

The transcendental sublime significance that Africanism has on freewill and determinism

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Received: 17 Oct. 2025

Accepted: 29 Apr. 2026

Published: 02 July 2026

How to cite this article:Van Rooyen, J.A., 2026, 'The transcendental sublime significance that Africanism has on freewill and determinism', *Inkanyiso* 18(1), a326. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ink.v18i1.326>**Copyright:**© 2026. The Author.
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According to many scientists and philosophers, the concept of 'Freewill' for *Homo sapiens* is largely considered non-existent due to the deterministic nature of sapiens' brains, where every decision is influenced by a complex interplay of factors like genetics, environ, past experiences and neurochemistry (or as it is also described in theology: hermeneutics), all operating beyond our conscious control, essentially predetermining our choices. Perhaps the oldest question ever in philosophy has been the rhetoric betwixt freewill and/or determinism. Not just in Western philosophy, but also in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern parts of the World, examining the rational inquiries of the truths and principles of being of knowledge, in three philosophical entities, namely: natural philosophy, moral philosophy and metaphysical philosophy. However, the greatest piece of the pie will go on in dealing with the African metaphysical scrutiny in trying to obtain a tenacity by obtaining a reciprocal vernacular betwixt the three.

Contribution: This phenomenon of African existence evolves into an ambiguity and/or haziness among the unanimity of this antithesis. This amenity and/or pleasantness and awe embody the notion that by being African sapiens must swing towards modernism – meaning that the higher the ability would be to pinpoint subjective determinisms of ownership to the fringe or the verge. Why? Because of the inevitability of the evolution of modernism within the African continent that must give way now to the individual. In the same disposition, there is a real obligation and wish for cognitive adjustment from untidy yet compelling fraternity to a joint ability to accommodate this extreme profound complexity.

Keywords: African thought; freewill; determinism; communalism; individualism; Craffert; Pillay and Chikane.

Introduction

The philosophical dispute on freewill and determinism whatever period in the venerable cycle of time, nevertheless, takes the lead in sapiens' philosophical rhetoric today. Just how free are *sapiens'* behaviour as well as their preferences? The inquiry grows into an integration (juxtaposing) with a protracted affirmation that all sapiens' behaviours and preferences have causes. Then I ask how scrupulously answerable are sapiens' behaviours and preferences? As this is most of the time the contemporary absurd paradox in sapiens' rhetoric regarding freewill and determinism, as this is the primary justification trailing the persistence on this acrimonious rhetoric. When sapiens infer that their behaviours and preferences are caused and accordingly determined and reply (then) in infinite retribution (epistemology based) as a sanction for sapiens anticipated erroneous behaviors and preferences.

Mutatis mutandis, when *sapiens* infer that their behaviours and preferences are not caused and invariably free, the principled inquiry is forwarded, yet the existential experience of cause-and-effect accord is brought forward once again. Thus, any draconian or rigorous obedience brings forward either a principled or an epistemic inquiry. These two lines can never ([un]intentionally) be blurred so that they can meet or cross. If one would make this out to be a probability, he or she is busy with philosophical academia bias and dishonesty. Therefore, to try and answer my own question – why this amenity and/or pleasantness and awe would embody the notion that, by being African, *sapiens* can swing towards modernism, meaning that the higher the ability would be to pinpoint subjective determinisms of ownership to the fringe or the verge. Why?, In explaining this, we will make use of the following headings:

(1) Africa has a superb advantage in looking into the paradox of freewill and determinism, and my reason is that although the two can never cross or meet, they can stand together as a kind of synchronised entity. (2) Then we will engage in the metaphysics of freewill where we will

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dislodge the problem of the elemental matter that stays remnant in *sapiens'* metaphysical detail. (3) Then we will discuss the African perspective of freewill and determinism as life itself commences and cultivates into experience and understanding and only then is it terminated. (4) We will discuss three famous African theologians who deal with this subject matter in their writings, namely Craffert, Pillay and Chikane. And lastly (5), a sketch of deduction and conclusion will be introduced. This brings us to the first heading, namely Africa's superb significance.

Africa's superb significance

Suppose we think that it is imperative that *sapiens* look at this freewill-determinism inquiry from an African context regarding what is being said above as we can perhaps formulate an answer closer to the core of the problem. The problem that is that these lines can never meet or ever cross. Why then suggest an African departing point? The answer lies in the seething rhetoric that has transmuted into a new question that either the two terminuses, freewill and determinism, can be synchronised. Therefore, is it a probability that they can be jointly segregated as well as jointly comprehensive? It sounds like a paradox, and yet (to me) herein lies the slant from where the African context peripheralises the subject. Thus, the African context with its understanding must suffice.

