Soul Beyond Death: Kalabari Ijaw Conceptions in Dialogue with Platonic Philosophy

An Ethno-Philosophical Study of the Soul and Its Immortality

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Abstract

This paper undertakes an ethno-philosophical analysis of the soul (‘teme’) as conceived within the Kalabari Ijaw worldview of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. Despite the richness of Kalabari metaphysical thought, it remains largely absent from mainstream comparative philosophy. This study addresses that gap by positioning the Kalabari conception of the soul alongside the Western philosophical tradition, with particular attention to Plato's account in the Phaedo. Within the Kalabari framework, the body (‘oju’) functions as the vessel of the soul, while the soul itself transcends physical death and begins a new phase of existence. Death is therefore not an end but a transitional point within a periodic system of being, orientated towards ancestral return and cyclical continuity. Whereas Plato's theory was developed through abstract reasoning and individual intuition, the Kalabari Ijaw understanding emerges from collective wisdom, ritual practice, and communal acceptance. This contrast reveals differing epistemic foundations: one rooted in rational deduction, the other in shared cultural experience. The paper argues that the Kalabari conception offers a philosophically coherent and distinctive contribution to metaphysical discourse — one that affirms the immortality of the soul while grounding human existence in embodied, divinely ordained destiny. By examining these perspectives side by side, the study emphasises the philosophical significance of indigenous African thought and its rightful place in broader debates about the nature of the soul and the meaning of human mortality.

Keywords: African Philosophy, Ethno-Philosophy, Immortality, Kalabari Ijaw, Metaphysics, Soul, Teme.

INTRODUCTION

The debate concerning the human soul has persisted from antiquity to the present, reflecting its perennial philosophical significance. Despite widespread belief in the soul's existence, diverse religious and philosophical traditions have developed competing theories regarding its nature, its relationship to the body, and its fate after death. Philosophically, the soul is typically understood as the immaterial aspect or essence of a human being, conferring individuality and humanity, and is often considered synonymous with the mind or self. This fundamental question has animated some of the most consequential arguments in the history of thought, and it shows no sign of resolution. It remains as urgently contested today as it was in the dialogues of Plato or the disputations of the medieval scholastics.

Ancient Greek thought offered varied positions. Pythagoras held that the soul is of divine origin and exists both before and after death. Socrates and Plato affirmed the soul's immortality, while Aristotle considered only the nous, or intellect, to possess that quality. René Descartes conceived of man as a union of body and soul — two distinct substances acting upon each other — while Spinoza regarded body and soul as two aspects of a single reality. From the Middle Ages onward, the nature of the soul and its relationship to the body continued to be disputed throughout Western philosophy. Theologically, the soul is widely regarded as the spiritual part of an individual that partakes of divinity and is often held to survive the death of the body. What is frequently overlooked in these surveys, however, is that richly developed metaphysical accounts of the soul exist well beyond the boundaries of the Western canon, and that these non-Western accounts offer genuinely novel philosophical resources.

This paper argues that the Kalabari Ijaw conception of the soul, centred on the *'teme'* — the immaterial spiritual force that pre-exists birth, declares its own life-course before the Supreme Being, and persists as an ancestral spirit after death — constitutes a philosophically coherent and distinctive metaphysical position that both resonates with and meaningfully diverges from Platonic accounts of the soul. Far from being a pre-philosophical curiosity, the Kalabari framework engages the same fundamental questions — the nature of the soul, the grounds of immortality, the relationship between matter and spirit, and the structure of human destiny — and offers original answers that enrich the broader metaphysical conversation.

The paper is structured as follows. It begins with a survey of Western philosophical accounts of the soul, ranging from Aristotle and Epicurus to Plato and Augustine, before examining the case for engaging traditional African thought on its own terms. It then provides an ethnographic and metaphysical account of Kalabari Ijaw cosmology and soul conception, followed by a philosophical analysis of the 'teme'-'oju' framework in dialogue with classical dualisms. The paper concludes with a comparative critique of the Kalabari and Platonic positions, identifying both convergences and philosophically significant divergences, before drawing broader conclusions about the contribution of indigenous African thought to metaphysical discourse.

