Obscuring Our Sense of Morality: Barry Hallen's Yoruba Moral Epistemology and the Problem of Character Indeterminacy

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Image: Nigeria, yoruba, tunica, da okuku, 1916-34 ca.jpg / commons.wikimedia.org

Abstract

Barry Hallen's critical engagements with the African (Yoruba) philosophical scholarship have earned him a place among African intellectual giants of the 20th century. Among his diverse contributions to African philosophical discourse is his Yoruba moral epistemology thesis. Built on his canonical distinction between knowledge (ìmọ̀) and belief (ìgbàgbọ́) within the Yoruba linguistic framework, the Yoruba moral epistemology thesis suggests that knowledge of human character could be modelled alongside a similar pathway with knowledge of other propositional items where knowledge claims are made based on evidence obtained via first-hand information. Using Yoruba ethnological/linguistic resources as a methodological standpoint, our critique of Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology is primarily motivated by three fundamental observations: a. that the acclaimed distinction between ìmọ̀ and ìgbàgbọ́ on which the thesis is based, is faulty; b. that the thesis does not agree to a certain conception of personhood within the Yoruba metaphysical worldview; and c. that the behaviourist implications engendered by Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology do not adequately represent the deeply spiritual essence of human conducts in Yoruba ethical system. We conclude that, although it is flawed, Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology thesis is an important contribution to African philosophy as it stimulates fruitful discussions around the subject matters of epistemology and ethics, and the connection between them within a traditional intellectual discourse of the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria.

Keywords: Yoruba morality, Moral epistemology, Barry Hallen, Character Indeterminacy

Introduction

Barry Hallen belongs to a group of scholars whose professional accomplishments and contributions to African scholarship continue to defy every cultural criterion for delineating who an African philosophy is. Although an American by birth, Hallen's scholarship on African philosophy has so greatly impacted a vibrant generation of African philosophers that it would be a matter of racial chauvinism to deny him a foremost place among the primogenitors of professional African philosophy. Significantly, Hallen has bequeathed to African philosophy the ordinary language approach to philosophical investigation. In this article, we examine one of the fallouts of this approach. Three principal objectives are thereby aimed at. One, the article shows that Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology thesis is a consequence of his analytic experiment with the Yoruba concepts of *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ*. Two, the article tries to understand Yoruba morality in the light of Hallen's specific encounter with moral epistemology. Three, the article raises some objections against Hallen's moral epistemology thesis.

There are four sections in all. The first section describes the nature of moral epistemology in general. Section two traces Hallen's specific encounters with moral epistemology thesis and posit that Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology is an epistemological thesis rather than an ethical one. Section three provides a link between moral epistemology thesis and the determination of epistemic reliability in terms of transitioning second-hand information to knowledge (*ìmọ*). The last section raises some critiques against Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology.

Moral Epistemology Thesis

Like other traditional branches of philosophy, epistemology is a transdisciplinary area of study. With subject matters covering trans- and multidisciplinary boundaries, epistemological questions can be legitimately asked in almost, if not all, disciplines both within and outside philosophy. This observation is considerably valid because epistemology, being primarily concerned with the nature, sources, scope and justification of knowledge (Hamlyn, 1970), has the legitimacy to probe into the affairs of other disciplines insofar as there are no disciplines in which knowledge claims are not regularly made. In probing into the cognitive affairs of other disciplines, epistemology is primarily interested in (in)validating the claims to knowledge made therein through critical assessments of their possibility, methods, scopes, and justification. This makes epistemology a sort of stinging fly to all other disciplines in matters of knowledge generation. Moral epistemology comes because of this second-order activity of epistemology.

The central focus of moral epistemology is the question of how moral knowledge is possible (Campbell, 2019). We take the thesis of moral epistemology to be that it is possible to establish a set of normative principles through which human conducts can be appropriately situated and evaluated within a moral context. That human beings somehow know that actions are either right or wrong is not inherently controversial. It is based on this knowledge that various societies develop some punitive systems which either serves to deter people from engaging in wrong acts or as a retributive measure for punishing wrongdoings. The rules may differ from one cultural setting to another. What is of importance, however, is the fact that each of the cultures can recognise not only that there are morally reprehensible actions that must be condemned, but also that individual persons have been socialised in a way that they are able to know and distinguish between morally right and wrong actions. The interest of moral epistemology lies in understanding how people come by this knowledge.

