

## Epistemological Implications of John Mbiti's Conception of African Time



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**ABSTRACT:** This paper makes an attempt to critically explore the concept of time in African understanding as developed by John Mbiti. Specifically, the paper will look at the epistemological implications of Mbiti's claim that Africans do not have future dimension in their understanding of time. However, as we will highlight, a close examination of such position bears significant epistemological consequences. To that effect, the paper, first examines Mbiti's categorization of time in African perspective, whereby we will explore dual-dimension of time in traditional Africa as suggested by Mbiti versus linear dimension understanding of time. That will be followed by a detailed discussion against Mbiti's position and the epistemological ramification of his claim.

**KEY WORDS:** Epistemology, African Concept of Time

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The idea that Africans lack a sense of timekeeping is not shocking when one hears others refer to 'African time.' A carefree attitude toward time is demonstrated by such a laid-back habit, such as failing to begin meetings at the appointed hour. Academic opinions on this weighty charge differ; some believe it is not real at all and that it is only a colonial label used to denigrate Africans for their lack of punctuality. However, some argue that the statement has a cultural undertone because they don't think anything truly begins at the precise hour listed on the calendar. Others still believe that the problem is only that Africans are not accustomed to the strange western clock-time system.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the goal of this paper is to examine a widely held assertion made by distinguished African scholar John Samwel Mbiti. Although Africans do have a concept of time, he claims that it differs from Western classification. Whereas Western concepts are three-dimensional, encompassing past, present, and future time, Mbiti African concepts are two-dimensional, consisting of past and present time.<sup>2</sup> The paper will specifically look at Mbiti's conception from its epistemological implications. Put differently, Mbiti argues that Africans do not understand the concept of future time. Thus, in this study, we base our investigation on two questions: What makes Mbiti's viewpoint unworkable? And what are this position's epistemic ramifications? In light of this, the paper will first present his interpretation of time, which he attributes to Africa, before outlining the reasons why this assertion is false. Before we go any further, let us keep in mind that Mbiti's inquiry and inscription of the concept of time are limited to traditional Africans and do not in any way encompass modern Africans. Thus, it is necessary to consider this investigation in that context.

### 1.1 Mbiti's Categorization of African Time

Generally speaking, Mbiti employs the idea of time as a paradigm for his research on African philosophy, and in his well-known work *African Religions and Philosophy*<sup>3</sup>, he expressly credits Africans for their knowledge of time. His main goal in that work, among other things, was to "discuss the African concept of time as the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts"<sup>4</sup> of Africans and assumed that this would apply to all of their traditional ways of thinking. His underlying belief that learning about the concept of time could improve one's comprehension of African peoples' beliefs, customs, and values

<sup>1</sup> Abaniku, *New Essay on African Philosophy*, 29-31.

<sup>2</sup> Parker, *Kalumba, Mbiti, and a Traditional African Concept of Time*, 53-56, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/philafri.9.1.0053?seq=1> accessed December, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 19-36.

<sup>4</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 20-21.

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served as the driving force.<sup>5</sup> He believed that we can articulate the philosophical systems of the Africans by looking at them from their ontological perspective. In other words, using such ontology, we can arrive at “the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African people think, act or speak in different situations of life.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Mbiti's research, time is therefore perceived by Africans as a two-dimensional reality with a rich past and a dynamic present. In African perception, the future is essentially nonexistent, unlike Western linear conception of time. He says, “According to traditional concepts, the time is a two dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite past, is practically absent because events in it have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time.”<sup>7</sup> With this knowledge, it is evident that Mbiti connected events and the concept of time. To put it another way, he was saying that there could be no event without time, and since their understanding of time is limited to the past and present, it follows that they understood events in the literal, or concrete, sense of the word. They don't, and for Mbiti, they really are unable to imagine the fictitious event.<sup>8</sup>

