be out of place to assert that the appetitive lacks reasoning totally. Annas (1981, p.145) avers that the appetitive part "has the ability to figure out the means to achieve the end it wants". This notion is supported by the idea Plato portrays when he says:

We call it appetitive part because of the intensity of its appetites concerned with food and drink and love and their accompaniments, and likewise the money-making part, because money is the chief instrument for the gratification of such desire. (*The Republic*, 580e)

From what Plato says above, it is evident that the appetitive element has the ability to use money as a means to acquire what it wants in order to satisfy its desires. With this, it can be deduced that the appetitive part is rational to some extent, though, not in any way comparable to the rational part of the soul.

Just as the Guardians in Plato's ideal state have the responsibility of guiding the auxiliaries and the workers, the rational part of the soul has the duty of guiding the other two parts — spirited and the appetitive. For the rational part to perform its duty effectively, there must be interaction among the sub-parts of the soul, Hsu (2007, p.148) asserts that inner conversation must take place within the appetitive part. By using this theory of tripartite soul, Plato tries to show how a man can be virtuous, relating virtue to the major themes found in *The Republic* — wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. To each of these three parts of the soul, is a corresponding virtue: For the rational or intellectual element, there is wisdom; for the spirited element, there is courage; for the appetitive element, there is moderation; while temperance is consisted in the union of the spirited and appetitive parts, which come under the rule of reason. Justice is regarded as the general virtue that enables every part of the soul to perform its proper function in due harmony.

Through these virtues the soul attains a certain concord or integrity, which Plato believes is the only real happiness worthy of the name. A virtuous man is one of the three parts of his soul playing their roles perfectly well and remaining in harmony with one another. The idea of orderliness as reflected in Plato's *The Republic* is not only applicable to an ideal society or state, but also to the man who can be regarded as just. From Plato's point of view, a virtuous man is identified by his orderly and harmonious soul. Hence, it can be said that human virtue depends greatly on how these psychosomatic elements intermingle with one another.

The aim of Plato's claim that there are three parts of the soul is to show the psychological foundation of one's virtuous or moral behaviour. With the orderly interaction among the parts of the tripartite soul, Plato tries to show that complying with inner justice is the only rational way of living for an individual. From Plato's analysis of the tripartite soul, it can be deduced that the soul is not just the principle of life, but the most precious possession of an individual, the very centre of his being, which harbours the nature of his personality and the value of his character. Plato attributes to the soul the function of "caring, ruling, planning", and the like. He adds that living is also part of the function performed by the soul. This leads to the interim conclusion that a soul, with appropriate virtues, cares, rules, deliberates and lives well; whereas the soul with the relevant vices does these things badly. Another premise is that justice is the virtue suitable to the soul, while injustice is its vice. Hence, a just soul lives well; an unjust soul lives badly. But living well, according to the next premise, is being happy, whereas living badly is being wretched. So Socrates draws an interim conclusion that the just person, that is, a person whose soul is just, is happy; whereas the person whose soul is unjust is wretched.



### 3. YORUBA TERMINOLOGIES FOR THE WORD SOUL

In the traditional Yoruba vocabulary, there seems to be no word corresponding in meaning to the Greek word translated soul in English. Three terms *qkàn*, *orí* and *ẹ̀mí* are used as equivalent to the word soul, depending on the context. The term ‘*qkàn*’ in English language is ‘heart’. The Yoruba view the heart from two perspectives: The first is the material heart that human beings have in common with the lower animals; this is the material heart that supplies blood through the veins into the other part of the body and, thus, makes all animate objects alive. But this material *qkàn*, is regarded as a real representation of the other *qkàn*, which is essentially immaterial and invisible (Awolalu & Dọpamu, 2005, p.180). This immaterial *qkàn* is the seat of intelligence, thought, action, emotion and psychic energy (Awolalu & Dọpamu, 2005, p.181). And according to Dọpamu (2006, p.4), *qkàn* is also used to denote that part of man called *iyè* (mind, mentality or rationality). The word *qkàn* is used in different ways but mostly in figurative manner, such as *qkàn rẹ̀ ti lọ* (He is buried in thought): *qkàn mi sọ pé yóò wá* (my mind tells me that he will come or I think he will come). In each of these expressions, it is not the physical *qkàn* — heart, that is being represented here but the immaterial *qkàn*.