Hence, the thesis of moral epistemology is built around two basic assumptions. The first is the view that there are general normative principles that can be used to determine the epistemological values of propositions about natural objects, events and processes. Call this "the ontological claim". The ontological claim affirms the existence of some epistemological principles for ascertaining propositional knowledge about the world around us. One undisputed feature of the world is that it is full of facts about which there can be agreements and disagreements. When an epistemic agent makes an assertion that correctly reflects a situation in the world, we readily refer to the assertion as true, and if otherwise, as false. This indicates that truth and falsity, being prominent markers of knowledge

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or lack thereof, are impossible to determine except in relation to facts. Given this important role of facts in the formation of beliefs about the universe, and barring the unsustainable arguments for global scepticism, the possibility of knowledge claims about the external world is incontrovertible.

The second assumption holds that the normative principles identified in the ontological claim are applicable to the evaluation of the epistemological values of human conducts. Hence, moral knowledge is possible. Call this the "moral knowledge claim". The moral knowledge claim attempts to extend the principles used in determining the epistemological values of propositions about the external world to the realm of human conducts. This may be due to the contentious assumption that human conducts are part of the furniture of the external world. However, for the moral knowledge claim to be able to consistently maintain this extension, it must acquiesce to the existence of moral facts, that is, the sort of entities that moral adjectives such as right, wrong, good, bad, etc. qualify. In like manner with propositions about the external world, moral facts must play some role in determining truth

and falsity of propositions about human conduct and on the basis of which knowledge of human conducts is founded.

The ontological claim has received wider acceptance from scholars. There is a sense in attributing the whole edifice of epistemology to demonstrating this point beyond the reach of scepticism (Hamlyn, 1970). This is to be expected. With an appropriate method of verification, propositions about natural facts can be evaluated on the scale of truth and falsity. Matters are not as clear in the case of moral knowledge claim, however. If facts make propositions either true or false, then it is a genuine concern to ask if there are moral facts which may help determine the truth-value of moral propositions. Are there moral facts? If yes, what is their nature, and how do they help us determine the truth value of moral propositions, and help secure moral knowledge?

Philosophers have not agreed on how to answer these questions. The controversy surrounding the questions is whether a value judgement can be validly inferred from facts (Òkè and Esikot, 1999). Basically, there are two theoretical standpoints to this debate, namely, moral realism and anti-moral realism (Smith, 2013; Dancy, 2016). Moral realism is the view that there are facts of the matter about which actions are right and which wrong, and about which things are good and which bad (Dancy, 2016). The sense of existence of moral facts needs some clarifications. According to the moral realist, moral facts are not natural facts; like the scientific facts, they are abstract facts in the same category with mathematical facts. Despite this, however, they are easily recognised in the evaluation of moral acts and are potent in the formation of beliefs about moral agents. Moral anti-realism, on the other hand, denies that there are moral facts. For the anti-realists, what makes moral acts right and wrong are not matters derivable from facts because moral issues are not cognitive issues (Ayer, 1952). Hence, as a non-cognitivist moral position, antirealism denies the existence of moral facts, and instead opines that moral judgments are merely expressions of likes and dislikes towards things that people do or fail to do (see Ayer, 1952; Stevenson, 1945).

The article is not straightforwardly an exercise in meta-ethics. However, we must note that

traditionally speaking, moral epistemology is an ethical thesis on the thematic categorisation of acts into right or wrong, good or bad, etc. However, Hallen's moral epistemology thesis is more of an epistemological thesis than a meta-ethical concern. In contradistinction to the traditional moral epistemology where epistemological principles are used to determine the moral value of acts, Hallen's moral epistemology thesis is one in which ethical considerations motivate epistemic agent to either accept or reject epistemic claims. In the ensuing section, we discuss how Hallen discovered this sense of moral epistemology, using Yoruba epistemological concepts of ìmọ̀ (knowledge) and ìgbàgbọ́ (belief) as conceptual devices.