He referred to the two dimensions as *zamani* (past) and *sasa* (present), using Swahili terminology. He argues that the sense of immediacy, nearness, and now-ness that *sasa* possesses serves as an illustration of the differences between the two. For the people, *sasa* is the time frame that matters most right now because it refers to ‘where’ or ‘when’ the events that make up time occur. Thus, in the *sasa* dimension, things have to be happening right now, in the process of coming to pass, or they have to have happened recently.<sup>9</sup> In addition, people and communities view the *sasa* period as the most meaningful and significant because those people or communities have vivid memories of the events or phenomena that occurred during this time or are about to experience them. Furthermore, because *sasa* is not numerically or mathematically constant, an individual's *sasa* period lengthens with age. Similar to how each person has a unique *sasa* dimension, the community also has a *sasa* dimension, albeit a larger one than the individual's. The most vivid moment, in Mbiti's opinion, is *sasa*; it is a dynamic present in and of itself with a full or complete temporal dimension, consisting of an experienced past and a brief future (no longer than two years, in his case). However, the *sasa* period only has significance and meaning for the person or community that participates in or experiences it.<sup>10</sup> *Zamani*, however, is not constrained by what English has historically offered. On a larger scale, it has its own ‘past,’ ‘present,’ and ‘future.’ In contrast to the *sasa*, which we might refer to as little or micro-time, we might refer to it as the macro-time (Big-Time). It is evident that Mbiti appears to have his own usage (understanding) of the future because, although acknowledging that some people do not have a future, he also acknowledges that those same people do have a concept of one (albeit one that is limited, lasting no longer than two years). Stated differently, the notion of a distant future appears to have been taken away from traditional Africans by Mbiti. Interestingly, from an ontological perspective, *zamani* and *sasa* overlap and are inseparable. This is due to the fact that while *sasa* feeds into or vanishes into *zamani*, events must first actualize or become realized within the *sasa* dimension before they can be incorporated into *zamani*. Events ‘move backwards’ after this, beyond which nothing can proceed. Thus, *Zamani* is the cemetery of time, the moment of ending, the dissolution where everything is absorbed into a reality that exists neither before nor after.

### 1.2 Epistemological Implications of Mbiti's Conception

This section's discussion entails an explanation of the connections between the concepts of existence, time (including future time), experience, and outside knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Actually, academics have already taken notice of Mbiti's assertion that Africans do not understand the concept of future time for a number of reasons.<sup>12</sup> According to Mbiti, the ontological basis of the conventional

<sup>5</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 15-28.

<sup>8</sup> Parratt, “Time in Traditional African Thought”, 117-126, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1016/0048-721X%2877%2990019-7?journalCode=rrel20> accessed Jan. 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Umah, “Ontologico-Epistemological Background to Authentic African Socio-Economic and Political Institutions”, 23 – 67.

<sup>10</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 21-23. He says here, for example, that what is not now occurring or certain to occur immediately belongs to the category of “No-time” such that “time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present, and virtually no future.”

<sup>12</sup> Examples of this are:

(a) Some of these criticisms are compiled here by Masolo (*African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 103–104): The philosophical analysis of the ontology that Mbiti described was not provided; Mbiti's writings on “African philosophy” are ambiguous; he does not define the term; instead, he merely presents ‘African traditional beliefs (mythology)’ as ‘philosophy’ and fails to distinguish ‘African philosophy’ from African religious ideas.

(b) Mbiti's thesis, according to Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*, is only “a report of a communal world-view without an attempt to evaluate” it (especially on page 22).

(c) According to Makinde's work, *Of Chance Philosophy and Obsolete Philosophy*, Mbiti's analysis of the African conception of time is an example of ‘chance and obsolete philosophy’ since it lacks critical thinking and is therefore inappropriate for enhancing

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understanding of time is that time must be lived through in order to be considered. Therefore, 'time is either used time or present time.' This observation suggests a relationship between the idea of perception and the outside world and the idea of time. As previously mentioned, the significance of time, especially the *sasa*, is contingent upon the actuality of experience; that is, it requires participation or experience on the part of the individual or community. According to Mbiti, the ontological basis of this traditional view of time is that time can only be defined by participation and living; otherwise, time passes by unnoticed; in fact, if there is no event, nothing has happened and there is no time in that scenario. Because of this, time for the traditional African is strongly linked to events (the experiential kind), according to Mbiti. But clearly, this view of limited time as a wholly empirical phenomenon. Regarding time as a perceptual (experiential) reality, Mbiti claims that for traditional Africans to exist, that is, to exist in time alone. This is because existence in space implies existence in time, so it follows, I suppose, that the traditional view of time is essentially experienced time only.<sup>13</sup> Based on Mbiti's observation, it is evident that Africans have been classified as experience-oriented individuals, meaning that experience is regarded as the most trustworthy source of information.