The fundamental questions at stake are: Do souls exist? What happens to the soul after death? Dualists affirm that the soul survives the death of the body; materialists hold that mental activity is nothing but cerebral activity, and that death brings the total end of a person's existence. The Kalabari Ijaw tradition offers a third framework — one grounded not in abstract rational proof, but in communal wisdom, ritual practice, and a theologically ordered cosmology — which this paper seeks to take seriously as a philosophical contribution. Engaging this tradition not only enriches comparative metaphysics but also challenges the assumption that philosophical rigour is the exclusive property of literate, text-based traditions.

PHILOSOPHICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF THE SOUL

The question of the soul's immortality has long divided philosophers. Aristotle rejected immortality, viewing the soul as the "form" of the body, inseparable from its material substrate; once the body perishes, the soul ceases to exist (Aristotle, 2001). Epicurus, advancing a materialist atomism, argued that both body and soul are composed of atoms which disperse at death, leaving no remainder (Epicurus, 1994). For these thinkers, immortality is a metaphysical impossibility, and human existence is bounded by mortality. In contrast, many traditions affirm the soul's endurance beyond death. Robin W.G. Horton, drawing on the Kalabari Ijaw worldview, describes human beings as composed of *'oju'* (body) and *'teme'* (soul), with the soul continuing existence after death as an ancestral spirit (Horton, 1961). This conception resonates with Platonic and Cartesian dualism, where the immaterial soul is distinct from the perishable body.

Pythagoras advanced the doctrine of transmigration, teaching that the soul is immortal and repeatedly reborn into different bodies until purified and united with the universal soul. This belief parallels African traditional religions, which hold that virtuous souls join the ancestors while corrupt souls may reincarnate as a consequence of moral failure, thereby linking morality with metaphysical destiny (Zhmud, 2012). Plato, especially in the *Phaedo*, argued that the soul belongs to the eternal and unchanging realm, unlike the body, which is subject to decay. He saw philosophy as preparation for death — a discipline that trains the soul to detach from bodily distractions and anticipate its liberation into the world of Forms (Plato, 1975). St. Augustine, synthesising Platonic philosophy with Christian theology, affirmed that the soul is rational, immortal, and derives its being from God, the source of all life. He argued that the soul's capacity to apprehend eternal truths demonstrates its endurance beyond death (Augustine, 1998).

Taken together, these perspectives reveal a spectrum of metaphysical commitments. Aristotle and Epicurus deny immortality by grounding the soul in materiality, while Pythagoras, Plato, Augustine, and the Kalabari tradition affirm its immaterial and enduring nature, though with different theological and philosophical emphases. The Kalabari conception situates immortality within a communal and ancestral framework; Plato locates it in the metaphysical realm of Forms; Pythagoras in cycles of purification; and Augustine in divine creation and eternal destiny. The persistence of this debate underscores its existential weight: it concerns whether human consciousness is bounded by mortality or participates in a reality beyond material decay.

It is worth noting that the African philosophical tradition has itself developed sophisticated internal debates about the nature of the soul and personhood that go beyond what ethnographic accounts alone can capture. Kwame Gyekye, the Ghanaian philosopher, offers a systematic analysis of the Akan concept of the person, distinguishing between the 'okra' (soul) and the 'sunsum' (spirit or personality) in a way that parallels, yet complicates, Western dualist categories (Gyekye, 1995). Gyekye argues that the Akan understanding of the soul is irreducibly social: personhood is not achieved at birth but through moral and communal participation across a lifetime, and the soul's postmortem status reflects the quality of that participation. While Gyekye writes from an Akan context, his framework resonates meaningfully with the Kalabari Ijaw case, where the ‘teme’ is similarly embedded in a web of

social obligations and communal duties. Kwasi Wiredu, another major figure in contemporary African philosophy, has similarly argued that African conceptions of the person resist the radical Cartesian split between mind and body, favouring instead a more integrated understanding of the human being in which spiritual and material dimensions are mutually constitutive (Wiredu, 1980). These contributions from within African philosophy demonstrate that the Kalabari Ijaw tradition being examined here is not an isolated curiosity but is part of a broader and philosophically rich African discourse on the soul, personhood, and immortality.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CASE FOR ENGAGING TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