Hallen's Specific Encounter with Moral Epistemology Thesis

Hallen, like Descartes, was searching for a secure footing for the Yoruba epistemologies of knowledge and belief. In *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft* (thenceforth, KBW), Hallen and Sodipo (1997) undertook a conceptual journey into the meaning of Yoruba epistemological concepts of ìmọ̀ and ìgbàgbọ́. They attempted an analysis of the concepts of knowledge and belief from the ordinary language methodological perspective of the Yoruba speaking world. They hoped, thereby, to understand these concepts vis-a-viz the equivalent concepts of "knowledge" and "belief" in the anglophone ordinary language context.

Through the assistance of various onísẹ̀gùn, who for the purpose of the research, played the role of local informants and indigenous language experts of Yoruba language, Hallen and Sodipo came to the following observations. One, that the concept of knowledge, which the Yoruba call 'ìmọ̀', is used to denote a piece of information that is acquired first-hand through empirical, and most especially, visual means. They emphasise the role of sighting as key to claims to knowledge. The analysis of ìmọ̀ reveals that it implies truth (òótọ́) and inner witness (ẹrí-ọkàn). Hallen and Sodipo (1997) accept the impossibility of having ìmọ̀ without the duo of òótọ́ and ẹrí-ọkàn. Òótọ́ (truth) is obtained through the phenomenon of first-hand visual perception (ìrí) and the witness of the heart or mind (ẹrí-ọkàn). Hence, ìmọ̀ is a piece of information obtained first-hand through visual apprehension, accompanied by mental awareness that one has seen or is seeing.

Two, that the concept of belief, which the Yoruba call 'ìgbàgbọ́', is used to denote a piece of information acquired second-hand, i.e., through testimonies or reports from others who presumably experienced the event constituting the information first-hand. According to Hallen and Sodipo, ìgbàgbọ́, a noun, is derived from the verb gbàgbọ́ (to believe). Etymologically, gbàgbọ́ is a conceptual amalgam of gbà (to accept) and gbọ́ (to hear), which together mean "agreeing to accept what one hears from someone else" (Hallen and Sodipo, 1997:64; see also Hallen, 2000; 2004). Because the truth-value of second-hand information is subject to further investigations, ìgbàgbọ́ does not have the condition of òótọ́ (truth) as a necessity. Whereas ìmọ̀ has the mark of òótọ́, the identity marker of ìgbàgbọ́ is what Hallen and Sodipo (1997) call ó ṣe é ṣe (lit.: it is possible). For Balogun (2021: 293), the epistemological value of "Ó ṣe é ṣe speaks of the possibility that what one accepts is likely to turn out true, but unless this is confirmed on the first-hand basis, it is never affirmed." Given its source from other epistemic agents, ìgbàgbọ́ qualifies for what is called "propositional knowledge" or "knowledge-that". This may include knowledge of "the things one is taught in the course of a formal education, what one learns from books, from other people, and, of particular interest in the special case of the Yoruba, from oral traditions" (Hallen, 2000: 17).

The third observation directly flows from the nature of ìgbàgbọ́ already established above. This is that as a non-literate linguistic culture, the Yoruba operate a predominantly oral epistemological doctrine that relies so much on the testimonies of others. For Hallen, "The *moral* underpinnings to this discussion of Yoruba epistemology become evident once one recognises that the primary source of propositional or 'second-hand' information in a culture that is significantly oral is other persons" (Hallen, 2003: 86). For an average epistemic agent, there are limits to what information one can obtain first-hand in a lifetime (see Hallen, 1998). Human beings depend largely on information obtained second-hand. This puts us in a precarious and vulnerable position because much information at our disposal may turn out to be false. Now, to forestall being led into making errors because of false information, there is the need to be sure that the channels of information at one's disposal are solid enough to serve as reliable sources of knowledge.

