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Philosophy and Human Well-Being: An Afro-Constructivist Approach

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Abstract: This paper interrogates whether human well-being can be reduced to the satisfaction of bodily and mental needs and advances an Afro-constructivist response grounded in both African and Western philosophical traditions. It argues that genuine well-being transcends material and psychological fulfilment, encompassing moral integrity, social harmony, and ecological balance. The study mobilizes Aristotle's eudaimonia, Kant's moral autonomy, and existentialist reflections on meaning, while dialoguing with Ubuntu ethics, eco-bio-communitarianism (Tangwa), and Afro-constructivism (Mosima). Drawing on Cameroonian thinkers such as Fonlon, Boulaga, Mosima, Tosam, and Tangwa, the paper defends the view that development must emerge from cultural self-understanding and moral creativity rather than external prescriptions. Incorporating psychological, sociological, and anthropological insights, it conceptualizes well-being as a multidimensional, relational, and context-sensitive phenomenon. The article concludes that philosophy remains indispensable to Africa's pursuit of holistic thriving, offering a critical lens for constructing just, inclusive, and sustainable societies. In doing so, it situates African thought within the global discourse on human well-being and presents Afro-constructivism as a viable framework for reimagining the human condition.

Keywords: Philosophy, well-being, bioethics, African communalism, economic development, Afro-constructivism.

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1. Introduction

The question of what constitutes human well-being is both recurrent and urgent. Contemporary public discourse too often conflates well-being with material affluence or the absence of illness, yet philosophical reflection suggests a richer, more contested field of meaning. This paper asks a focused question: ***Is human well-being reducible to the full satisfaction of the needs of the body and/or the mind?*** The aim is not simply to resolve between competing definitions but to advance an **Afro-constructivist** framework that integrates African and Western philosophical insights[1] and that can inform both theoretical debates and practical policy concerns. Two reasons make this question pressing. First, contemporary development discourse, from international indicators to national policy, relies heavily on narrow measures[2] (GDP per capita, life expectancy) that privilege material and biomedical dimensions of welfare (Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Sumner 1996). Second, the African philosophical tradition, widely misread as narrow-minded or merely communitarian, contains conceptual resources that can both critique such reductive metrics and enrich global hypothesizing about human prosperity (Mbiti 1969; Wiredu 1996). An Afro-constructivist approach, as developed here, refuses the either/or of individual versus collective goods; instead it proposes a synthetic view in which well-being is relational, ethical, and contextual. Methodologically the paper follows comparative philosophical analysis. It reads recognized Western contributions; Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia*, Kantian duty ethics, existentialist reflections on meaning, and contemporary capability and capability-inspired work, alongside African and Cameroonian thought, including Ubuntu, Nkrumah's political philosophy, Fanon's critique of colonial order, and Cameroonian bio-communitarian voices such as Fonlon and Tangwa (Aristotle 2009; Kant 2012; Frankl 2006; Mbiti 1969; Tangwa 2009). Where appropriate, the philosophical account is dialogued with relevant findings from psychology, sociology, and anthropology to show how conceptual claims bear on lived human practices (Maslow 1954; Seligman 2011; Geertz 1973; Durkheim 2002).

The paper proceeds in five empirico-theoretical moves. primo, it sketches principal Western conceptions of well-being and highlights their strengths and limits for thinking about human blossoming in African contexts. Secundo, it reconstructs African conceptions of the person and community, showing how such perspectives reframe the conditions of well-being. Tertio, the paper focuses on Cameroonian voices that insist on moral rectitude, de-colonial appropriation, and an eco-ethical vision of communal life. Quarto, I elaborate Afro-constructivism as a mediating, pragmatic framework that draws on indigenous epistemologies without rejecting the merits of critical modernity. Quinto, the article outlines implications for practice and policy, arguing that philosophical clarity about well-being has tangible consequences for education, health, and development policy. Three clarificatory points will help orient the reader. Firstly, by "well-being" I mean more than hedonistic pleasure or the mere absence of disease; the term denotes a multidimensional state that includes moral, relational, and existential dimensions as well as bodily and mental health. Secondly, the argument is not a wholesale rejection of material needs, survival conditions are logically and ethically prior, but it defends the claim that material provision is necessary yet insufficient for holistic wellbeing via the help of Maslow (1954) and Nussbaum (2011). Thirdly, Afro-constructivism, as elaborated below, is not an assertion of cultural essentialism; rather it is a critical posture that reconstructs indigenous resources to engage global knowledge in a way that serves local growth (Mosima 2019a; Wiredu 1996). By situating the inquiry at the intersection of ethics, political philosophy, and development thinking, the paper contributes in three ways. Primo, it supplies a conceptual critique of reductionist accounts of well-being; secundo, it offers Afro-constructivism as a practicable philosophical frame that links ethics to policy; and tertio, it demonstrates the normative and practical relevance of Cameroonian and African philosophical thought to contemporary debates about development and human wellbeing.