A central methodological commitment of this paper is the treatment of Kalabari Ijaw thought as a legitimate philosophical system, not merely as ethnographic data. This position requires justification, particularly given the long history of Western dismissal of African intellectual traditions. For many scholars shaped by the European Enlightenment, the continued relevance of traditional belief systems appeared anachronistic — a relic of pre-modern thought incompatible with rational inquiry. Hume and Hegel, for instance, denied African peoples any substantive capacity for philosophical reasoning, thereby foreclosing in advance the possibility that indigenous African cosmologies could constitute genuine knowledge systems.

Yet this dismissal has been robustly challenged. Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, writing in the nineteenth century, argued that so-called ‘primitive’ thought reflects the same cognitive processes operative in ‘civilised’ societies, and that examining indigenous worldviews illuminates universals in human reasoning. More significantly for the present study, Robin W.G. Horton — English social anthropologist and philosopher — argued that the superimposition of a Western interpretive framework onto non-Western thought is philosophically unwarranted. Horton contended that animist and traditional belief systems should be taken on their own terms, as systems of explanation and prediction operating with internal coherence and rigour, not as symbolic representations of social structure or political order (Horton, 1961).

This position does not require abandoning critical evaluation. It does require recognising that the epistemic foundations of Kalabari metaphysics — grounded in collective wisdom,

ancestral authority, ritual practice, and communal validation — constitute an alternative but legitimate mode of philosophical knowledge-production. The fact that Kalabari claims about the soul are not derived from individual abstract reasoning in the Platonic mould does not render them philosophically inferior; it renders them philosophically different, and that difference is precisely what makes the comparison instructive. As Omoregbe (2011) observes, the task of contemporary African philosophy is not to demonstrate that African thought meets the standards of Western rationalism, but to articulate the internal logic and coherence of African conceptual systems on their own terms, before engaging them in cross-cultural dialogue. This paper adopts that approach.

Furthermore, the communal and oral character of Kalabari philosophical knowledge should not be mistaken for an absence of systematic thought. Oral traditions are not simply unreflective custom; they are the medium through which generations of accumulated wisdom, tested against lived experience and communal deliberation, are preserved and transmitted. The philosophical claims embedded in Kalabari ritual practice and cosmological narrative have been refined over centuries through precisely the kind of sustained reflective engagement that philosophy, in its broadest sense, requires. To dismiss them because they were not committed to writing in the form of a Greek dialogue or a Latin treatise is to confuse the vehicle of philosophical inquiry with its substance. What matters philosophically is not the format in which ideas are expressed but the depth, coherence, and explanatory power of those ideas. By that standard, the Kalabari account of the soul stands on equal footing with the Western positions surveyed in this paper, and it is to that account we now turn.

THE KALABARI IJAW METAPHYSICS AND EPISTEMIC FOUNDATION

The Kalabari Kingdom, also known as Elem Kalabari, is the independent traditional state of the Kalabari people, a sub-group of the Ijaw nation, Eastern Ijo, situated in the Niger Delta of southern Nigeria. It is recognised as a traditional state in what is now Rivers State. According to Alagoa (1966), King Amachree I, the first king of the modern Kalabari kingdom, ruled from 1669 to 1757 and came from Emakalakala in Ogbia, establishing the Amachree dynasty that continues to the present day. Kalabari cosmology is broadly theistic: the world was created and is sustained by a supreme being known as Tamuno and as *'So'* (Sky). When referring to the creation of things from formless material, Kalabari use the name Tamuno,

which denotes a female creative principle. When referring to the subsequent fortunes of entities, they use *'So'*, a neuter principle governing the course of events. The Supreme Being is conceived both as a single unitary entity and as having multiple aspects of refraction. Thus, people speak of Tamuno as the unitary creator and sustainer of the world, of *'So'* as the unitary force behind events, and also of each town, each house, and each individual as having a distinct guiding *'So'* — the amateme *'So'* (the *'So'* of the town), the wariteme *'So'* (the *'So'* of the house), and the tombo *'So'*, a person's individual destiny comparable to the Igbo 'Chi' (Horton, 1984).

