

THE METAPHYSICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF IFA CORPUS

**ADEGBOYEGA Oyekunle Oluwayemisi**

Department of Philosophy  
Olabisi Onabanjo University  
Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State  
Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *The focus of this paper is not to ascertain the reality of Ifa among the Yoruba, but to examine the philosophical relevance of Ifa corpus from epistemological and metaphysical points of view. The paper employs a critical and analytical methods to expose various philosophical issues in Ifa corpus. The paper argues that the metaphysical and epistemological relevance of Ifa corpus is enormous and the effect is fundamental in showing that true knowledge can be acquired through the empirical and transcendental means. The ability of Ifa corpus in this regard underscore the traditional claim of existence of basic relationship between epistemology and metaphysics.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ifa corpus, Philosophy, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Yoruba tradition.

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## INTRODUCTION

Questions about human knowledge, actions, nature, existence, and reality among others are generally considered in metaphysics. Such questions revolve around what is human being made up of and when does his existence become authentic? How do human beings acquire knowledge both of themselves and their environment? Is knowledge absolute or relative? The solutions to such epistemological and metaphysical questions brought *Ifa* to focus in Yoruba thought. *Ifa* plays vital role in the folk-life of the people as it is held to be the custodian of true and adequate knowledge of human beings in particular, nature and existence in general. *Ifa*, the oracle of the Yoruba is consulted in finding answers to the fundamental questions and problems confronting humans. It is the ability of *Ifa* in ‘solving the problem of existence that is of interest to this paper. Such an ability raises certain fundamental questions of epistemological and metaphysical relevance of *Ifa*.

### Philosophy, and the problem of human existence

Philosophy can be conceived as a search for answers to wide ranging questions about the nature of the universe, the nature of human being, the purpose of life, the character of good life and the contemplation about an ideal society. This conception of philosophy may not receive universal acceptance, as every definition of philosophy is apt to be personal. However, most notable in many conceptions of philosophy is the curiosity of the human mind to possess knowledge both of himself or herself and of the universe in which he or she lives. Generally, what human beings sees and experiences daily makes them to wonder. For instance, they wonders on conception, delivery and

what reality is. Human's wonder on attempt to deal with these problematic and many other puzzling issues is the concern of philosophy.

Though, there are no universally accepted position regarding the question of what should be the focus of philosophy, it is less disputed that experience, events and actions as they occur in one's space, time and culture are the data for philosophising. Humans are core to many problems of existence. Whatever problem they have in the universe is central to the reality of his very own existence. Momoh therefore identified some of these problems:

...Man and his knowledge of himself and of knowledge itself; man as a mythical being, as a religious animal: as a metaphysical being; man as a scientist, man as he perceives the supreme being or as he thinks of his place or latterly his rights within the state and the universe or man as the state, and as he sees his duty within the system; man and the institutions he creates and the organs he manipulates; man in business; man in politics and history: Man in romance; man in peace and in war; man as an angel and as a demon; man in truth and man in fiction. (Momoh 1991:2)

All the above identified problems of human beings which human beings seeks solutions can be discussed under five major problematic questions that. These are:

“Who am I?” “Where am I coming from?” “Where am I?” “What can I do?” “Where am I going to?”

These questions show the problems that often confront human existence in the physical world. Reflecting on this questions is important in order for human beings to have a fulfilling earthly existence. They cannot in any way be divorced from these problems. Doing so results in running away from possible realities of life. An impossible idea which led to his wonder and curiosity about what reality is.

Philosophy therefore, focuses on human beings and the universe at large. Philosophers have also shown concerns about human knowledge and reason. Questions about reality, human nature and human knowledge are interrelated. Epistemology cannot be divorced from the metaphysical problems of life. While epistemology is a critical inquiry into the nature, foundations limits and possibilities of knowledge, metaphysics is concerned with knowing the nature and structure of reality as a whole as well as the place of humans in the universe.