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[1] Mosima (2019a) coined "Afro-Constructivism" to describe a philosophical attitude of creative reconstruction that seeks dialogue between African traditions and global modernity rather than their opposition.

[2] This refers to global indices such as the *Human Development Index* (HDI) and *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP), which often ignore cultural, moral, and ecological dimensions of well-being (see Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).

2. Theoretical Framework: Western Conceptions of Human Well-Being

Philosophical reflection on human well-being has a long and complex genealogy in Western thought. From the classical to the contemporary period, the question has shifted from inquiries about the *good life* to more technical discussions about *quality of life*, *happiness*, and *blossoming*. Yet across these transformations runs a shared conviction that well-being is an ethical ideal, not simply a biological or psychological state. This section revisits key milestones in that genealogy; Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, Kant's deontological ethics, Stoic and existentialist themes, and modern welfare and capability theories, to illuminate what they contribute and where they fall short in accounting for holistic human fulfilment.

Firstly, from a teleological perspective of blossoming, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* remains the classical point of departure for theories of well-being. For Aristotle, the *telos* of human life is *eudaimonia*, often translated as "happiness" or "flourishing." This state is not reducible to pleasure but denotes the full realization of human potential through the cultivation of virtue. He distinguishes between lower goods, those of the body and external possessions, and higher goods related to the soul and reason. True happiness, therefore, consists in living in accordance with virtue and rational activity, rather than in the pursuit of transient satisfaction. Aristotle's insight lies in recognizing that well-being is an *activity* rather than a possession. It involves continuous moral formation through habits that align human conduct with reason and the common good. Nevertheless, the Aristotelian framework assumes a relatively stable social order and pays limited attention to structural injustices that may constrain individual flourishing. In postcolonial contexts where inequality and historical trauma persist, a more relational and socio-political conception of well-being is required.

Secondly from the perspective of the Kantian autonomy and the moral law, Immanuel Kant radicalized the ethical discussion by grounding morality not in the pursuit of happiness but in the autonomy of rational agents. His categorical imperative, depicting that one should *"act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"* (2012, 37), establishes moral duty as independent of subjective desires. For Kant, well-being cannot be equated with happiness since moral worth arises from acting out of duty rather than inclination. The good will, guided by reason, constitutes the highest good. While Kant's moral philosophy elevates the dignity of the human person, it also risks divorcing ethics from the affective and communal dimensions of existence. His formal universalism leaves little room for cultural particularities or relational ethics such as those central to African thought. Moreover, the strict separation of moral duty from empirical conditions has limited utility in societies where material deprivation itself undermines autonomy.

Thirdly, from the Stoic and existential response, the Stoics, from Epictetus to Seneca, responded to moral uncertainty by teaching that happiness depends not on external circumstances but on the mastery of one's inner life (Epictetus 2004; Seneca 1969). Freedom is achieved through rational self-discipline and acceptance of what lies beyond one's control. This inward orientation later influenced Christian asceticism and modern existentialism. In the 20th century, existentialists such as Viktor Frankl reformulated this view by linking well-being to meaning. In *Man's Search for Meaning* (2006), Frankl observed that even in extreme suffering, individuals can preserve their humanity by discovering purpose. Unlike the hedonist or utilitarian traditions, existentialism situates well-being in the capacity to confer significance upon one's existence. It thereby anticipates contemporary "positive psychology," which also emphasizes meaning and resilience (Seligman 2011). Nevertheless, existentialism like Stoicism, remains primarily individualistic; it rarely explores how collective structures and historical contexts shape the very possibilities of meaning.