Hence, having knowledge of other persons' moral character (ìwà) – their honesty, their reliability as a source of information, etc., becomes a fundamental criterion for evaluating the reliability of second-hand information (Hallen, 2000, 2003, 2004). Hallen's moral epistemology is basically a search for epistemic certainty, or systematic avoidance of error in ascribing òótọ (truth) to false pieces of second-hand information. This is a point where ethics becomes instrumental to epistemological pursuits. In this case, ethics serves as a "quality-assurance officer" for ascertaining the reliability or trustworthiness of information not obtained first-hand. In contrast to the traditional moral epistemology wherein epistemology is employed to resolve issues in ethics, Hallen's moral epistemology is an attempt to use ethics to resolve issues in epistemology.

Yoruba Moral Epistemology Explained

Working within the framework of ìmọ and ìgbàgbọ as first-hand and second-hand information respectively, Hallen reaches some conclusions about the Yoruba moral epistemology. First, that knowledge (ìmọ) of another person's character (ìwà) is obtained from observing (first-hand) their outward behaviours (ìṣesí) (Hallen, 2003: 86). On its own part, ìṣesí is a broad and complex phenomenon, comprising both bodily and verbal (ìsọrọsí) dispositions overtly displayed to the recognition of the community. The verbal and non-verbal behaviours play an important role of serving as hard evidence or, perhaps, a motivation for risking to accept that a person's testimony is true, and therefore, knowledge. Hallen gives the impression that this is to be expected given the Yoruba culture's strong inclinations for hard evidence. "For the point is that a person's verbal and non-verbal behaviour are construed as first-hand evidence (ìmọ) of their moral character (ìwà)" (Hallen, 2003: 86).

Further, the knowledge of a person's moral character involves a kind of inference drawn from observing multiple individual actions to a generalisation about his/her character. The role of observation in the Yoruba knowledge acquisition process has been well argued in Hallen and Sodipo's analysis of ìmọ and ìgbàgbọ. What needs to be said more is that, in the case of knowledge of human character, the level of observations required is accumulative in nature. By this, we mean that knowledge of human conducts is acquired through a long process of observing moments and instances of a person's social interactions with the community. This, in turn, is ultimately aimed at a sort of inductive generalisation about the character of the human agent involved. For example, when someone's previous claims have consistently been verified to be true (òótọ), there could be readiness on the part of the observer to take the person information as epistemically reliable, and therefore forming the basis for the latter's knowledge (ìmọ) of the person's character, etc.

There is a need to be more emphatic on the knowledge of human characters being a product of inference from previous actions and inactions. Although there is a sense in which human characters are empirically verifiable, it by no means follows that they are of the same physical valuation with other physical components of the world. That is, this heavily behaviourist system of knowledge acquisition process does not commit us to pitch human conducts in the same tent with ordinary physical object of everyday experience. The posit of Hallen's moral epistemology is that, in the case of human character, one should have kept a track record of truth of the informant's narratives for a reasonable length of time before one can accept the authenticity of the report as knowledge.

Hallen's observation finds support in some Yoruba oral literature. There are Yoruba sayings which clearly show the place of observation to reliability of first-hand experience. For instance, ìròyìn ò tó àfojúbà (to witness an event oneself is more believable than when it is reported); ojú ol'ójú kò jọ ojú ẹni (one's direct experience is more reliable than another's); among others. These proverbial sayings demonstrate, in clear terms, that there are no perfect substitutes for first-hand experience. These sayings suggest, among other things, that the Yoruba language users are primarily concerned with what, in contemporary philosophy of mind, is called qualitative experience (Nagel, 1974). Yoruba place such a high premium on first-hand experience. This may not be due to a lack of general trust towards other persons, but to enable them to clear all doubts occasioned by the imperfection of the human memories, inaccurate linguistic presentation in transmitting first-hand experience and deliberate distortion of the experience of

others. Concerned about the last in the series, for example, the Yoruba would say *ká s'ọrọ ká ba bẹẹ ni iyì ọmọ ènìyàn* (It is honourable for a person to speak truthfully). All this aligns perfectly well with Hallen's outline of the Yoruba moral epistemology.