### **The idea of *Ifa*: origin and nature**

The controversies surrounding the idea of *Ifa* deserves a brief clarification. *Ifa* and *Orunmila* are two names for one divinity. Some writers believe that the name *Orunmila* belongs to the deity himself while *Ifa* refers only to the divination system. In the words of Wande Abimbola (1976: 3), Rev. Lijadu calls *Ifa* “The word of divination which issues from the mouth of *Orunmila*.” This view is corroborated by Epega view when he says: “The received instructions from *Orunmila* are called *Ifa*..., *Ifa*'s are so many and varied that none can know them all” (ibid.). To corroborate this view, Abimbola (1976:14) further states Bascom's argument that; “the word *Ifa* is used to mean

both the system of divination and the deity who controls it; and this deity is known also as *Orunmila*".

Fundamentally, these two names represent the same deity. This view can be explicated by what is observable from the *Ifa* priest doing the process of divination. In this process, *Ifa* is normally praised by the aphorism *Orunmila, baba Agbonmiregun* (*Orunmila*, the father of *Agbonmiregun*). One can therefore argue that *Orunmila* is the attribute of *Ifa*, just like the name *Adeda* (creator) is an attribute of *Olodumare* (God in Yoruba belief). Furthermore, an understanding of *Ifa* literary corpus shows that these two names, *Ifa* and *Orunmila* are used to refer to the deity while the name *Ifa* is used also for the system of divination. Thus, none of the two names can be divorced from the deity.

*Ifa* is generally conceived as divination system through which hidden facts are revealed. There are two views on the question of his origin and nature. On the one hand, some myths state that *Ifa* came from a deity who descended from heaven with some others. On the other hand, there are oral traditions, which identify its originator as an exceptionally wise man whose fame brought several disciples and apprentices from far and near. *Ifa* chose only 16 of them and their names coincided with the elder 16 *Odu Ifa* (the 16 corpuses). The younger 240 *Odu* could therefore be reasonably regarded as member of later generation of disciples and apprentices trained by the first 16 and others (Oluwole, 1996:3). To the first view, *Ifa* was recognized as the first point of call when the divinities first came to the world. To the other, *Ifa* himself was said to have eight children all of whom later became diviners.

Whichever of the above views that may be considered appropriate, it is arguable that the myth of the origin of *Ifa* does not necessarily detract the belief that *Ifa* once lived as a man of great wisdom who eventually became a consulting oracle to the Yoruba people.

### **The place of *Ifa* corpus in Yoruba thought system**

It is interesting to note that other divination systems exist among the Yoruba people some of these are *Opele* and *Agbigba* (ibid.). However, *Ifa* is often preferred to any other forms of divination by the people. The above view is corroborated by the argument that:

Of all the methods of divination employed by the Yoruba, *Ifa* is regarded as the most important and most reliable. The honesty of knowledge of individual *Babalawo* may be questioned, but most are highly esteemed, and the system itself is rarely doubted. The number of *babalawo* is a reflection of the influence they wield. (Olatunji 1984: 110)

*Ifa* is one of the most important Yoruba deities. Going by the cosmological account of the Yoruba race, the belief is that *Orunmila* was sent by *Olodumare*, the Yoruba Supreme Being, to use his profound wisdom to put the earth in order. The belief of the Yoruba in the great wisdom of *Ifa* is manifested in the praise names accorded him. For instance, he is sometimes addressed as *Akere finu sogbon* (the small person with a mind full of wisdom). No wonder he is averred as the most

powerful counselor of all the other deities. It is this great knowledge and wisdom of *Ifa* that gives him a high position.

Without *Ifa*, the importance of the Yoruba gods would diminish. If a man is being punished by the God, he can only know this by consulting *Ifa*, if a community is to make sacrifice to one of its gods, it can only know this by consulting *Ifa*. So that in this way, *Ifa* is the only active mouth piece of Yoruba traditional religion taken as a whole. As a mouth piece *Ifa* serves to popularise the other Yoruba gods, he serves to immortalise them. (Abimbola 1965:3-4)

*Ifa's* wisdom, knowledge and understanding makes him to serve as a link between him and other gods. His wisdom, knowledge and understanding cover not only the past but the present and the future. He is believed to be instrumental to the foundation of the earth, the creation of human beings, and human beings' journey into the world. Identified with the knowledge of all things, *Ifa* is described as an inexhaustible repository of knowledge (*Imo aimotan*). He is believed to have knowledge and unquestionable answers to the intractable problem of human kind. This explains why the Yoruba always recourse to him with a view to getting solutions or explanations to problems.