Adding Africa's confidence, as well as my own *Gestimmtheit*¹ as an African born in South Africa in the 21st century, to the entrenched philosophical rhetoric on freewill and determination, the African context with its understanding goes as a protracted approach to profoundness from that is its being to its explanation. There has invariably been an inquiry into the term 'Africa', and its stalwartness signifies a congruity when it is worn to explicitly when it is set as a cultural comfortability of a minute segment of the continent that is Africa. Notwithstanding how *sapiens* view it, as a minute or a meticulous cultural context within Africa – say Ubuntu² in South Africa (as an example), It is used to serve Africa; it satisfies to wear their cultural understanding and insignia as *Africana*. This is due to African *sapiens'* cultural understanding, to the extent that it is Africa, and it will always have a resemblance with alternative African cultures.

The existence of freewill is a classical question in philosophy, and one that has been around for a while (unless you consider

Greek antiquity the recent past). Unlike some of the more far-fetched thought experiments philosophers like to indulge themselves in, freewill is something everyone can relate to, and about which everyone seems to have a strong opinion. This arguably makes it hard to approach the question rationally, considering everyone starts with a deeply rooted *a priori* position.

Before we dive into the thick of the subject, we need to define a few things. Let us start with the definition of freewill,³ determinism⁴ as well as epiphenomenalism,⁵ which is the belief that conscious experiences are a by-product of our brain's activity. Adherents of this view state that the brain's activity is the sole cause of any observable behaviour, and that conscious emotions cannot influence the system. Then, when we look at Carr's insistence (in Igboke 78) in his book *African Perspective of Freewill and Determinism* (2015):

'... there is no other test of the strongest motive but the fact that we choose it. The Freewill supposed in a choice that is indifferent to motives is also absurd in its ethical aspect, for the moral responsibility of the agent which it is supposed to establish is clearly destroyed.' (p. 77)

Then when *sapiens* make the inquiry, are they free?' What *sapiens* mean to ask is, when they act; do they really create? Or is creation in this context impossible? Undeniably and liberating so, Africans view the soul of life as a development that has an outset and inception. This outset that is understood by Africans defines the African view of determinism. Therefore, are African *sapiens* liberated to view themselves living in a life that is caused and accordingly determined, as it defines the notion of 'Osebuluwa'?⁶ Now we turn our attention to the metaphysics of freewill.

The metaphysics of freewill

Reality has one metaphysical understanding. This has been the antiquated philosophical confidence that set the Ionian philosophers into seeking the primary substance of nature. Igboke (2015) reminds us:

'Thales predicted water, Anaximander predicted boundlessness, and Anaximenes predicted air. Even after the Ionian philosophers, subsequent philosophers continued the search for that basic stuff.

1. *Gestimmtheit* denotes the substantial emotive heart-warming emotion *Gemut*, but then as a phycoexistential prejudice towards the phenomenon matter in the sensemaking procedures that canvass and regulate those very procedures. As Veldsman (2017:2 footnote 7) hails it: the effective-cognitive dimension of human beings.

2. Paulson (2025:15): philosophy is a traditional African communal concept, often summarised as 'I am because you are, you are because we are' that emphasises the interconnectedness of all people, mutual responsibility and collective well-being over individual gain. It fosters values like compassion, sharing, forgiveness and consensus building, highlighting that one's humanity and identity are shaped by their relationships and community. Also, James Ogude (in Paulson 2025:40) said this regarding Ubuntu's ethos: There is a sense in which ubuntu as a concept, and the African communitarian ethos imposes a sense of moral obligation regarding your responsibility for others even before you think of yourself. You must, as the Russian critic Bakhtin would say, look into another person's eyes and have that person return the gaze. When the gaze is returned, that recognition is what humanises you.

3. Freewill is the ability of *sapiens* to make choices unimpeded by certain factors. Such factors include metaphysical constraints, physical constraints, social constraints and mental constraints. Generally, we intuitively hold that we have freewill given our common choices and self-decisions concerning those choices. However, debate has been raging throughout history on how true and to what extent our wills are indeed free.

4. The most historical constraint of dominant concern to freewill has been determinism. According to Abel (1976:243): 'this is an important problem because Freewill lies at the intersection of two fundamental but perhaps incompatible convictions: the subjective or inward phenomenological certainty of freedom: and Determinism, the insistence that every event has a cause'.

5. EPIPHENOMENALISM is a philosophy of mind theory that states mental events are caused by physical brain events but have no causal influence on the physical world. In this view, mental experiences are like steam from a locomotive – they exist and are generated by the physical engine but do not contribute to its work. For example, the feeling of being sleepy is not what causes one to yawn, but both the feeling and the action are effects of the same underlying neural state (see Epiphenomenalism 2025).