*Orí* is another Yoruba term used to represent the word ‘soul’. The Yoruba traditional thought represents *orí*, like *qkàn*, in two ways. Literally, *orí* simply means head. But when the Yoruba speak of *orí*, they are not referring to the physical and visible head; rather, they speak of *orí inú*, inner or metaphysical head of each individual. The word *orí* is used in different contexts, like *qkàn*, in a metaphorical sense. *Orí* is viewed as an important element of a man that cannot be overlooked. Awolalu (1979, p.183) illustrates the importance of *orí* as the person’s guardian or protector through the advice given to a bride. A newly married woman is given instruction to take *orí* along to her husband’s house, not just beauty. This is because beauty is ephemeral, but *orí* abides with one in the husband’s house- “*Mú orí lọ, máà mú ẹ̀wà lọ: ọ̀jọ̀ lẹ̀wà n bọ, orí ní bá ni gbélé ọ̀kọ*”.

Further usage of *orí* among the Yoruba confirms the fact that they think of *orí* as the personality — soul, human’s double, a semi-split entity or a person’s guardian angel. A person that is fortunate is described as *Olórí-ire* (One who possesses good *orí*) while one who is unfortunate is regarded as *Olórí burúkú* (one who possesses a bad *orí*). When a person is embarking on a journey, the Yoruba pray for the person: “*Kí orí kí ó sìn ẹ̀ lọ*” (May *orí* go with you). Parents do pray for their children in the belief that their *orí* will affect them positively. An example is pointed out by Awolalu (1979, p.83): “*Orí mi á sìn ẹ̀ lọ*” (May my *orí* go with you). In other words, may my *orí* guide you and bless you. In

another instance, if a person miraculously escapes from harm, he will say: “*Orí mi yọ mí*” (my *orí* saved me). And when accomplishment has been attained, the Yoruba say: “*Orí bá mi ẹ̀*” (my *orí* has enabled me to do it). The illustration cannot be exhausted. What is being stressed is that human beings have souls, which in, this context, is *orí inú*, which makes them rational, conscious, responsive and responsible. It is this *orí inú*, as personality soul, that differentiates human beings from animals and makes humans to be capable of knowing their maker, *Olódùmarè*, the Supreme Being.

*Ẹ̀mí* is also viewed as a divine element which links man directly to God, just as Plato considers the soul to be divine and spiritual. A renowned authority in Yoruba culture and traditional belief, expresses the Yoruba traditional opinion that *ẹ̀mí* is the most appropriate equivalent word to the term soul. He compares *ẹ̀mí* (soul) with the oil used to light the traditional lamp (*fitilá*). According to him, the light of the lamp radiates for as long as the lamp is filled with oil. The light, however, grows deem as the oil dries, and by the time the oil dried up, the lamp fades away. In the same way, man is full of life when the soul—*ẹ̀mí*— is intact, but when *ẹ̀mí*, like the oil, leaves the body, life is sniffed out of the body and it becomes lifeless (Koşemani, 2009). *Ẹ̀mí*, unlike *orí* and *qkàn*, is viewed in two ways, it is an immaterial and intangible entity, which the Yoruba regard as the element that provides the “animating force” or “vital force of life” without which a person cannot be said to be alive not to talk of being conscious. *Ẹ̀mí* is variously translated as life, spirit or being. It is also used to refer to spiritual beings. Awolalu and Dọpamu (2005, p.181) regard *ẹ̀mí* as the vital principle, the seat of life. *Ẹ̀mí* is also thought of as the conscious self. According to Bascom (1960, p.410), it does not only provide locomotion for the body, but can also think independently of it and can travel abroad on its own in dreams. Qladipọdescribes *ẹ̀mí* as the “undying part of man which is given directly by the creator before man is born into the world”. He explains the Yoruba concept of *ẹ̀mí* thus:

Generally speaking, *ẹ̀mí* is regarded by the Yoruba as the basis of human existence. It is the entity which gives life to a person; its presence or absence in a person makes the difference between life and death. It is conceived as that divine element in man “which links him directly to God... Hence, in the event of death, it returns to *Olódùmarè* — who has among many of his attributes that of being the owner of life (*Ẹ̀lẹ̀mí*) — to give an account of a person’s activities on earth and to continue to live. *Ẹ̀mí* then, for the Yoruba, is immortal (1992, p.19).