Furthermore, from the modern welfare and capability perspectives, 20th century thought expanded the horizon of well-being from individual ethics to social justice. The welfare tradition, exemplified by Dewey (1929; 1954) and Singer (2002), conceived of well-being as a function of social cooperation and rational reconstruction of society. Dewey's pragmatism linked individual growth to democratic participation, suggesting that social institutions must foster environments where persons can develop their capacities. More recently, Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Amartya Sen (Nussbaum and Sen 1993) advanced the *capability approach*, which defines well-being not by utility or resources but by the real freedoms

individuals have to achieve valued functionings. Their model is pluralistic, encompassing bodily health, emotional life, political participation, and respect for one's environment. It therefore marks a significant move toward multidimensional and context-sensitive understandings of human development. However, even the capability approach, though sensitive to diversity, tends to universalize its categories in ways that may overlook local cosmologies and communal epistemologies. As Tangwa (2009) and Mosima (2019a) argue, genuine well-being cannot be fully captured through external frameworks; it must emerge from within a culture's own moral universe. Thus, while Western theories provide valuable conceptual tools; virtue, autonomy, rational self-mastery, and capability, they remain insufficient when abstracted from the lived relational contexts that sustain human life.

Synthetically, the Western intellectual trajectory demonstrates a gradual shift from metaphysical to moral, psychological, and socio-economic accounts of well-being. Aristotle teaches the importance of virtue, Kant underscores moral law, the Stoics and existentialists locate freedom in self-meaning, and Nussbaum and Sen emphasize social justice and capability. Together, these traditions insist that well-being involves more than mere pleasure or material comfort. However, they share certain limitations; an overemphasis on the autonomous individual, an implicit assumption of secular rationality, and an inadequate appreciation of the communal and ecological dimensions of existence. These gaps invite dialogue with African philosophical traditions that foreground interdependence, moral responsibility, and harmony between humans and nature, which is the focus of our next part, highlighting how they reconceptualise the meaning and pursuit of human well-being.

3. African Conceptions of Well-Being

African philosophy offers a profoundly different, though not incompatible, orientation to the question of well-being. Whereas much of Western thought locates flourishing within the rational autonomy or psychological interiority of the individual, African philosophy emphasizes relationality, moral harmony, and community. Well-being is conceived not merely as what benefits the self, but as what sustains the *we*; the network of persons, nature, ancestors, and moral order. As Mbiti (1969, 108) famously declared, *"I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."*[3] This maxim captures a metaphysical and ethical worldview in which human identity and fulfilment emerge through participation in communal life. The African perspective thus provides an indispensable lens for reinterpreting well-being as a shared and situated reality.

Beginning with the idea of the communal self and relational ontology, we posit that at the heart of African thought lies the conviction that the person is essentially communal. We strongly see this with Mbiti (1969) and Menkiti (1984, 2004) who both argue that personhood is not an inherent status but an achievement realized through moral and social relations. By this, we mean the individual is born with potential personhood but becomes fully human (that is an *'ontodunatologist'*) only through ethical participation in community life. This view finds a succinct expression in the Southern African philosophy of *Ubuntu*[4], summarized by Ramose (1999, 52) as the idea that *"a person is a person through other persons."* Ubuntu situates well-being in the quality of human relationships; the virtues of compassion, mutual respect, and solidarity that bind society together. It rejects atomistic individualism and proposes a moral humanism in which the health and success of one depends on the health and success of all. In this relational ontology, moral failure is not merely a violation of duty but a fracture of the communal fabric. Illness, misfortune, and alienation are often interpreted as disruptions of social and spiritual harmony. Consequently, healing involves restoring relationships; with others, with ancestors, and with nature. This holistic understanding implies that well-being is not only psychological or bodily but also spiritual and environmental as defended by Tempels (1959) and Wiredu (1996). It mirrors Tangwa's (2009) later formulation of *eco-bio-*

[3] Mbiti's communitarian ontology is foundational for understanding African ethics. It resonates with Menkiti's view (1984) that personhood is achieved rather than given, emphasizing social maturation and moral responsibility.

[4] Ubuntu, derived from Bantu linguistic roots (*ntu* meaning "human"), functions as both an ethical and metaphysical concept, central to post-apartheid moral reconstruction in South Africa (see Ramose, 1999).

communitarianism, where ethical responsibility extends to the entire web of life.