6. Osebuluwa is a profoundly spiritual and uplifting Igbo name that translates to 'God who carries (or sustains) the world' or 'God who carries the universe'. It represents the immense power and providence of the Supreme Being in Igbo cosmology, serving as a reminder of the divine being's life-affirming and sustaining presence in the world (Ezeugwu & Chinweuba 2020).

Thus, Heraclitus sought his own in fire while Pythagoras saw numbers as the basic stuff.' (p. 77)

Nevertheless, how (in) accurate they might be, the elemental matter stays remnant in *sapiens'* metaphysical detail. Whatsoever this detail is established or unfamiliar is a divergent matter to postulate. Outside being conscious of it, the query of freewill and determinism is determined in a specific manner that the inquiry for freewill is absurd by the very same process of the inquiry constructed. Carr (2004:1) made this definitive.

We usually ask, can we choose indifferently between two alternatives or must the strongest motive prevail? Carr (2004:60), on this, asserts that there is no other test of the strongest motive but the fact that we choose it. The freewill supposed in a choice that is indifferent to motives is also absurd in its ethical aspect, for the moral responsibility of the agent that it is supposed to establish is clearly destroyed. So, when we ask the question, are we free? What we mean to ask is when we act, do we really create or is creation impossible?

Using the metaphysics of Henri Bergson (in Carr 2004:59), existence rushes as a development or an enhancement, existing evolution that enhances the real time. This is his (Bergson) approach of development. And then he (to my mind) excels when he stated:

'Real time which is the true duration is ... not a succession, but, like life or consciousness, an existence in which all reality is the (actually) present, moving, changing, now.'

What makes *sapiens* view regarding cause and effect and then think of determinism? This happens when *sapiens* regard life or happenings, not as a process, yet as portions. This understanding of life as portions in the structure of the *sapiens'* brain applies to be able to understand life. It is only at this point of view of life that would give admission to Zeno's (in Carr 2004:61) bickering that there is no gesture betwixt the Achilles and the tortoise, as any space betwixt them is inferior to absolute portions.

So, assembling is probably due to life's semblance, and the phenomenon of the Cosmos is infuriated semblance, and there is movement due to life, a continuous process of evolution. Moreover, causality is a scientific semblance, and science is a cerebral viewpoint of life situated on (in) portions.

Yet in Carr (2004), Bergson insists:

'That life itself as known in intuition is not like the intellectual view of it; it is a becoming in which there is no repetition and therefore, prediction is impossible as it is a continual new creation.' (p. 63)

Therefore, is it that freewill is only probable, hence, if the cerebral point-of-view is not infinite? Thus, there could be no place in the Cosmos and hamlet(s) as physical science presents it. And consequently, to determine this, the will is free, is to prove that sapiens have a spiritual as well as a finality from an actual nature; that the will is free, and this (to my mind)

proves that sapiens have a conscious spirituality. Thus, sapiens are hardly automated preparations of portions in a chunk of the Cosmos, however, they are living proponents of a Cosmos that are susceptible to sapiens assemblance movement. To better understand what was said above, we must look to the African perspective of freewill and determinism.

African perspective of freewill and determinism

Is it sizeable that the extra hamlet(s) turns civilian and contemporality into the recognition of *sapiens*-individual freewill that is entirely in contrast with deterministic bias? Modification is what *sapiens* understood all the time on the African understanding although there is a development from the life of the primordial to the contemporary.

According to Igbokwe (2015:80):

This has a corresponding movement from the life of communalism to the life of individualism. Living a life of communalism in the African setting inhibits the freedom of an average African. The African takes his decisions and is responsible for his actions. But his decisions are defined by the choice of the community. His freedom is still there because he can choose to act otherwise and even face the consequences.⁷

However, being a communistic hamlet(s), the African proceeds with the undetected rite of the hamlet(s). This aids the regular African to uphold a more determined life when correlated to those in Europe and the Americas. Impeding from a communistic *mise en scene*, the regular African engages more in determinism than freedom. Nevertheless, the African can uphold freedom, as they still believe what happens to them is more determined than freedom. Therefore, as Igbokwe (2015) paints it beautifully when writing:

'Though he (Africans) believes he can act freely, he still believes what happens to him are determined. Even in this determinism, he can still change things by appeasing the gods in sacrifices, as life is a continuum or a process.' (p. 80)

I wholeheartedly agree with Igbokwe (2015:80) when he implied the following in my own words: the endeavour to crack life into portions or slices to reason and scrutinise, and it then became explanatory to the dilemma. Thus, to the point, African's life is a continuity of interlaced of their free determined life, and it is also a form of continuation. Life commences, cultivates into experience and understanding, and then it is terminated.