According to the Kalabari, the Supreme Being created and sustains not only the visible, tangible world, but also a host of lesser spirits. These lesser beings fall into three main categories: the am'oru (ancestral founders of lineages and houses), the duein (founding ancestors of specific lineage groups), and the Owuamepu (spirits of the waters). According to Horton:

> The Am'oru are thought to have once lived among men in Elem-Kalabari (old Kalabari) and made various contributions to the foundation of Kalabari culture and socio-political life. Having made their contributions, they disappeared into the earth or the sky and have continued to watch over Kalabari from the spiritual plane ever since. They collectively sustain the bond and strength of the Kalabari state and guarantee the continued flourishing of its characteristic skills, language and culture. At their head stands Owamekaso, the national goddess. (Horton, 1984)

As the am'oru sustain the state as a whole, the duein sustain the bond and strength of the various lineages and houses constituted by their descendants, real and adoptive. Within these units, they reward peaceful harmony with prosperity and punish disruptive conduct by threatening the unity of each house. The Owuamepu, by contrast, are associated not with human communities but with particular creeks in the surrounding environment, whose ecological conditions they regulate. Unlike am'oru and duein, they have no concern with the observance of the community's moral code. The distinction may be summarised as follows: am'oru and duein are forces of society, while owuamapu are forces of nature (Horton, 1961). This tripartite structure reveals a sophisticated cosmological architecture in which the

spiritual and material realms are not separate but intimately interconnected, each dimension of reality sustained by spiritual forces operating at different levels of generality.

What this architecture makes clear is that Kalabari metaphysics is not anthropocentric in the narrow sense. The human person does not occupy the centre of a cosmos arranged for their benefit; rather, they exist within a densely layered web of spiritual forces, communal obligations, and natural powers that exceeds individual comprehension and control. The soul, the 'teme', navigates this web from its earliest pre-natal moment before Tamuno to its eventual return to the ancestral realm. Understanding this broader cosmological context is essential for appreciating the specific claims the Kalabari make about the soul, for those claims are not isolated metaphysical propositions but nodes in a comprehensive account of reality, community, and the place of the individual within both.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF KALABARI IJAW SOUL CONCEPTION

Having addressed the traditional view of society and its relationship to nature, it is necessary to consider the traditional perspective on the individual and their place in the world. Kalabari hold that every individual consists of a spiritual force, *'teme'* (soul), which guides a body, *'oju'*. Before the birth of a person, their *'teme'* goes before Tamuno, the Supreme Being, to declare what is to be its life-course on earth. Tamuno then sends the *'teme'* to join its body. The words spoken by the *'teme'* become personified as the individual's *'So'* and are thought to be the ultimate determinant of their earthly fortunes. Depending on the nature of the words spoken before Tamuno, there can be a good *'So'*, which leads to a successful life, or a bad *'So'*, which leads to failure and misfortune (Horton, 1984).

Horton further asserts that where a long sequence of misfortune leads eventually to the diagnosis of a bad *'So'*, a ritual known as 'bibi bari' (literally: calling back the words) can be performed. This ritual involves recalling the bad words spoken by the *'teme'* before birth and substituting new and better words, thereby creating a new *'So'* and new life possibilities (Horton, 1984). This mechanism demonstrates that the Kalabari understanding of soul and destiny is not rigidly deterministic: while the *'So'* is divinely ordained, a provision exists — grounded in the very ontology of the *'teme'* — for its revision through ritual intervention.

One may ask how a *'teme'* could speak in such a way as to give itself a bad *'So'*. Diviners experienced in these matters explain that the *'teme'* may speak thus out of disillusionment

with events in a previous incarnation. A *'teme'* that, in a former life, rose to power and fame and then experienced the horror of a fall may, before its next incarnation, choose to start at the bottom and remain there. In this way, the Kalabari account integrates a form of experiential memory across incarnations into its metaphysics of the soul, paralleling — though not reducing to — the Platonic notion of the soul's accumulated knowledge from prior existences.