The Yoruba use *ẹ̀mí* in ways that it can be translated as “life” or “spirit,” depending on the context, such as *Ó fẹ̀gba ẹ̀mí rẹ̀* (He wants to take his life); *Ó pà àdánù ẹ̀mí rẹ̀* (He lost his life); *Ẹ̀mí gùn ún* (He is possessed by a spirit). Thus the Yoruba believe that *ẹ̀mí* is the basis of human existence; it is the entity, which gives life to a person. As such, its presence or absence in a person makes the difference; its presence means life, while its absence

means death. Èmí is also viewed as a divine element “which links man directly to God.

Generally, the Yoruba believe that a person is made up of three important parts: *ara-* (body), *èmí-* (the life-giving element called soul), and *orí inú-* (inner head), which Oladipo (1992, p.1) refers to as “the individuality element, which is claimed to be responsible for a person’s personality”. The Yoruba tripartite human composition is not to be confused with the Platonic tripartite soul, where the harmonious tripartite soul is responsible for human personality as just or unjust person. According to Awolalu and Dọpamu (1979, p.155), the physical part of human composition is known as *ara*, while the immaterial is the nonphysical called “*èmí*”. The *ara* (body) is concrete, tangible, and visible and is made up of flesh and bones. Èmí, on the other hand, is invisible and intangible. According to Bọlaji Idowu (1962, p.169), as cited by Oyeshile (2006, p.54), “it is the *èmí* that gives life to the whole body and therefore can aptly be described through its causal functions”. Therefore, the presence of *èmí*, or its absence from the body, helps to determine whether a person is alive or dead. Accordingly, *èmí* can be regarded as the life force. Abimbọla (1991, p.77) asserts that the invisible spiritual element of human personality – *èmí*, has its “physical realization in the human head, and *ẹsẹ* (leg), which is also known by same name on the physical plane.”

Although many scholars of Yoruba culture and philosophy agree that *èmí* is the Yoruba term that best corresponds with the Greek word *ψυχή* (psyche), translated soul in English, from various description of the word *èmí*, it is apparent that the word *èmí* does not correspond with the Platonic tripartite soul. *Orí inú*, the personality-soul, however, has a corresponding meaning to Plato’s tenet of the soul. While *èmí* is regarded as the life force and described by Oladipo as the “undying part of man which is given directly by the creator before man is born into the world,” *orí inú* is responsible for the personality of an individual. It is *orí inú* that makes man what he is, a just or an unjust person. Oyeshile is of the view that the description of *orí inú*— inner head, as the personality soul and *èmí* as soul creates more confusion “since the two concepts and their functions seem to be lumped together” (Oyeshile, 2006, p.157). However, in relation to Yoruba belief, *orí* is responsible for human destiny (Àyànmó). Èmí, on the other hand, is regarded as the ‘seat of life’, life force. Thus, the choice of a good *orí* in heaven brings success, while the choice of a bad *orí* brings failure to its bearer on earth.

#### 4. YORUBA TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF ORÍ AS DETERMINANT OF HUMAN PERSONALITY

It is generally believed by the Yoruba that a person is made up of three important parts *ara-* (body), *èmí-* (the

life-giving element called soul), and *orí inú-* (inner head), which is responsible for a person’s personality. Barry Hallen and Sodipo acknowledge this tripartite conception of person in Yoruba traditional thought in this declaration:

For the Yoruba, the essential element of the person (*eniyan*) when in the world (*aye*) are the body (*ara*), the vital spirits of the body or sour (*emi*) and the destiny (*ori*) that which determines every significant event during the particular life time (1986, p. 105).

Oladipo is of the same mind as Hallen and Sodipo on the tripartite conception of man in Yoruba traditional thought. According to him, the essential components of man are *ara-*(body), *èmí*, which he refers to as “life- giving entity,” and *orí*, which he terms the “inner head”. Oladipo, in his analytico-philosophical discourse points out that man’s constituent can be divided into two categories, material and immaterial elements. He describes *ara* as belonging to the material realm, while *èmí* and *orí*, belong to the immaterial realm thus supporting the Platonic dualism of human composition (1992, pp.14-16). Gbadegeşin, in his analysis of Yoruba conception of a person considers *ara-* (body), *èmí-* (life giving element), *orí-* (inner head) and adds *ọkàn*. To him *ara* is the physico- material part of man, whereas *ọkàn* is an element in the structure of human person having a dual character. He does not just view *ọkàn* as an internal organ of the body responsible for pumping and circulating blood. He views it as an invincible part responsible for all forms of conscious identity. To Gbadegeşin, *èmí* and *orí* belong to the non-physical realm of human constitution. He construes *èmí* as the active principle of life, the life-giving entity that guarantees the conscious existence of a person for as long as it is in force. He considers the *orí* (inner head), as the bearer of human destiny as well as the determinant of a person’s personality. Explaining the significance of *orí* as an element of human person, Gbadegeşin asserts that:

“*orí*” is therefore the determinant of the personality of the individual. The “*èmí*” as the active life force supplied by the deity is a common denominator... it cannot be the basis for identifying person as individual selves because it is common to all (1991, p.42).