As I understand it in this juncture of time and space in this article, life commences in determinism, develops over comfortable-determinism (complementary-determinism) and then terminates (in) the freedom. It then boils down that when life commences, the intensity to which this freewill is understood is then falsity from the environ of life.

This means that, when life commences, the continuation of the evolution process is such that this freewill is executed

⁷What I mean here with the term African, specifically at this juncture of this article, is every *sapiens* living on African continent including North Africans?

in life itself. Notwithstanding this, the reality is that Africans are still infants regarding modernity. Yet, due to this communal (humanistic) life, the communal life is proficient and skilled, and it moves fast in curtailing a kind of freedom understood by Africans in Africa. In Africa, the hamlet(s) determine for you as a *sapiens* essentially or nonessentially. Yet, in the West, individual tenure exists and so it seems that *sapiens* are freer to make choices. This signifies that the individuality approach is better discounted than freedom within communality. The African understanding is a hamlet(s) of spirits – living and non-living *sapiens* merge inside and amid each other. It is a hamlet(s) where the intermitted mediation of capricious gods is understood. The African *sapiens* self is a meticulous hamlet(s) that interconnects in a structure or grid regarding liaisons. Thus, the African understanding of freewill has a sizeable portion of determinism and reflects the consequence of the fact that African *sapiens* is still a youngster in self-understanding and advancement. As Craffert (2024), an African scholar, interprets it under the heading *Ectoplasm: A different modality of matter* in his book *The fabric(ation) of consciousness: A neuro-ecological perspective*:

‘In an autoethnographic study that plays a constitutive role in these circles. Turner claims that during an Ihamba healing ceremony in a Zambian village, she saw with her own eyes a large gray blob of something like plasma emerge from the sick woman’s back. Then I knew the Africans were right, there is spirit stuff, there is spirit affliction, it isn’t a matter of metaphor and symbol, or even psychology. The term used for such spirit manifestations is ectoplasmic forms – a term already coined in 1894 to describe the ‘materialization’ of anomalous limbs.’ (p. 176)

Also, other African scholars, namely Jerry Pillay⁸ and Frank Chikane⁹ (from South Africa), have marked the way African traditional religions can comprehend different mindsets, on the freewill and determinism, as well as purpose in societal life and juxtaposing, which contradict with the self-absorbed worldview of a few Western philosophical ways to the subject matter.

When referring to Pillay’s work on freewill and determinism, it is especially relevant to the notion of reconciliation in South Africa. The notion of reconsolidation, especially in the background of South Africa’s post-apartheid era, has been purported as a venture into the freewill and determination, displaying ongoing protests and the repetitive essence of rivalry. This brings us to the deduction and conclusion.

8. Jerry Pillay is the current (since 2023) General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. He is a Reformed pastor, a member of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, a former professor of theology at the University of Pretoria where he heads the Department of History and Ecclesiology and was the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion. He was elected president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in 2010 and, in June 2022, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), to take office on 01 January 2023 (Wikipedia 2025).

9. Frank Chikane (born 03 January 1951 in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga) is a South African civil servant, writer and cleric. He is a member of the African National Congress and moderator of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs for the World Council of Churches. South African History Online (17 February 2011) (Chikane 2011).

Deduction and conclusion

Africa has, indeed, a superb significance as they view the solemnness of life as a perpetuity, an ongoing process that has an outset and inception. This mindset is then understood by Africans, defining the African view of determinism. Then we deduce that African *sapiens* are liberated to view themselves living in a life that is caused and accordingly determined, as it defines the notion of Ezeugwu and Chinweuba (2020), when *sapiens* inspect the freewill as a metaphysical endeavor, the determination that the will is free, and it suggests that *sapiens* have a spirituality as well as a finality from an actual nature. Thus, African *sapiens* are not automated preparations (hardly) of portions in a chunk Cosmos; however, they are living proponents of a Cosmos that is susceptible to *sapiens*’ assemblance movement. In the context of Africa’s views regarding freewill and determinism, African *sapiens* self is a meticulous hamlet(s) that interconnects in a structure and grid regarding liaisons. When we as African theologians can say this: that the African understanding of freewill has a sizeable portion of determinism that is conscious (sadly and notably not by most of Africa’s politicians), regarding the measures that African *sapiens* is still a youngster in self-understanding and advancement, we are silently moving forward. Slowly yet surely!

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Johan A. van Rooyen: Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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