By consulting *Ifa*, the Yoruba find meaning and purpose in the past, the present, and future. The high esteem with which they consider him is revealed in the following *Ifa* poem:

*Ifa lo loni*  
*Ifa lo lola*  
*Ifa lo lotunla pelue*  
*Orunmila lo n'ijo mereerin oosa daye*

(*Ifa* is the master of today  
*Ifa* is the master of tomorrow  
*Ifa* is the master of the day after tomorrow  
 To *Ifa* belongs all the four days established by  
*Oosa* on earth) (Abimbola 1965).

The Yoruba normally consult *Ifa* owing to reasons such as:

- (a) Metaphysical problem for example, to determine the cause and find solutions to intractable occurrence like sudden death,
- (b) Epistemological problems: for example, to discover the truth about certain facts of life, to determine the destiny and know the most befitting name of a new born baby.
- (c) Religious problems: to determining the frequent cause of religious crisis and why prayers and sacrifices are not efficacious.
- (d) Social ethical problems: to determining who and what is responsible for a particular crime committed in the society, as well as how best to act in the society.

The faith of the Yoruba in *Ifa* is derived from their belief system and this rests on the view that every human being is born into the world with his own personal destiny.

Besides, *Ifa* corpus can be treated as a verbal art and as a store-house of information about the Yoruba mythology and cosmogony. The world view of the Yoruba can therefore be reconstructed from the information contain in the *Ifa* verses.

## THE QUESTION OF RELEVANCE

Wande Abimbola speaking on the relevance of *Ifa* corpus emphasis that *ese Ifa* constitute a comprehensive account of information on Yoruba world view:

*Ifa* literary corpus is the Store—house of Yoruba culture inside which the Yoruba comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. Even until today *Ifa* is recognized by the Yoruba as a repository for Yoruba traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore

Thus, *Ifa* corpus is relevant in human life, and such relevance could be understood philosophically as either in terms of metaphysics or epistemology.

### Metaphysical relevance

A person's destiny is known as *Ipin ori* (The *ori* portion or lot). In traditional Yoruba thought, there are several words or terms used for destiny: *ayanmo* (that which is fixed), *akunlegba* (that which was received while kneeling), and *akunleyan* (that which was chosen while kneeling). These variants of destiny acquisition processes does not necessarily mean that the physical head is *ori* but that the physical head only symbolizes it. The Yoruba believe very strongly that whatever achievement recorded by an individual in the universe is the result of his/her *ori* that is, 'that portion which he/she has chosen; whether good or bad. Thus, no one came into the world without a portion. This portion can be affected for good or ill; a good *ori* can be protected while a bad one can be amended. By implication, the belief in *ori* among the Yoruba cannot be seen as being in accordance with strong determinism. It is also believed by the Yoruba that no one on getting into the world can remember whatever he or she might have gotten as his own *ipin-ori* having passed through the mythological water of forgetfulness. Only a consultation with *Ifa* could reveal what an individual portion is and how he can go about it. Because only *Ifa* was believed to be present when individuals were acquiring their destiny.

Though, the Yoruba belief in destiny is metaphysical and it is problematic, this paper's immediate concern is not to dwell on such problem. But then, it is important to note that the concept of destiny as established by *Ifa* corpus shows that, in the Yoruba account, human beings are more than the body and the spirit. *Ori* is also an integral part of human being. It is the controlling force of any affairs of life which one undergoes, and it is believed to be in the same metaphysical realm with *Olodumare* (God in Yoruba believe) (Ogugbemi 1997:46). The realization or fulfilment of human existence can only be established in his/her destiny which remains unknown to him except by consulting of *Ifa* divination.

*Ifa* is believed to know everything about human being and can furnish adequate information about them since he was a witness to every human's choice of destiny (Ogungbemi 1997). Furthermore, it is believed that the profound system of divination which *Ifa* bequeathed to his people has all the answers to human problems that result from his unknown destiny.

Whenever the Yoruba want to consult the *babalawo* (a diviner) they cup their mouth as they whisper their problems into a coin which they puts on the divinatory tray. They may hold these objects in their hands and whisper the problems which have prompted them to consult the *babalawo* (a diviner). The *babalawo* then provides an answer to the problems which have been whispered and, mark you about which he has been kept in the dark. To do this the *babalawo* has to recognize the *Odu* that come forth in the process of divination. The term *Odu* in Yoruba language still carries notion of a 'secrecy' known only to a privileged few.