It is also significant that the Kalabari account assigns a moral and experiential weight to the *'teme"*s pre-natal declaration. The soul does not arrive at its life-course arbitrarily; it speaks from a position of prior experience, shaped by what it has undergone in previous incarnations. This means that Kalabari destiny-thought contains an implicit theory of moral formation: the character of a *'teme"*s declaration before Tamuno is itself the product of a history. A soul that has suffered repeatedly may seek ease; one that has been humbled may aspire to greatness. The *'So'* that results is therefore not a random assignment but a morally freighted choice, even if that choice is made in conditions of imperfect reflection. This gives the Kalabari metaphysics of the soul a richly narrative dimension: each life is a chapter in a longer story whose arc is shaped by both divine ordinance and accumulated experiential wisdom.

PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF THE KALABARI IJAW CONCEPT OF SOUL

Horton's account in *Destiny and the Unconscious in West Africa* presents the Kalabari Ijaw belief that each person consists of a spiritual force, *'teme'*, and a bodily vessel, *'oju'*. Before birth, the *'teme'* appears before Tamuno, the Supreme Being, to declare the life-course it will pursue on earth. Tamuno then unites the *'teme'* with its *'oju'*, thereby initiating embodied existence. This dualistic framework implies two distinct ontological modes: the immaterial (*'teme'*) and the material (*'oju'*), each necessary to the other.

Philosophically, this conception resonates with classical substance dualisms. The *'teme'* embodies immaterial essence, akin to Platonic Forms or Descartes' *res cogitans*, while the *'oju'* represents material essence, comparable to *res extensa*. The immortality of the soul is grounded in its immateriality: unlike the perishable body, the *'teme'* persists beyond death, inhabiting an unchanging metaphysical realm. Yet the Kalabari view adds a teleological

dimension absent from Cartesian dualism: the soul's earthly embodiment is not accidental but divinely ordained, oriented toward fulfilling a predetermined life-course declared before Tamuno.

The assertion that the *'teme'* requires the *'oju'* to engage with the material world invites comparison with Kantian epistemology. Just as Kant posits innate categories of the understanding that structure raw sensory data, the *'oju'* functions as the necessary condition for the *'teme"*s engagement with empirical reality. Without the body, the soul cannot actualise its earthly destiny, suggesting a form of embodied epistemology in which matter mediates the spirit's access to experience (Lawhead, 2002). This is a philosophically important insight: the Kalabari framework does not treat embodiment as a punishment or a prison, as some strands of Platonism tend to, but as a necessary condition for the fulfilment of a spiritually significant purpose.

The Kalabari conception complicates the typical Western hierarchy of matter and spirit. In the immaterial realm — prior to and after embodied existence — the *'teme'* is primary, immortal, and unchanging. Yet in the material world, the *'oju'* assumes epistemic and existential precedence, enabling the *'teme'* to fulfil its divinely ordained mission. This relational ontology resists the Western tendency to privilege spirit over matter or vice versa. Instead, it proposes a dynamic interdependence: spirit requires matter to enact its destiny, while matter gains metaphysical significance only through its union with spirit. The result is a worldview in which neither pole of the material-immaterial dyad is philosophically self-sufficient.

A further philosophically productive dimension of the Kalabari account concerns its treatment of moral freedom. As noted above, the bibi bari ritual allows for the revision of a soul's declared destiny. This raises a subtle metaphysical question: if the *'teme'* can choose a bad *'So'* out of prior suffering, and if ritual intervention can then alter that *'So'*, what is the ontological status of human freedom within this framework? The Kalabari answer appears to be neither strict determinism nor unconstrained libertarian freedom. Rather, it posits a form of structured agency: the soul declares its own destiny (agency), but does so within the context of prior experience and in relation to divine authority (structure), and this declaration may be revised when circumstances demand (revisability). This three-part model of

structured, revisable agency offers a distinctive contribution to the perennial philosophical debate about free will and determinism.