The African conception of well-being is equally ignited and fortified by the associations of Ubuntu ethics and the moral community. According to Ramose (2003, 115), Ubuntu is not a mere cultural sentiment but a moral principle where human beings are morally indebted to sustain others' humanity. Well-being thus depends on participation in a moral community governed by reciprocity and care. This explains why Desmond Tutu (1999) popularized this insight in social practice, describing Ubuntu as the spiritual foundation of reconciliation and restorative justice. Under this paradigm, autonomy and interdependence are not opposed; rather, they are mutually reinforcing dimensions of human dignity. A community prospers when its members live in harmony, and individuals flourish when they contribute to collective good. From a philosophical standpoint, Ubuntu enriches global ethics by grounding well-being in *relational justice*; a concern for right relationship rather than abstract equality. It aligns with Aristotelian virtue ethics in its attention to character and with Kantian moral law in its universality, yet it surpasses both by incorporating empathy and forgiveness as ontological imperatives. In African terms, to be well is to live justly within the web of human and cosmic relations. Similarly, Nkrumah's Consciencism and Ujama'a Socialism enriches the concept of collective well-being in Africa in the 21st centuery. In modern African political philosophy, Kwame Nkrumah (1970) expanded the communal ethos into a theory of social and economic justice. He argued that true well-being cannot exist under exploitative or individualist systems that privilege a few at the expense of the many as we observe today in African political settings. In *Consciencism* (1964) and *Class Struggle in Africa* (1970), Nkrumah envisioned a socialist humanism that harmonizes individual freedom with collective progress like the villagization set-up of Ujama'a. The moral foundation of society, he contended, must rest on solidarity, equality, and shared ownership of resources. Nkrumah's view translates Ubuntu's ethics into the socio-political sphere, calling for structures that enable all to participate meaningfully in development. This move from metaphysical to structural thinking underscores a central African insight depicting that well-being is inseparable from justice. Individual happiness is vacuous where poverty and exclusion prevail. In this sense, African philosophy dissolves the dichotomy between moral virtue and material conditions by insisting that ethics and economics co-constitute human prosperity and success.

In addition, Frantz Fanon (1961) adds a radical dimension to this discourse by exposing the colonial impediments to African well-being[5]. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he diagnoses colonialism as both a material and psychological pathology that divides the world "into compartments" and alienates the colonized from their humanity. For Fanon, liberation is not only political emancipation but also existential healing; the restoration of self-worth and agency. His analysis implies that well-being in postcolonial contexts cannot be understood apart from historical injustice. True success requires decolonizing both structures and minds. Fanon's insight bridges African and Western perspectives by translating existentialist concern for authenticity into a collective project of emancipation. Where Aristotle and Kant focus on virtue and duty, Fanon insists on freedom and recognition as prerequisites for moral life. Thus, in the African experience, the philosophical pursuit of well-being is inseparable from the political struggle for justice. This permits us to look into a postcolonial reconfiguration with Achille Mbembe. Mbembe (2001) further extends the critique by examining the postcolonial condition as a domain of fractured subjectivity. In *On the Postcolony*, he argues that African existence is shaped by *"the violence of historical dispossession"* and by the lingering psychic structures of domination. This diagnosis reveals that well-being is not merely ethical or material but profoundly political and epistemic. Mbembe calls for a reimagining of African subjectivity beyond the binary of victim and oppressor, positing an intellectual and moral reconstruction parallel to what later thinkers such as Mosima (2019a, 2019b) identify as Afro-constructivism, as equally presented in this epistemic piece. Mbembe's deconstructive project converges with the communitarian and socialist currents discussed above in emphasizing relational autonomy and historical consciousness. Yet he also warns that recovery must be accompanied by critical reflexivity, that is to reclaim well-being, Africans

[5] Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* reframes colonialism as an existential disorder, extending Sartre's existentialist critique into a de-colonial humanism that integrates psychology and politics.

must rethink not only colonial inheritances but also their own modes of self-knowledge.

Consequently from the above elucidations on the African conception of well-being, moving toward a holistic African paradigm across these diverse strands; Ubuntu, socialism, decolonialism, African philosophy articulates a vision of well-being grounded in moral community, justice, and historical renewal. It refuses reduction to the satisfaction of bodily or mental needs, recognizing that these are necessary but not sufficient conditions of human flourishing. The African worldview integrates the ethical, social, ecological, and spiritual into a single fabric of existence. As such, African philosophy contributes not merely an alternative but a corrective to Western paradigms. It reminds us that the human person is never an isolated self but a node in a web of life. In African thought, to live well is to live rightly with others, with the environment, and with one's history. This communitarian ethos anticipates the more recent calls for sustainable development and global ethics, affirming that the health of the individual and the health of the community are mutually constitutive. Hence, this discussion is deepened in our subsequent part by examining how Cameroonian philosophers like Bernard Fonlon, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, Godfrey Tangwa, Mbih Jerome Tosam, and Pius Mosima, translate these continental insights into a contextual philosophy of moral rectitude, cultural autonomy, and eco-ethical responsibility.