After the *Odu* which emerged has been recognized, the *babalawo* then begins to recite as many as he knows of the *ese Ifa* (*Ifa* verses). Each *ese Ifa* (*Ifa* verses) generally occurs as a poetry intermittently with prose. The diviner usually chants the poem and then tells a story in the form of prose to offer analysis, explanation, and justification of the thesis proposed in the poem. The *ese Ifa* presents a prototype situation, a legendary character who consults a *babalawo* on specific problem. It is through this procedure that solutions are proffered to the problems of man. Solutions to every human problems are therefore situated in each *Ifa* verses or corpus. It is important therefore, that an *Ifa* priest knows all the *Ifa* corpus and be capable of reciting the appropriate verse for a particular problem.

Every *Ifa* corpus is presented as a historical poem, which suggests to our mind the possibility of a world outside the physical world. This argument is deduced from the fact that each *ese Ifa* is believed to be an accurate account of what once happened or what has once been observed in the past.

Furthermore the past event is presented as an accurate record of a past divination involving a past priest of *Ifa* and his clients. Each *ese Ifa* therefore contains the nature of the people involved in the past divination in question, the occasion of the divination, and its result (Olatunji 1984:111). The desire to understand the world and the curiosity to explain various phenomenon in life which makes the Yoruba to consult *Ifa*. Every individual has his destiny which is unknown and inexplicable by self without consultation with the oracle. In such process, reality is seen as being outside the physical world in order to understand and unravel the mystery of an individual's existence and destiny. Through *Ifa* human beings are able to know what life holds for the individual based on their destiny. *Ifa* is therefore a link between human being with the spiritual world.

*Ifa* verses simply show that what we have in this world is a physical manifestation of the spiritual, thereby providing a stand point by which every individual can answer the following fundamental questions; Who am I? Where am I coming from? What can I do? Where am I? Where am I going to? This position is true as *Ifa* verses can reveal what an individual can do such that will make life meaningful to him. *Ifa*'s ability to predict future occurrence could help in knowing where man is going to and what is at stake for him.

**Epistemological relevance**

From the above discussion an argument that can be established is that every *Ifa* priest makes his client to learn from the experience of the past. Let us consider the following *Ifa* corpus to show the epistemological relevance.

**OYEKU MEJI**

*Olooto li nbe laye o pogun*  
*Sikasika ibe won o mo niwon egbefa*  
*Ojo esan o lo titi*  
*Koje Koran o dun ni*  
*Adia fun orangbogbo ti ndun akapo*  
*Beeni won o dun 'fa*  
*Oran owo n dun akapo*  
*Oran obinrin n dun akapo*  
*Akapo wa a lo so fun Orunmila*  
*Oni ire gbogbo ni oun n wa.*  
*Orunmila ni ki akapo o lo so fun Esu*  
*Esu ni gbogbo oran ti ndun iwo akapo yi*  
*Ko dun Ifa.*  
*Esu ni iwo akapo,*  
*Orii re ni ki o lo ro fun,*  
*Nigba ti akapo se bee tan*  
*Oran re waa bere sii dara.*  
*Ijo ni akapo n jo*  
*Ayo ni nyo*  
*O n yin awon awoo re*  
*Awon awoo re n yin Ifa.*  
*Oni bee gege*  
*Ni awon awoo oun wi,*  
*Olooto ti n be laye o pogun,*  
*Sikasika ibe won o mo niwon egbef'a*  
*Ojo esan o lo titi,*  
*K'oje k'oran dun ni.*  
*Adia fun oran gbogbo ti ndun akapo.*  
*Bee ni won o dun Ifa*  
*Nje, ohun gbogbo t'o ba ndun mi.*  
*N g o ma a ro f'orii mi.*  
*Ori mi la mi o,*  
*Iwo !alagbon randun. (Abimbola 1976:143-145)*

Just people in the world are few  
 The wicked ones are in their thousands  
 The day of reckoning is at hand  
 Hence there is no need for despair