From the analysis of Hallen and Sodipo, and Gbadegeşin, *orí* (inner head), as one of the three or four components of a person, plays an important role of determining every significant event during the particular lifetime of a person. In other words, they claim that *orí* is the sole determinant of human personality in Yoruba traditional belief. However, Oladipo, though, pitches his tent with the tripartite conception of man does not subscribe to the opinion of *orí* being the sole determinant of human personality. He is of the opinion that there is no way any element of human constitution can solely determine human personality in Yoruba traditional thought. According to him, *ọpọlọ* (brain), *ọkàn* (physical heart), and *ifun* (intestine), which are all material parts of

the body, perform “some mental and psychic functions”. He construes a person to be “an integrated physico-chemical system whose conscious activities are product of the harmonious interaction between the various elements of subsystems.” (Oladipo, 1992, pp.17- 22)

Since *orí* is regarded as the central concept in Yoruba traditional conception of human personality, it is, therefore, important to discuss how *orí* is acquired according to Yoruba traditional thought. There are various myths of creation and methods of acquisition of *orí*. On the whole, the Yoruba believe that the body and the soul were not created simultaneously; they were created in order of priority. The body is believed to have been the first to be created and then the soul (Makinde, 2007, p.104). This is in contrast with the Platonic account of creation where the soul came first. The Yoruba concept of body first is based on the belief that Olódūmarè (The Almighty God) is the one responsible for the creation of the soul and he could only effect this work after Òrìṣàńlá, who has been delegated with the responsibility of moulding both the body and the human heart (*òkàn*) out of clay, has finished his work (Abimbola, 1971, pp.77-78). The lifeless body is then taken to Olódūmarè, the supreme deity, who infuses it with *ẹ̀mí* (life force). The body, having been activated with life, goes to the house of Àjàlá (one of the divinities) who is responsible for making *orí*, and often referred to as “*Alámòtí n mọ̀rì*”, that is, the potter who moulds the human head, to select an *orí*.

According to Yoruba traditional belief, as opined by Wande Abimbola, the *orí* selected by an individual determines the life course and the personality of its possessor on earth. Hence, Abimbola states that:

The choice of a good *orí* ensures that the individual concerned would lead a successful and prosperous life on earth while the choice of a bad *orí* condemns the individual concerned to a life of failure (1976, p.80).

*Orí*, according to many scholars as mentioned earlier, with the exception of Oladipo, is believed to be the sole determinant of human personality and at the same time represents human destiny. It is responsible for the actuality and significance of man on earth. According to Bolaji Idowu, *orí* is responsible for human destiny; it is the essence of human personality which rules, control and guides the life and activities of a person (1962, p.170). Awolalu also gives a good description of the Yoruba conception of *orí*'s responsibility as the personality soul in the following words:

We are, however, convinced that when the Yoruba speak of *orí* they mean something more than the physical head. They are referring to the personality-soul, which is believed to be capable of ruling, controlling and guiding the life and activities of man. The people believe that success or failure in life depends on *orí* and its quality (1979, p.9).

Understandably from the above, the Yoruba believe that *orí* is the indicator of one's purpose in life. The choice

of a good *orí* ensures that the person in question would lead a successful and prosperous life on earth, while the choice of a bad *orí* condemns the individual concerned to a life of failure and doom. Gbadeggeṣin says that “a person is what he is in virtue of what he is predestined to be his character.” (1992, p.183)

While Plato's analysis of the tripartite soul shows that an individual is in total control of his personality through the harmonious relationship of the three-part soul and the attributed virtues, the Yoruba believe that human personality is controlled by his destiny through his choice of *orí*. The Yoruba generally believe that the prenatal choice of *orí* determines the personality of man in the world. Many scholars of Yoruba tradition and culture argue that the Yoruba believe that there are some ways by which a bad *orí* can be altered or improved for a better *orí* through consultations with Òrúnmilá, a deity, who may prescribe *ètùtù* (sacrifice) to that effect. Antithetically, a good *orí* can be changed for the worse through the activities of malevolent agents, like *ájé* (witches) and laziness.