On the other hand, Mbiti's own affirmation of the ontologically hierarchical structure of beings indicates that he has considered the possibility of existence for ontological realms and abstract entities. It is evident from these ontological categories that traditional Africans support the existence of such realities because they hold the ontological movement from empirical to abstract realities. With reference to the question of existence or being, this understanding allows for the treatment of time as an ontological phenomenon,<sup>14</sup> and provides the foundation for the shift from ontology to epistemology by looking at the idea of both empirical and non-empirical knowledge that might be present in the traditional African conception of the future that Mbiti rejected.<sup>15</sup>

In my opinion, if Mbiti's assertion is accurate, traditional Africans are unable to imagine a world where knowledge and perception are transcendent. If so, since they view time as merely a stream of experiences, they should be unable to develop a scientific epistemology and incapable of understanding time as a 'metaphysical construct,' created by the rational power of transcendence in human beings. A critical African perspective on empirical knowledge could be developed from Mbiti's description of an African conception of time, according to the possibility of such a movement.<sup>16</sup> Such movement assumes that there are theoretical and practical connections between the ontological issues of time and existence and the epistemological issues of experience and our knowledge of the outside world, which cannot be reduced to the empirical world alone, since concepts always occur in clusters.<sup>17</sup> According to Mbiti's theory, existence is essentially limited to experiencing time, and time alone is what it means to exist.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, existence in space requires existence in time when it comes to perception. In actuality, this confirmed the earlier theory of *esse est percipi* by G. Berkeley ("to be is to be perceived").<sup>19</sup> This means that 'to be known is to be perceived either in the present or in the past'<sup>20</sup> directly relates to perceptual knowledge. This implies, I believe, that Africans cannot rationally be able to imagine objects as existing without experience or as having qualities that cannot be sensed if they are not aware of future time. This means, I suppose, that for an African who does not understand future time, a past experience cannot be projected into the future - that is, there is no time.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, something does not exist and most likely never did if it does not coexist with the experience we have right now. If the aforementioned implications are accurate, then Africans must be ontological immaterialists and epistemological idealists of some sort. If so, they won't be either epistemological realists or metaphysical realists.<sup>22</sup>

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Africa's and Africans' lot in light of modern realities. Therefore, if Mbiti's account is accurate, it must incorporate a critical analysis that can result in a corrective synthesis regarding the nature of time.

(d) Kwame Gyekye believes Mbiti's story to be erroneous and flawed due to linguistic considerations specific to his Akan Culture false because it is untrue that Akans did not have a concept of future time, and fallacious because Mbiti made a hasty assumption about the entirety of Africa based on observations he made of a very small area of the continent, assuming those observations were accurate. Refer to Gyekye, "J.S. Mbiti's African Religions and Philosophy," page 86-94. In his paper "The Empirical Apperception of Time and the Conception of History in Bantu Thought," particularly on pages 101-102, Alexis Kagame makes a similar assertion.

<sup>13</sup> Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science", 50-71. Also available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1157195?seq=1> accessed Jan. 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Òkè, *The Nature of Political Concepts and Ideologies*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Makinde, "Of Chance Philosophy and Obsolete Philosophy: Some Anti-Scientific Features of African (Traditional) Thought", 8-15.

<sup>17</sup> For related discussions, see Òkè, "Towards an African (Yoruba) Theory of Empirical Knowledge: A Critique of Hallen and Sodipo", 205-216; and also in Hallen, "Moral Epistemology – When Propositions Come Out of Mouths: Reply to Òkè", 187-204.

<sup>18</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 45-48.

<sup>19</sup> Bracken, *The Early Reception of Berkeley's Immaterialism, 1710-1733*, 27-28.

<sup>20</sup> Atherton, *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision*, 13-14.

<sup>21</sup> Beidelmann, "Kaguru Time Reckoning; An Aspect of the Cosmology of an East African People", 9-20.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, "Understanding and Ontology in Traditional African Thought" 158-178.

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Mbiti claims that because of the way Africans conceptualize time, they should be unable to imagine a world that is 'perception-transcending' or 'knowledge-transcending'.<sup>23</sup> This is due to the fact that an understanding of time that disregards the future is incompatible with an understanding of a self-sustaining world or one in which objects, processes, and events have "an enduring identity of its own."<sup>24</sup> By extension, such a conception of time will not be able to support, nor be consistent with, a conceptual framework that permits direct, objective knowledge of the outside world. The world, or the object of knowledge, must be physically or materially real in order for such knowledge to be possible. This means that there must be a constant possibility of sensations, whether actual or potential.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, for it to be such a world, it needs to "admit universality of access [and again exhibit] "autonomy or independence."<sup>26</sup> The world will be able to transcend any given set of occurrent finite perceptions thanks to these features. However, such a world is not possible, and no one whose understanding of time is restricted to the past and present could claim knowledge of such a world. However, it is impossible to accurately attribute epistemological idealism to Africans in the larger context of what they say, do, and believe. Africans might therefore be best classified as phenomenologists in terms of how they conceptualize and understand reality.