The truth of this thesis is aptly demonstrated  
 By the abject poverty of the *Ifa* priest  
 Yet *Ifa* did not have these problems.  
 The priest lacked money  
 He lacked a wife  
 He lacked children  
 The priest therefore went to complain to *Orunmila*  
 He said he lacked all good things of life.  
*Orunmila* then instructed him to complain to *Esu*.  
*Esu* reminded the priest that all what he lacked  
*Ifa* did not lack  
*Esu*.then told the priest  
 “Go and consult with your inner self”  
 When the priest did  
 His life changed for the better.  
 The priest danced  
 He was happy  
 He praised his wise men  
 And his wise men praised *Ifa*.  
 He said, so exactly said the wise men:  
 Just people in the world are few,  
 The wicked ones are in their thousands  
 The day of reckoning is at hand  
 Hence, there is no need for despair  
 The truth of this thesis is aptly demonstrated by  
 The abject poverty of the *Ifa* priest  
 Yet *Ifa* did not have these problems  
 “Now, in all my problems and travails,  
 I will always consult with my inner self  
 My inner self,  
 You are the only reliable consultant”.

The above *Ifa* verse reveals the true picture of some of the problems that confronts human beings in the world. Such problem(s) arises since human beings has no knowledge of the reality behind his existence. The name *Orunmila*. is a representation of such individual with such problem(s). Solution to the problem as seen in the excerpts, shows that the priest, *Orunmila*, has no knowledge of himself. Thus, we are back to one of the questions that we considered relevant to existence. That is “Who am I?” As simple as the question sounds, it goes a long way to determine the meaningfulness of human’s existence. It is both an epistemological and a metaphysical question. The *Ifa* corpus below shows that human being does not know who he is.

*Ori buruku kii wu tuulu*  
*A kii da ese asiweree mo loju-ona*  
*A kii m’ori oloye lawujo*  
*A dia fun Mobowu*

*Tii se obinrin Ogun*

*Ori ti o joba lola*

*Enikan o mo;*

*Ki toko-taya o mo p.e'raa won ni were mo.*

*Ori ti ojoba lola*

*Enikan o mo.* (Abimbola 1976)

A bad head does not swell up

Nobody knows the foot-prints of a mad man on the road

Nobody can distinguish the head destined to wear a crown in an assembly

The truth of this thesis is aptly demonstrated in *Mobowu* the wife of *Ogun*

Nobody knows who has been destined to be crowned tomorrow

Husband and wife should not cause each other

Nobody knows who has been destined to be crowned tomorrow.

In the first *Ifa* corpus, the solution to the problem of the client cannot be sought in the physical world, hence he was asked to consult himself, a position similar to Socrates dictum "know thyself". This divination was performed for an *Ifa* priest but in the verse, reference was made to another individual 'who was shown to have lived in the past with a similar problem to that of *Orunmila* (i.e. The lack of all good things). The advice that was given to him then, was also given to *Orunmila* which eventually served as the solution to *Orunmila's* problem. It should be stated that the client may not know who *Akapo* is, but, *Ifa* has successfully shown that *Orunmila's* problem is not new. This archetypal situation implies that certain people have lived in the past or that a particular world exist somewhere, where a particular person has had a similar-problem to that which the client is now seeking for solution. Similar solution to the character's problem were offered to the client's problem, who also believe that happiness awaits him if he/she obeys and the reverse will be the case if he/she disobeys. It is however imperative to say that the existence of such agents or beings and ingredients used for the sacrifice in the past make us to be skeptical about the genuity of this claim. Moreover, human beings are only sure of this physical world.

Arguably, every *Ifa* verse has similar structural pattern with reference to this unseen entities and world. But, can the same solution be offered to a similar problems? For example, that when Jingo had malaria he was treated with chloroquine does not necessarily follow that if Manga has malaria he should be treated with chloroquine. The formulation of an argument from this would amount to a weak inductive argument. For example,

Jingo has malaria, he was treated with chloroquine

Manga has malaria, he was treated with chloroquine

Kanga has malaria, he was treated with chloroquine

Therefore, all malaria patients should be treated with chloroquine.

The conclusion for the above argument is weak. In the same vein, it is fallacious to take similarity for sameness as it is the case in *Ifa* divination process.

Also, it can be argued that *Orunmila* is believed by the Yoruba one lived with *Olodumare* and was sent by Him to come, and better the world with his knowledge. The assumption can then be made that *Orunmila* acquired his knowledge through the experience he had gathered when he was with *Olodumare* before coming to the world; and that all the names of human beings and objects that are employed in explaining the phenomena of life in each *Ifa* verse are indeed real in the world where he once lived. If we grant this position, then it will be true that every *Ifa* verse gives an account of a past event which are only known to *Orunmila*.