Many issues arise from the foregoing. One, to be able to generalise about a person's moral character, which then strengthens his or her epistemic reliability as a secure source of knowledge, Hallen thesis requires us to look at his or her antecedents. Does the person have a reputation for telling the truth? Is he or she a habitual liar? For Hallen, antecedents are all there are to answering this sort of question. By this, however, Hallen is committed to the inductive doctrine that the past observations of the person's moral character, especially as it relates to the epistemological issues of truth and falsity of claims, will provide a guide to predicting their present or future claims to be true or false. This is a problematic position considering Hume's continuous spell on the reliability of induction as a guide to future epistemic claims. Hume's famous assault on the principle of the uniformity of nature appears to us more potent in the realm of human character than in the realm of inanimate objects (Hume, 1896).

Hallen is probably aware of this implication of making inductive inferences on the testimonies of others; hence, he insists on accepting others' testimonies only tentatively. This tentative acceptance of their information becomes knowledge only when we have had first-hand experience of their claims. Now, this leads to our second observation, namely, that not all claims made by others can ever be experienced first-hand by a third party. No doubt, some testimonies may be verified first-hand in the way that Hallen envisions. However, quite a few of the information that forms the core of our lives as epistemic agents is not accessible in this way. Some pieces of information, by their very nature, are not reproducible. For instance, the knowledge of historical events such as the Nigerian civil war can only be known through the testimonies of those who had first-hand experience of those events. Hence, when a historian interested in investigating this event is out on a fact-checking exercise, he or she does not set out on the assumption that history repeats itself, in which case, the event would have played out to him or her in a first-hand

manner. What is considered the best thing to do in this case is to rely on the information received in discussions and interviews from veterans of the war, journalists, or consult war memoirs, archives and museums. Comparing and contrasting information derived from these various epistemic sources may help the investigator to arrive at a rough estimate of what happened in the war.

Yoruba Morality Does Not Work Like That

In this section, we adduce some objections to Hallen's thesis of the Yoruba moral epistemology on three mutually related grounds, as follow. One, we argue that the knowledge-belief distinction on which foundation the thesis is built, is conceptually faulty from the Yoruba linguistic point of view. Two, we raise some critical concerns about the Yoruba metaphysical notion of personhood that is difficult to marry with Hallen's thesis of moral epistemology. Three, we argue that Hallen's behaviourist approach to Yoruba moral epistemology encounters the epistemological problem of other minds. The problem, which arises in the current context from the duality of behaviour and intention, reinforces our criticism of Hallen's behaviourist approach to Yoruba moral epistemology.

In our first case against Hallen, we note the impression that Yoruba moral epistemology is built on the foundation of the conceptual distinction between *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ*. The Yoruba moral epistemology thesis sits on a foundation provided by this distinction, which Hallen and Sodipo intended to use in comparison with knowledge and belief in the English-standard conceptual framework. However, the distinction has attracted so many criticisms that virtually every scholar that has considered the matter seems to have criticised it. The popular opinion in the literature is that the *KBW*'s analysis of knowledge and belief fails to correctly represent the ontological meaning among Yoruba speakers (Balogun, 2021, 2023; Bello, 1998; Kalumba, 2008; Oke, 1995, 2009). There are at least three categories of issues raised against *KBW*'s analysis. One, criticisms have been expressed about the identification of *ìmọ* with visual experience. Balogun (2021) thinks that this error results from the ambiguity of the Yoruba verb *rí* (to see) which is not necessarily restricted to only cases involving the instrumentality of sight. A similar case has been raised concerning *òótọ*. Oke (1995), for instance, has

noted that the *KBW*'s analysis of *òótọ* is committed to empiricism, and thus impoverishes its meaning within Yoruba linguistic convention.

Another category of objections against *KBW*'s analytic experiment on *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ* revolves around the alleged distinction between the two concepts. Hallen and Sodipo (1997) opined that the distinction lies in one involving first-hand information and the other involving second-hand information. This distinction has been found not to exist in the way these terms are used by competent Yoruba speakers. Oke argues that "[i]n ordinary Yoruba language usage, the problematic epistemological "know-believe" distinction probably does not exist as such (2005: 145). Balogun indicates that in some instances, readiness to believe among competent Yoruba speakers is motivated by seeing. Such instances of seeing satisfy the "on spot sighting" condition, but for Hallen and Sodipo, it is a case of *ìgbàgbọ*, not *ìmọ* (Balogun, 2021: 295).