4. Cameroonian Perspectives on Human Well-Being

The Cameroonian philosophical landscape offers a microcosm of Africa's wider intellectual quest to reconcile moral, cultural, and developmental aspirations. Thinkers such as **Bernard Nsokika Fonlon, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, Godfrey B. Tangwa, Mbih Jerome Tosam,** and **Pius Mosima** have advanced distinctive perspectives that translate African communitarian ethics into reflective projects suited to contemporary realities. Collectively, they portray human well-being as the product of moral integrity, intellectual freedom, cultural authenticity, and ecological balance. Their works illustrate that philosophy, when grounded in indigenous wisdom and modern critical reflection, can generate frameworks of sustainable and holistic emancipation.

First is Bernard Nsokika Fonlon on *Moral Rectitude and the Ethos of Integrity*. **Bernard Nsokika Fonlon** (1969) viewed human well-being primarily through the moral lens of character formation[6]. In his essay *Genuine Intellectuals in Africa*, Fonlon insists that true progress begins not with material prosperity but with moral and intellectual regeneration. For him, *"true development begins with the liberation of the mind,"* meaning that self-knowledge and virtue are preconditions for authentic progress. Fonlon's project, situated in postcolonial Cameroon, was both ethical and pedagogical, that is, to form citizens capable of critical thought and moral responsibility. He believed that Africa's future depended on an educated elite whose integrity would release throughout society. Fonlon's understanding of well-being therefore links the moral and the political by depicting that an unjust or corrupt society cannot nurture human emancipation. His vision recalls Aristotle's conception of virtue as civic excellence and Kant's insistence on autonomy as moral worth. Yet Fonlon situates these ideals within the African communal matrix, that is, virtue is not an individual accomplishment but a collective moral culture. For him, education must cultivate both intellect and conscience, for *"intellectual excellence without moral rectitude is a menace to society."* In this synthesis, Fonlon articulates an ethics of responsibility that remains foundational for Cameroonian moral thought.

Second is Fabien Eboussi Boulaga on *Decolonization and Cultural Re-appropriation*. Where Fonlon emphasizes morality, **Eboussi Boulaga** (1981) accentuates epistemic and cultural freedom[7]. In *Christianisme sans fétiche: Révélation et domination*, he exposes how colonial and missionary ideologies undermined African self-understanding by imposing alien categories of thought. For Boulaga, well-being cannot be imported; it must emerge from within the historical and cultural consciousness of a people. His

[6] Fonlon's moral vision aligns with the Thomistic and Aristotelian traditions of virtue ethics but is contextualized within Africa's moral decay post-independence. He saw education as the *"laboratory of conscience."*

[7] Boulaga's *Christianisme sans fétiche* was revolutionary in Francophone Africa for its critique of missionary paternalism and its demand that Christianity be reinterpreted through African cultural agency.

philosophy of decolonization is not merely political but spiritual, that is, a call for Africans to reclaim the right to define their own truth and destiny. Boulaga's critique echoes with Fanon's insistence that liberation is also psychic and epistemological. He argues that Africa's crisis is fundamentally a crisis of meaning, a dislocation between inherited institutions and lived experience. To restore well-being therefore, Africans must "think themselves anew" through what he calls *le retour au même* - a return to authenticity that is creative, not nostalgic. This vision of cultural re-appropriation remains vital for any discourse on human well-being in postcolonial contexts, where dependency and imitation still obscure self-realization.