Thus, Kalabari thought offers a distinctive contribution to metaphysical discourse. It affirms the immortality of the soul while simultaneously grounding human existence in embodied experience. In doing so, it bridges metaphysics and epistemology, theology and anthropology, and challenges Western categories by presenting a worldview in which destiny, embodiment, and immortality are inseparably intertwined.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

To examine the Kalabari Ijaw conception of the soul rigorously, it is instructive to place it in sustained dialogue with the Western philosophical tradition, particularly Plato's account in the *Phaedo*. Both perspectives share striking similarities, yet they diverge in ways that reveal their distinctive cultural and epistemological foundations.

A central point of convergence is the doctrine of immortality. For both Plato and the Kalabari, the soul is ontologically distinct from the body and endures beyond its dissolution. In Plato's argument from opposites, life and death form a cyclical continuum: existence moves from death to life and back again, grounding the possibility of reincarnation (Plato, 1975). The Kalabari similarly affirm that the soul originates in the immaterial realm before entering earthly life, thereby participating in a cycle of continuity between worlds. Reincarnation further unites these traditions: both hold that the soul, after biological death, begins anew — whether in another body or another form of existence.

A particularly illuminating point of comparison is the role of pre-natal or post-mortem deliberation in shaping the soul's earthly life. In the Myth of Er at the close of Plato's *Republic*, souls in the afterlife are permitted to choose their next life from an array of available destinies before drinking from the River of Forgetfulness and being reborn (Hamilton and Cairns, 1966). There is a striking structural parallel here with the Kalabari account: in both cases, the soul makes a consequential choice before embodiment, and that choice shapes the life that follows. Yet the differences are equally revealing. In Plato's Myth, the choice is made by the soul alone, through its own rational deliberation, from a range of lives laid before it; the responsibility for choosing well falls entirely on the individual soul. In the Kalabari account, by contrast, the *'teme'* speaks its declaration before Tamuno, the

Supreme Being, and the resulting *'So'* is ratified by divine authority. Choice and divine sanction are not opposed but intertwined. This theological embedding of the soul's agency — the fact that freedom is exercised in the presence of, and subject to the acknowledgement of, a personal God — represents a fundamentally different metaphysics of moral agency from the one implied by Plato's Myth.

The divergences are, in other respects, even more fundamental. Perhaps the most consequential concerns the relationship between soul and destiny. In Platonic thought, the soul's immortality is grounded in its participation in the eternal realm of Forms, which it apprehends through philosophical reason. The soul aspires toward the Good through its own rational effort; its liberation from the body is achieved through the discipline of philosophy. The Kalabari conception, by contrast, is fundamentally relational and theologically ordered. The *'teme'* does not discover its destiny through reason; it declares its destiny in direct encounter with Tamuno, the Supreme Being, before birth. This ordained destiny is not the soul's own rational achievement but a divinely structured life-course. Where Plato's soul is epistemically sovereign — the philosopher who knows the Forms achieves the highest form of existence — the Kalabari *'teme'* is covenantally bound: its existence unfolds within a framework of divine appointment and communal obligation.

A further divergence concerns the role of community. Plato's account of the soul is ultimately individualistic: each soul faces its judgement alone, and the philosopher's preparation for death is a personal, rational endeavour. In the Kalabari framework, the soul is embedded within a web of communal relations that extends beyond death. The ancestral spirits (duein) remain actively concerned with the welfare of their living descendants; the soul, upon becoming an ancestor, joins a community of spirits that continues to act on behalf of the living. Immortality, in this framework, is not a solitary metaphysical achievement but a communal reality. This contrast carries significant implications for moral philosophy: in the Kalabari world, the soul's obligations do not end at death, and the living are not left alone to face the challenges of existence but are sustained by a web of ancestral care.

There is also a theological asymmetry. In Kalabari thought, the soul engages directly with Tamuno, a singular supreme divinity who ordains its earthly destiny. Plato, by contrast, invokes the authority of "the gods" in general — never a singular divine monarch — and locates the soul's ultimate good in its rational apprehension of impersonal Forms. The

Kalabari emphasis on a personal supreme divinity introduces a dimension of relational theology absent from Platonic metaphysics. One might compare this, more fruitfully, with Augustinian Christianity than with Plato: for Augustine, the soul is not a self-sufficient rational faculty but a creature in perpetual relation to its Creator, and its deepest longing is for that divine relation rather than for abstract knowledge.