In the third category of problems identified against Hallen and Sodipo's analysis of *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ*, scholars have rightly questioned the methodology of this discourse, especially the legitimacy and expertise of the *oníṣègùn* as reliable sources of correct interpretations of the Yoruba concepts of *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ*. Bello (1988) insists that the choice of *oníṣègùn* is not particularly effective or interesting given that, as traditional medical practitioners, they do not possess more special knowledge of the Yoruba language than an average speaker of it. As Balogun (2021: 298) notes "he does not have better mastery of the language by virtue of which he is expert enough to be a primary source of information on the right use of *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ*." For Oke (2009: 145), "[a]part from their alleged professional knowledge in their fields, the *oníṣègùn* do not possess any special training, knowledge or wisdom as a class to qualify them for the privileged role of philosophical discussants and informants of the race on correct ordinary language usage such as Hallen has given to them." This appeal to, or reliance on, inexpert authorities on the right meaning of *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ* has continued to raise doubt about Hallen's disquisition into the Yoruba epistemological concepts in question.

Our second problem with Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology arises from the concept of personhood

which Hallen presumably aims to achieve as a consequence of the epistemological incursion into Yoruba ethics. One of the central theoretical consequences of Hallen's moral epistemology borders on the relation between personhood and epistemic reliability, or to put it in disciplinary terms, between ethics and epistemology. Hallen agrees to the popular normative conception of personhood in which one earns personhood. Scholars like (Menkiti, 1984, 2004; Gbadegesin, 1991, 2003; Gyekye, 1992, 1997; Masolo, 2010; Tshivhase, 2011; Molefe, 2019, 2020) agree on the normative conception of African notion of personhood, although they differ, largely, on the details. They all agree to the centrality of moral character as a proper marker of African concept of personhood. Hallen accepts this normative concept by emphasising the place of *ìwà* (moral character) (see Hallen, 2000: 41).

Now, if good character makes one, normatively, a person, bad character makes one a non-person (see Gbadegesin, 1991, 2003). It could, then, be argued that part of Hallen's intention for moral epistemology thesis is to fashion out a principle for delineating persons from non-persons within the Yoruba ethico-epistemological context. This way, to be a person is to be a reliable and trustworthy epistemic agent while to be a non-person is not. Our stance against this putative principle is that it does not align well with a more fundamental conception of personhood among the Yoruba. There is a conception of personhood in Yoruba system of thought that has not received sufficient attention in the literature. This, to us, is most unfortunate because of its epistemological implication on the sort of things that Hallen aims to achieve through his Yoruba moral epistemology thesis; more so because, *also in our opinion*, it is more fundamental than the normative conception now popular in the literature to which Hallen's *KBW* analysis subscribes.

The Yoruba have a conception of personhood (*ènìyàn*) that is fundamentally negative. This manner of thinking about personhood is suggested to us through some common linguistic utterances among native speakers of the Yoruba language. To the Yoruba, personhood is an intrinsic feature of humans. This originates from their belief that personhood is more of an inner configurative mechanism in human being that *sometimes* plays out on the surface as characters. They will say *inú*

l' ènìyàn wà (personhood is an internal trait). Also, the sort of internalism adduced to the notion of personhood by the Yoruba is one that conjures the idea of depth. Hence, the Yoruba saying *inú ènìyàn jìn* (human minds are deep). Given such depth, being persons comes with a certain sort of uncertainty that plays out remarkably in the possibility of sometimes deviating from the moral track (such as truth telling) that hitherto forms part of one's identity as a moral being.