Evaluating the *Ifa* corpus in *OYEKU MEJI* we observed that *Orunmila's* problem could not be solved by *Ifa* all he did was to offer a piece of advice to go and complain to *Esu*. The Yoruba understanding of *Esu* is different from the biblical Satan. *Esu* in Yoruba world view is regarded as the minister of justice. He is the trick star and he plays vital role in Yoruba belief system. He is the divinity that keeps *Ase* which is a copy of the divine authority and power with which *Olodumare* created the universe. He also maintains physical law and order. *Esu* is the closest divinity to *Orunmila* in the Yoruba pantheon, despite that they do not exhibit cordial relationship (Abimbola 1972:5). However, it was *Esu* that eventually provided solution to *Orunmila's* problem when he advised the latter; 'go and consult your inner self'.

It is relevant to note that contrary to Yoruba belief that *Ifa* knows everything, it seems that he did not know the direct solution to *Orunmila's* problem. Hence, he relied on the knowledge of *Esu* for a complete solution to *Orunmila's* problem. The argument been stressed here is that it is either *Ifa* did not know any thing about every human beings hence he did not know that it was *Orunmila's Ori* (destiny) that is responsible for his problem or there is a limit to what *Ifa* can know. He therefore supplements his knowledge with other divinities' knowledge. If he knows everything, he should have been able to offer a direct solution, especially when the person involved was an *Ifa* priest. Moreover, the *Esu* that *Ifa* directed *Orunmila* to, is said to be a man of an unpredictable character. A way of responding to this disjunction is to assert that *Ifa's* reference to *Esu* is to show the indispensability of *Esu* in the total belief of the Yoruba whatever his nature. Every divinity is important to them and so *Esu* cannot be neglected. Therefore, we can still accept the conviction that there is no limit to what *Ifa* knows and that he is the only repository of knowledge speculated in the Yoruba mythology.

Despite all the above observations and arguments both on the epistemological and metaphysical basis, it will be apt to say that *Ifa*, been a repository of knowledge is fundamental as a source of acquiring indubitable knowledge and this gives respite to the Yoruba. So, while we contest that *Ifa* does not directly solve the problem of *Orunmila*, yet, it remains the architect of the solution to *Orunmila* and all other people's problem. This and many other acts of *Ifa*, instills confidence in the mind of the people, therefore warranting the need to consult it at the period of difficulties and uncertainties. Testimonies given by people who have consulted and obeyed the instruction(s) given by *Ifa* at one time or the other are further proves that the place of *Ifa* in Yoruba tradition cannot be undervalued. It is a truism, that the Yoruba no longer see their lives being in darkness. Answers to such questions: Who am I? Where am I coming from? Where am I? What can I do? Where am I going to? which an individual mind may ask are known to *Ifa*. Also, the problems and issues emanating from those questions are refer to *Ifa* for solution given the belief that its wisdom

encompasses all that may arise from the above adumbrated questions. The idea of what reality is, which is obscure to human existence can be made known to them through the *Ifa*.

*Ifa* knows the secret of nature and the ways it proffer solution to problems show that it has an unlimited ability to predict future events or occurrence given certain conditions as they are. Makinde has argued for a similar position that because *Ifa* knows for certain, situations that surround human existence and the world around human beings, *Ifa* is used to prevent the occurrence of certain things in a manner suggested through the divination, atonement or appropriate sacrifices (Makinde 1983:118) This in many cases have proved efficacious. Also, because *Ifa*'s ways of solving problems takes the form of an induction, it underpin the fact that the prediction of future events can be made by the Yoruba and so they can construct their world. This position is corroborated by Francis Bacon's argument for induction as a process that can enable human being to construct their world (Russell 1979: 527).

The grasping of *Ifa* as a body of knowledge is not an easy task. It takes several years before mastering and grasping all the *Odus* in *Ifa*. Once acquired, the knowledge is general. It entails the knowledge of herbs, healing and so on. Thus, *Ifa* verses provide us with various form of knowledge and ways of knowing.