Both traditions, nonetheless, agree that immortality is a ground of hope. For those who view earthly life as fragile or tragic, the endurance of the soul offers the reassurance that death is not final but a passage into another reality. Both the Platonic and the Kalabari traditions teach, in their own idioms, that the material world is not the whole of reality, and that human existence participates in a larger metaphysical order. It is in this shared affirmation — that the soul is the immaterial core of our being, bearing our deepest identity and our relation to the divine — that the two traditions speak most powerfully in concert.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the Kalabari Ijaw conception of the soul — centred on the *'teme'* and its divinely ordained life-course — constitutes a philosophically coherent and distinctive contribution to metaphysical thought. By positioning this indigenous African framework alongside the Platonic tradition, the paper has demonstrated that both share a foundational commitment to the soul's immortality and to a cyclical understanding of existence that transcends biological death. At the same time, the Kalabari framework diverges from Platonism in ways that are philosophically productive: it grounds immortality not in rational apprehension of Forms but in covenantal encounter with a personal divinity; it understands destiny as divinely ordained rather than individually achieved through reason; and it situates the soul within a communal web of ancestral relations that persists beyond death.

These differences are not merely cultural curiosities. They represent substantive philosophical alternatives. The Kalabari relational ontology, in which neither spirit nor matter is self-sufficient and each derives its significance from its union with the other, offers a corrective to both the Platonic tendency to devalue embodied existence and the modern materialist tendency to reduce the immaterial to the physical. The bibi bari ritual — which allows a *'teme'* to revise its declared destiny — further suggests a nuanced view of metaphysical freedom that is neither absolute determinism nor unconstrained autonomy. The

tripartite model of structured, revisable agency implicit in Kalabari soul-thought speaks directly to contemporary debates in philosophy of action and moral psychology that have long sought a conceptual space between determinism and libertarian free will.

The comparison with Plato's Myth of Er is particularly instructive in this regard. Both traditions locate a pivotal moment of soul-agency before embodiment, but the Kalabari framework embeds that agency within a relational encounter with divinity rather than leaving it as a solitary rational act. This embedding does not diminish the soul's freedom; it contextualises it within a framework of responsibility and relation that has significant implications for how we understand moral accountability. A soul that declares its life-course before Tamuno bears responsibility for that declaration and for the life that unfolds from it — but it does so in relationship, not in isolation. This relational structure of moral agency is, arguably, a philosophically more satisfying account than the lonely rational deliberation of Plato's disembodied soul choosing from a menu of lives.

The soul, as conceived within the Kalabari worldview, is not a philosophical fiction. It is the immaterial core of human being — the bearer of identity, the ground of consciousness, and the nexus of the individual's relation to both the divine and the community. The practice of libation, which addresses the ancestral dead as active participants in the affairs of the living, gives practical expression to this conviction: death is a transition, not an annihilation, and the *'teme'* continues its existence within the ancestral order, invested with ongoing responsibility for those left behind in the material realm. This is not merely a comforting belief; it is a metaphysical claim about the nature of persons, the structure of community, and the continuity of moral relations across the threshold of death.

In affirming the philosophical seriousness of Kalabari Ijaw metaphysics, this study contributes to the broader project of African philosophy: the recovery and critical articulation of indigenous African thought as a legitimate and rigorous participant in global philosophical discourse. The work of scholars such as Gyekye and Wiredu has already demonstrated that African philosophy has the conceptual resources to engage Western traditions as an equal, rather than as a subordinate or a subject of anthropological study. The present paper extends that project into the specific domain of Kalabari metaphysics, demonstrating that the *'teme'*-*'oju'* framework is not a naive pre-philosophical cosmology but a sophisticated and internally coherent metaphysical system that merits sustained philosophical attention. Future

research might extend this comparison to other Ijaw sub-groups, or place the Kalabari *'teme'* in dialogue with non-Western traditions beyond the Platonic — for instance, with Buddhist accounts of the continuation of consciousness across lives, or with Confucian conceptions of ancestral veneration and filial piety. The philosophical richness of the Kalabari tradition warrants, and indeed demands, sustained and comparative attention from philosophers working across disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

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