Wande Abimbola, however, argues otherwise, that, once a person has chosen his destiny by the selection of an *orí*, it is almost impossible to alter it here on earth. The inferred salient point here is that one's destiny, one's future existence or whatever one becomes in life or whatever activities or events that occur in one's life are all traceable to the type of destiny one's *orí* chose for one during creation. This point is proven in Ola Rotimi's *The God's Are Not to Blame*, where Oḡewale is destined to kill his father and have children through his mother. Oḡewale tries to avert this destiny by running away. However, the more he runs, the closer he moves to his destiny, which he later fulfils.

Although, Wande Abimbola has argued in some of his earlier works that *orí* can be regarded as a major determinant of human personality in Yoruba traditional thought and that the choice of *orí* is irrevocable, he observes in his work entitled: *Iwapele: The Concept of Good Character in "Ifa" Literacy Corpus* that when a person chooses a good or bad *orí*, the individual needs to supplement it with the use of *ẹ̀bọ* or *ètùtù* (sacrifice) and the use of his *ẹ̀sẹ* (spiritual leg) which requires strong will and earnest efforts in order to attain a suitable and desirable personality. In other words, Wande Abimbola, like Oladipo, is of the opinion that *orí* is not the sole determinant of human personality but that other components, such as *ẹ̀sẹ* (spiritual leg), *ìwà* (character), *ara* (body) and *ẹ̀mí* all jointly determine human personality. Wande Abimbola is not alone on this ideal, Kola Abimbola introduces *ẹ̀sẹ* (spiritual leg) as the principle of individual effort or strife to realise the potential that has been compressed in his *orí*. Kola Abimbola strongly believes that *ẹ̀sẹ* is an important part of human personality both in the physical and spiritual senses. To him, *ẹ̀sẹ* (physical leg), just like *orí* (physical head), has spiritual counterpart.



It is important to note the argument of Balogun that *ori* is limited to issues of material success, such as wealth, riches and success in one's chosen profession. In other words, *ori* has nothing to do with moral character and does not have any effect on all human actions or inaction. According to him, "nowhere in any of the Yoruba ancient scriptures (i.e. *Ifa* literary corpus, *Ijala* and *Iwi Egungun* and *Esa Egungun*) is there the claim that moral character can be pre-determined by one's earlier choice of *ori*" (2007, p.125). Thus, to him, *ori* is not about the issue of moral character but issues about material prosperity or impoverished destiny. If the idea introduced by Balogun is plausible, the question then is: what factor or factors is/are responsible for human personality?

Ekanola notes that the Yoruba recognizes the fact that an individual is a free moral agent, that is, he is free to do or not to do certain things. To him, the Yoruba believe that it is the choice of an individual to decide "whether to steal or not to steal, tell the truth, or be kind to people" (2006, p.46). Even though man seems to have the freedom of choice to build his own personality, from Ekanola's point of view, he is not absolutely free, for there are certain things that are beyond his control. These factors are identified by Ekanola:

It seems that no one is free in an absolute sense, even in those areas where freedom may be exercised. This is because a number of external factors which people do not have much control over, and of which they are frequently not conscious, often affect or influence the way of their actions and character. These may be classified into two sorts: Factors of heredity and factors of environment (2006, p.46).

The factors of heredity are attributed to all inborn "propensities" which are common to a race or family, such as "certain physical characteristics, diseases, and habits". Environmental factors, according to Ekanola, include earthquake, flood, drought and various climatic changes. Socio-environmental factors are also regarded as contributing to development of human personality, such as those happenings in the society "that may influence individuals either at the level of specific actions or at the level of dispositions and characters" this includes war (2006, pp.46-47). Gbadegeşin, though he asserts that *ori* plays an important role in determining human personality, he is also of the opinion that what we call personality is defined, shaped and developed within the context of a community as conveyed in Ekanola's socio-environmental factor. Gbadegeşin asserts that "a person is what he is in virtue of what he is predestined to be, his character, and the communal influence on him" (1992, p.183). To him, it is the combination of these elements that constitute an individual's personality. He writes further:

A person whose existence and personality is dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute his own quota to the continued existence of the community, which nurtures him and partakes in his destiny. This is the ultimate meaning

of human existence. The crown of personal life is to bear fruit (beget offspring); the crown of communal life is to be useful to one's community. The meaning of one's life is measured by one's commitment to social ideals and communal existence (1992, p.184).