But according to Mbiti's own account, Africans uphold an ontological hierarchy in which there are living humans in addition to God, recently deceased and distant individuals, non-human living things, and non-living things. Masolo is correct when he states that the mode or degree of existence of living humans is "directly related to the concept of time."<sup>27</sup> These are the living humans who deal with time and have experiences. Africans in these, by virtue of their cultural customs,<sup>28</sup> declare in agreement with all of humanity that reality is more than just their past and present experiences. It should not be assumed that they do not believe in the endless continuity of the outside world, even though it is true that none of their languages have a term for future or infinitude and they do not assert that the world must end with their current experiences. Actually, a variety of African cultural practices—such as community organization, language, therapeutic expertise, knowledge system, governance, and religious practices - evidence the phenomenon of infinite continuity.<sup>29</sup> Africans never confine themselves to the empirical or temporal forces in any of these practices; instead, they uphold a strong belief in supernatural forces that transcend spatiotemporal forces and are inextricably linked to experiential modes. As a result, I believe it will be incorrect to claim that Africans do not think about the future.

We might assume that Africans are some kind of Berkeleyan 'deity-phenomenologists' based on Mbiti's assertion that they are renowned for their religiosity and that they practically live in a religious universe. In that scenario, matter will start to take on a distinct meaning for them - that of being the everlasting potential for sensations, both real and possible in God's mind. According to this definition, God is the guarantee of the outside world's continued existence, according to Mbiti's Africans. This will lead to the assertion that while the future exists for deities, it does not exist for humans. Furthermore, the claim that God alone is the source of future time can be used to explain the unusually carefree attitude that most Africans have toward time, work, and development.<sup>30</sup> The best we can say about Africans' collective attitude toward work is that they lack 'time-discipline,' not that they do not understand the concept of future time, despite the fact that they are generally careless with time, especially future time.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the philosophical significance of the African conception of time, it should therefore be viewed with extreme caution. In this context, Mbiti should have highlighted the serious risks associated with the 'futureless' conception of time that he associated with Africans. This would have aided in the people's adoption of a more positive understanding of time, which could have improved their lives and better ensured their race's survival and independence.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, denying the future would be illogical because the traditional African belief in God is one of infinite possibilities. This is an claim made against Mbiti by Gyekye and Masolo.<sup>33</sup> Because traditional Africans express the concept of infinitude in their languages and engage in practices that imply it, they accuse Mbiti of being incoherent when it comes to the Africans who are said to lack the concept of the future. Using Mbiti's personal finding that, "Africans are notoriously religious...", [and that] "...for Africans, the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon, man is a deeply religious being in a religious universe"<sup>34</sup>. In what way does this claim align with his rejection of an endless future? Again, what about God, who is not a part of this physical reality, if

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<sup>23</sup> Rescher, *Epistemology: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 348.

<sup>24</sup> Rescher, *Epistemology: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 348.

<sup>25</sup> Bolton, "Berkeley's Objection to Abstract Ideas and Unconceived Objects", 76-77. See Also, M. Òkè, "A Critical Study of the Viability of Phenomenalism as an Alternative Theory of Perception", 19.

<sup>26</sup> Rescher, *Epistemology: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 348

<sup>27</sup> Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 110.

<sup>28</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 37- 46.

<sup>29</sup> Kalumba, A New Analysis of Mbiti's "The Concept of Time", 11-20, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/philafri.8.1.0011> accessed Jan. 2024.

<sup>30</sup> Uduigwomen, "The Place of Oral Tradition in African Epistemology" 23-24.

<sup>31</sup> Sogolo, *Foundation of African Philosophy: A Definition of African Philosophy: A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought*, 18-19.

<sup>32</sup> Ayoade, "Time in Yoruba Thought", 93-112.

<sup>33</sup> Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 111. Also Gyekye, "African Religions and Philosophy by J. S. Mbiti", 86-94.