To illustrate this possible moral inconsistency, consider a case where someone betrays the trust reposed in him or her, leading to the feeling of disappointment on the part of the one betrayed. A plea to forgive may come as a way of reminding the betrayed party that the former is only a human, and at an appropriate opportunity, anyone could behave in a similar manner! In this case, the Yoruba would say *ènìyàn ni ènìyàn yíò ma jé* (persons will always be persons). While it does not exonerate the betrayer from the guilt and blameworthiness associated with the act, this saying strikes us not as an acknowledgement of the inherently reliable status of personhood. On the contrary, it is a way of reminding the betrayed that his or her disappointment in the betrayer is a product of reposing too much confidence in a mere mortal. Such realisation may fuel the attitude of doubt in matters not witnessed first-hand. Of course, this resonates the Yoruba penchant for hard evidence, which Hallen recognises. However, it sharply deviates from the normative tradition of personhood accepted by Hallen in that it leads more readily to scepticism rather than epistemic reliabilism.

The last objection we put up against Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology is inspired by what, in the philosophy of mind, is called the problem of other minds. Basically, there are two problems of other minds, namely, the epistemological and conceptual problem of other minds (Balogun, 2022). Whereas the first asks an epistemological question of how it is possible to know what others have in minds (i.e., How do we know the states of their minds; their beliefs, intentions, motives, desires, etc.?), given that there are no objective ways of ascertaining such, the second asks a conceptual question of how we come to have the meaning of mental concepts used by others, given that we lack direct access to their mental states to which the mental concepts presumably refer. For our

criticism against Hallen's moral epistemology, we shall be restricted to the epistemological version of the problem of other minds.

As revealed in a previous section, Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology is heavily behaviourist. As he argues, morality is all about what people say and do. This raises the question of how we come to know whether verbal and non-verbal behaviours are truly expressive of people's intention for acting in particular ways. We may call this the problem of character indeterminacy. The problem of character indeterminacy arises when the obtainable number of behavioural outputs of an organism is insufficient to determine the character of that organism in a precise manner. This plays out most significantly in the character of human beings. The nature of human beings represented in the linguistic convention of the Yoruba (see Balogun, 2016) readily leads to the falsity of the logical behaviourist thesis.

Hallen's understanding of the Yoruba's demand for hard evidence can be categorised under logical behaviourist approach to the problem of other minds. The troubling question, however, is whether reliance on a person's verbal and bodily movements enough "hard evidence" to guarantee the knowledge of their epistemic reliability or otherwise. In response to this question, Balogun's (2016) engagement with the logical behaviourist approach to the problem of other mind from the Yoruba linguistic perspective suggests the contrary. As he reveals, "[T]he Yoruba linguistic framework offers some interesting grounds against the logical behaviourist thesis that "what one directly observes is all there is" (Balogun, 2016: 161). Thus, our position is that Hallen's over-reliance on behavioural outputs as methodological guides to epistemic reliability, cannot be sustained in its current form without incurring the logical behaviourist infelicities.

Conclusion

The central claim of this article is that Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology thesis is false. The article provided three grounds on which Hallen's Yoruba moral epistemology thesis stands rejected. The first set of grounds was targeted at the very foundation of the thesis, namely, the distinction between *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ*. Second, the article faulted the conception of person aimed at in the thesis. It was argued that accepting the normative

thesis, for Hallen, is to view an epistemic person as one who is epistemically reliable as a source of second-hand information. However, it was revealed that there exists a more fundamental conception of personhood most relevant to epistemological discourse among the Yoruba. This essentially negative conception of personhood does not guarantee epistemic reliability from persons, but rather suggests the Yoruba scepticism about second-hand information. In the third objection, it was argued that character determination based on verbal and bodily behaviours faces a special problem from the problem of other minds.

A substantial bulk of issues with Hallen's thesis of moral epistemology arise from the methodological standpoint of his analysis. Hallen adopts ordinary language method of analysis to arrive at his conclusions both on his distinction between *ìmọ̀* and *ìgbàgbọ́*, and the resultant analysis of Yoruba moral epistemology. (Balogun, 2021, 2023) has shown that this method of analysis does not adequately capture issues as they occur to African intellects. While acknowledging the originality, depth and rigour exhibited in Hallen's analysis, we argue that Hallen's minimal consultation with Yoruba ethnographic materials in his studies of the Yoruba epistemology contributes significantly to some of the errors, in his work, identified in this article.

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