Many scholars of Yoruba philosophy and traditional thought agree on the important roles played by *ori* as the sole determinant of human personality. Bolaji Idowu, and Hallen and Sodipo declare *ori* as the sole determinant of human personality. Oladipo, Wande Abimbola, and Kola Abimbola claim that there are other components of the human person apart from *ori* that play important roles in forming human personality. To Oladipo *apolo*, (brain), *okàn* and *ifun* all have different roles in forming human personality. Wande Abimbola notes that *eşè* (spiritual leg), *ara* (body) and *èmi* (the life force) all jointly determine human personality. Kola Abimbola also asserts that the spiritual leg (*eşè*) has a lot to do for a person to develop his personality. Balogun is of the opinion that *ori* has little to do with human personality since its primary responsibility concerns material prosperity or impoverishment; therefore, freewill comes in. From Ekanola's evaluation, even though man is viewed as free moral agent responsible for his personality, certain factors still have control over him, regulating his character, which forms part of his personality. Ekanola, like Balogun, is of the view that *ori* has little or nothing to do with human personality.

## 5. LOGICAL COMPARISON OF THE SOUL IN PLATO AND YORUBA TRADITIONAL THOUGHT

Plato's chariot allegory is indeed a symbolic depiction of the tripartite analysis of the soul. One of the horses drawing the chariot is good while the other is defective. The good horse represents the spirit, which is noble, well formed and possessing the tendency to act well and magnificently. Conversely, the other horse, representing the appetite, is fraudulent, ill made and stiff-necked. In order for the tripartite soul of Plato to act harmoniously for the betterment of an individual, each part of the soul receives educational programme which will enable it to carry out its respective social functions properly.

From the Yoruba conception of human personality, it can be deduced that it is the combination of the *ori* (inner head), *okàn* (heart), *iwà* (character) and *eşè* (leg) that jointly determine and constitute human personality. *Okàn* is described as the seat of thought and the abode of conscious identity that usually determines the emotional state of a person which, in turn, affects his personality. This then explains why some people are naturally impatient, eager to carry out certain desires of their hearts. Hence, the function of *okàn* (heart) in Yoruba traditional conception of human personality can be equated to Plato's spirited part of the tripartite soul, that which comprises



emotional motive. This aspect of the tripartite soul, according to Plato, is the motivating force that generally accounts for self-assertion, ambition and love of honour which makes man strive for self-esteem by competing with others. When its desires are frustrated emotional responses, such as anger and indignation behaviour naturally flows from such responses ensue.

*Ori* (inner head) can be said to represent Plato's rational part of the soul. Plato's description of this part fits well with Bolaji Idowu's analysis of *ori*. Plato sees the rational part as being capable of ruling, caring and guiding the other two parts to attain and maintain a healthy soul that works in compliance with inner justice. According to Bolaji Idowu, when the Yoruba speak of *ori*, they mean something more than the physical head. They are referring to the personality-soul, which is believed to be capable of ruling, controlling and guiding the life and activities of man. The third part of Plato's tripartite soul, appetitive, is in correlation with the Yoruba conception of *esẹ* (spiritual leg). According to Plato, appetite is that desire that drives man to seek out his basic bodily needs such as food, drink and love. And according to the Yoruba traditional thought, it is the *esẹ* (spiritual leg) that strives to bring to realize the desires of the heart (*okàn*) as destined by the inner head (*ori*).

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## CONCLUSION

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As evident in this paper, Plato considers the soul to be the sole determinant of human personality through the harmonious interaction of the tripartite soul. From the Yoruba point of view, however, *ori inú* (inner head), which corresponds to the Platonic soul, is not the sole determinant of human personality. It is the tripartite harmonious interaction of *ori* (inner head), *okàn* (heart), *esẹ* (leg) that determines and constitutes human personality. The longstanding impact of Plato's analysis of the soul and the Yoruba tripartite relation of *ori* (inner head), *okàn* (heart) and *esẹ* (leg) can be seen on Western civilization, particularly in the Christian tradition, where the soul is considered to be a tripartite relation of mind, body and spirit.

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