<sup>34</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1, 19.

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the physical world or real being that people live in and are aware of is the only one they can experience as human beings? Gyekye holds that any mention of God in the ontology of traditional Africans is, from an epistemological standpoint, a gratuitous ratiocinative postulate of the affirmation of an endless future.<sup>35</sup>

According to Mbiti's theory, traditional Africans can only know the past and the present if they have any knowledge at all. This is another epistemological implication. It could be argued that Mbiti distinguished between 'divine knowledge' and 'mundane knowledge' using this concept if that is the case and given that he asserts that traditional Africans acknowledge the existence of divine entities;<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, only God is aware of infinite. Moreover, this concept of time can also be utilized to clarify another outcome, which is that it rejects the idea that human knowledge is epistemologically progressive. Because it confines itself to the currently accepted truth - truth as we understand it, here and now, and as we have experienced it - it is inimical to both progress and innovation. Consequently, it impedes the advancement or continuity of epistemology; it does not strive for 'futures truth' or discuss 'completed truth' or 'perfected truth.'<sup>37</sup>

It follows that the idea of an infinite future is associated with the existence of the infinite Being, given the widespread African belief in the existence of the infinite Being - God, for that matter - in their cosmology. Since the infinite being must exist in an infinitely distant future, the idea of an infinite future is not alien to African conceptual framework; rather, it is fundamental to it. Time is not just an accumulation of events; rather, it is an objective metaphysical reality in which processes, events, and change occur. Therefore, taking into account the phenomena of change and events that occur within time, the idea of a distant future is an undeniable reality in an African conception of time.<sup>38</sup> However, since time is separate from and independent of the events that occur within it, the absence of any one of these phenomena has no bearing on the reality of time.

The use of common language expressions actually demonstrates that the infinite future is a fundamental aspect of African thought systems. For example, the Swahili word 'baadaye,' which is widely used among its speakers, can refer to both the 'near future' and the 'distant future' - it is not even restricted to a two-year time frame, as Mbiti had assumed. Similar definite expressions for the English tense 'future' can also be found among the Akan speakers; for instance, *daakye*, which means 'future or in the future,' and *dabi*, which means "someday, an unspecified day, a day as yet unknown, some time to come," are equivalent.<sup>39</sup> The underlying meaning of such phrases is undoubtedly an affirmation of 'an indefinite time,' or a far-off future, and it does presuppose that time exists among traditional Africans as an objective, continuous reality. Such language affirms the western notion that time flows linearly rather than being restricted to a dual-dimensional mode as Mbiti proposed.<sup>40</sup>

It is also interesting to note that Africans justify, or at least project, a three-dimensional, non-dual conception of time through their belief in life as an ongoing ontological journey through time. The ontological progression of time from the past, present, and future necessitates that it be regarded as pertinent to the acquisition of knowledge (or, more broadly, excellences) about the individual as they age.<sup>41</sup> In a sense, Africans view time as a movement from the present - represented by the birth of a child - to the past; the more experience one has from the past, the more knowledge or standing one possesses. Because of this, Africans view their elders as knowledge repositories, meaning that they are more knowledgeable than the younger members of the community.<sup>42</sup> The adage 'what an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing up' became famous as a result. Such a claim indicates that time not only contributes to the qualitative difference between the young and the old, but also to the ontologically significant difference that extends to ancestorhood, the far future. This process starts in childhood, continues through adulthood and elderhood, and culminates in ancestorhood, which is the last significant transition. Ancestorhood is regarded as the root, providing the trunk (in this case, knowledge) with the root.<sup>43</sup> With this understanding, traditional Africans hold the belief that whatever is not done now (in this life) will undoubtedly be done later, in the afterlife, as an ancestor - who are still living, breathing individuals who are still very much a part of the living community. In this sense, it is firmly believed that life does not end suddenly at the point of physical death.<sup>44</sup> Such ontological progression suggests, in my opinion, a sense of continuity that is unquestionably indicative of a future time. The notion that our unfinished business in this life may carry over into the next is, however, attributed by some to the reason for African laxity, or *polepole*, as Swahili speakers sometimes refer to it. The

<sup>35</sup> Adejumo, "The Concept of 'African Time': Its Manifestation in the Traditional Art of the Yoruba of Nigeria", 41-50.

<sup>36</sup> Rescher, *Epistemology: An Introduction*, 320-321.