From the above analysis *Ifa* corpus, the merit of the metaphysical and epistemological relevance goes beyond Yoruba culture. The services rendered by *Ifa* can be enjoyed by anybody irrespective of culture, ethnic group and race.

At this juncture, it is worthy to note that, the idea of situating reality outside the physical world is not restricted to the Yoruba alone. There are some Western philosophers who have also proved that reality does not exist in this physical world. What we have are imitations. Plato for instance argued that, what we can only have and found in this world are opinion and beliefs which are particulars and individual things and so cannot present us with reality. Reality to him can only be found in the world of 'form' (MacDonald 1972: 225-227). Promenades: sees this physical world been divisible, created, and has the possibility of movement; we can talk about the past, present and future. But reality is spherical immoveable, uncreated, having no future, no past. Therefore, it is not part of the physical work. Also, while reality to St. Augustine is eternal truth in the mind of God, to Hegel reality is the 'Absolute' 'spirit reason or ideal' (Onigbinde 2004: 263-268). What Hegel, meant by the 'Absolute' is unclear, is it God? Or what? People held different opinion on what Hegel's reality is.

From all the above discussions, the idea of whether reality can be found in this world or outside this world has generated arguments which philosophers have attempted to resolve. Each position taken by philosophers however is not self-sufficient. Common sense has revealed that some of what we experience go beyond the physical world. Hence the Yoruba belief in *Ifa* goes a long way in providing peace for the human mind by situating the existence of the physical world in the spiritual. Through this process, mind boggling issues and questions that are beyond physical realm are resolved. Furthermore, the knowledge of *Ifa* covers everything about human existence and the reality of the universe. Aside this, the mode of reasoning exhibited in each *ese Ifa* is inductive in

nature, which is tantamount to the principle of induction in modern science. More so, *Ifa* has the ability to predict the future. Whether this will satisfy other minds who might want to question the objectivity of such ground of knowledge is another question. However, since there is limit to what the human mind can know, and the strong desire to know about the causes and effects more importantly about the future kept increasing in human kinds, such theory of knowledge that could be formulated from *Ifa* epistemological claims would go a long way in providing respite to minds that can absorb such knowledge.

*Ifa*'s ability to reliably predict the future and detect causes of events may not be open to empirical observation, this however should not be a ground for its rejection since it is obvious that the senses may not provide us with objective knowledge, because, it is also prone to error. Thus, sense experience cannot serve as the only yard stick to measure what is real. *Ifa*'s form of rational conjecture is unique and transcends the physical which provide more ground for us to take the predictions and prescriptions to be authentic just as the empirical science. After all, *Ifa* is a science of a particular kind.

## CONCLUSION

The antiquated understanding of philosophy is that philosophy grew out of curiosity and wonder: wonder about life, existence, universe, nature, man, and so on. Philosophy, given its nature, is speculative. This is so when a philosopher wonders about the complexities of the universe and its constituents. It ventures into the unknown and this is a mark of curiosity. Of course, the traditional branches of philosophy includes logic and ethics, however, the basic foundations of philosophy rests on epistemology and metaphysics. In western philosophy, these two branches of philosophy, that is epistemology and metaphysics remains fundamental in the ultimate aim of human kinds to understand and unravels the reality that surrounds their existence; even as western philosophers have shown that solution can be sought for either within experience or outside experience. The same attempt is been made in Yoruba tradition and it is this that brought *Ifa* to focus.

Though, the epistemological and metaphysical relevance of *Ifa* corpus are not largely pronounced yet, they are numerous. The ultimate aim of individual is to know who he/she is, where he/she is from, where he/she is, what he/she can do and what to hope for. Solutions to these questions might not be easily sought in the physical world and this has been a serious problem among Western philosophers.

*Ifa* attempts to solve the various problems that borders on human existence and humans' pursuit of the good life by situating reality in the spiritual existence of all things. This is because the destiny of persons determines what they become in the physical world. Therefore, it can be argued that while the scientist may reject *Ifa*'s epistemological claim on the ground of lack of objectivity we make bold also, to say that objectivity does not rest on the strings of empirical science. There are numerous things that the scientific mode of knowing cannot measure due to its limitation. Also, *Ifa* corpus has successfully shown that true knowledge can be acquired through the empirical and transcendental means, thereby, providing solution to the problems that reality and human existence may pose to human beings.

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