<sup>37</sup> Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, 82.

<sup>38</sup> Gillies, "The Bantu Concept of Time", available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1016/0048-721X%2880%2990025-1?journalCode=rrel20> accessed Jan. 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Onyewenyi, *African Belief in Reincarnation: A Philosophical Reappraisal*, 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> Particularly in light of his claims on pages 37 - 49, we can rightly infer from Mbiti's statement on page 20 that "Africans have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology" that if Africans have their own science, it is a religious science; likewise, if they have their own epistemology, it is a religious epistemology; and so on. By 'religious,' we mean 'spiritual,' 'ancient,' 'God-centered,' 'transcendental,' 'dogmatic,' 'mystical,' and 'mystifying.'

<sup>41</sup> Rescher, *Epistemology: An Introduction*, 318-319.

<sup>42</sup> Tiles - Jim, *An Introduction to Historical Epistemology: The Authority of Knowledge*, 51-53.

<sup>43</sup> Oladipo, "Knowing and the African Renaissance", 5 - 17.

<sup>44</sup> Ijiomah, "An Excavation of a Logic in African Worldview" 29 - 35.

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accusation stems from the assertion that there is no sense in hurrying tasks when we have the chance to complete them much more fully in the future. However, we won't go into that in this paper.

The observable lives of many Africans in the home, in politics, and in business, both in traditional and modern times, sharply contradict Mbiti's claim that Africans lack the concept of future time. Many of them have large families, accumulate wealth quickly, work hard on cash crop plantations, undergo inheritance procedures, embezzle excessive amounts of public funds, engage in a number of forward-thinking business practices, engage in harsh, 'sit-tight' politics, struggle to get an education, and prioritize their health both historically and currently.<sup>45</sup> This accurately captures their aspirations toward acquiring for both their present and future generations - born and unborn - in a futuristic manner. This demonstrates that Africans do not have the epicurean mindset of 'let's eat today, we'll die tomorrow. These actions, along with others of a similar nature, demonstrate their awareness of the far future and their future - focused relationship dynamics.<sup>46</sup>

### CONCLUSION

All things considered, it is a given that traditional Africans are aware of the passage of time, despite their inconsistent adherence to a set schedule or time limit. Despite not placing as much emphasis on the future, Africans are aware of the far future. Put another way, even if we accept that Africans lack 'time discipline,' that does not imply that they lack an awareness of the future, even in the far future.<sup>47</sup> It is not accurate to say that Africans lack the ability to envision the far future, despite the common observation that most African countries lack the vision to implement sustainable economic initiatives. Maybe the best description of them would be 'time-discipline' lacking. If Mbiti had considered the ramifications of a particular culture's lack of the concept of the infinite future, he would have realized that introducing it into that culture is a necessary task for a valuable philosophy that is thought of as "the constructive critique of cultures."<sup>48</sup> Thus, he would have attempted to transform traditional African cultures by introducing the essential ideas that they might lack or appear to lack, rather than merely describing them (accurately or incorrectly). Conversely, in light of the detrimental effects that a poor time orientation might have on their life, philosophers still have a duty to introduce people to a new orientation and attitude toward time if they have a concept of futurity, regardless of how they define it, but are not serious about it. If Mbiti had considered the epistemological ramifications of the ontology he ascribed to Africans, he would have realized that traditional beliefs and behavioral patterns needed to be questioned philosophically rather than patronizingly. He could have highlighted the inconsistencies in traditional faiths, beliefs, and concepts and highlighted the need for finding a new foundation by using such a critical approach.

In this context, it's crucial to remember, to paraphrase Kwasi Wiredu, that, "Not all philosophies are useful or worthwhile. Some have no root in the life of the community.... On the other hand, merely to perpetuate traditional African thought-forms in a situation to which they are no longer relevant would be an equally lifeless and uncreative activity."<sup>49</sup> Since Africans lack both the concept of the infinite future and a progressive commitment to it, they must acquire it in order to prepare for eventual recolonization or, in fact, eventual inevitable early extinction. With all due respect to Mbiti, his concerns regarding the African concept of time would have been more philosophically significant if he had been critically analytical of it.

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<sup>47</sup> Hamming, "Epistemology from the African Point of View", 7-9.

<sup>48</sup> Andah, - Okpoko, "Oral Traditions and West African Cultural History: A New direction – Perspectives on West Africa's Past" 201 – 224.

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