Third is the living epistemic legend; Godfrey Tangwa on *Bio-communitarianism and Environmental Ethics*. **Godfrey B. Tangwa** extends the moral and decolonial projects into the bioethical domain[8]. His theory of ***eco-bio-communitarianism*** (Tangwa 2009) emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the cosmos. In contrast to Western anthropocentrism, Tangwa's framework posits that moral responsibility extends beyond interpersonal relations to include the environment and non-human life forms. Well-being, therefore, is ecological before it is psychological because to harm nature is to undermine the moral foundation of human existence. Tangwa argues that African traditional thought, often dismissed as "animistic," actually embodies an advanced ecological wisdom. The African sense of belonging to a moral universe (where plants, animals, and spirits are integral members of the community) encourages sustainable living. His position enriches global bioethics by demonstrating that care for life must transcend species boundaries. Through this communitarian ecology, Tangwa integrates ethics, metaphysics, and environmental science into a coherent vision of holistic well-being. It is a vision in which the dignity of humanity depends on reverence for all forms of existence.

Fourth is the epistemic son of Tangwa, Mbih Jerome Tosam on *Indigenous Epistemologies and Well-Being Policy*. **Mbih Jerome Tosam** (2019) critiques the marginalization of indigenous epistemologies in shaping African development and well-being policies. He argues that African societies often import external models of progress that neglect their own ethical and cognitive resources. According to Tosam, *"African well-being is intrinsically linked to its indigenous wisdom systems, where knowledge, ethics, and daily practices are interwoven."* This epistemological holism challenges the Western separation of theory and practice, suggesting that sustainable well-being must harmonize traditional knowledge with modern innovation. Tosam's contribution lies in his articulation of an "epistemic ecology," where diverse ways of knowing coexist and interact for communal benefit. His call echoes Dewey's (1954) pragmatism and Sen's (1993) capabilities approach but grounds them in African cultural contexts. For him, philosophy should not remain abstract, rather, it must inform education, governance, and environmental stewardship. In reclaiming local wisdom as a living intellectual heritage, Tosam bridges the gap between traditional values and modern policy, reinforcing the philosophical claim that well-being is cultural before it becomes economic.

Last but not the least is the thinker from the South West region of Cameroon, Pius Mosima on *Afro-Constructivism and Philosophical Synthesis*. **Pius Mosima** (2018, 2019a, 2019b) develops these insights into a systematic framework he calls **Afro-constructivism**[9], which argues for the creative reconstruction of African thought in dialogue with contemporary global philosophy. Mosima rejects both uncritical traditionalism and unreflective modernism; instead, he envisions philosophy as a mediating activity that constructs meaning across time and cultures. For Mosima, well-being is realized when societies engage their indigenous resources critically and adapt them to present challenges. Afro-constructivism affirms that African philosophy must not simply repeat ancestral wisdom but reinterpret it through rational reflection for a glocalized reality. In this sense, it echoes with Fonlon's call for intellectual freedom and Boulaga's plea for decolonial authenticity, while extending them toward practical engagement with globalization and glocalization. By advocating for inclusive development and epistemic creativity, Mosima positions philosophy as a vital force for moral and material renewal. His framework embodies what this paper

[8] Tangwa's bio-communitarian ethics stands among the earliest systematic African contributions to global bioethics, emphasizing ecological solidarity and moral inclusivity beyond species boundaries.

[9] Mosima's Afro-Constructivism bridges metaphysical anthropology and development philosophy, proposing that reconstruction of African identity must go hand in hand with scientific and technological creativity.

identifies as the *Afro-constructivist approach to well-being*, which is a synthesis of ethical, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions oriented toward human emancipation and well-being in the 21st century Cameroon, Africa, and the world.

Synthetically from the Cameroonian intellectual trajectory, these thinkers from Africa in miniature (Cameroon) present well-being as a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing moral character (Fonlon), cultural reawakening (Boulaga), ecological ethics (Tangwa), epistemic inclusivity (Tosam), and creative reconstruction (Mosima). Each thinker addresses a specific dimension of Africa's postcolonial predicament, yet all converge on the conviction that authentic development must originate from within. Their collective contribution demonstrates that philosophy in Cameroon is neither derivative nor merely speculative; it is existentially grounded and socially transformative. In Fonlon's virtue ethics, Boulaga's critical hermeneutics, Tangwa's ecological ethics, Tosam's epistemic pluralism, and Mosima's constructivist synthesis, we discern a coherent trajectory of thought that situates well-being at the intersection of morality, knowledge, culture, and environment. This trajectory affirms a principle central to African metaphysics: that to be well is to be whole, that is, to live in harmony with self, others, nature, and transcendence. The Cameroonian tradition thus offers an exemplary model for rethinking philosophy's role in nation-building and global ethics.

5. The Afro-Constructivist Synthesis of Human Well-being

The preceding sections have shown that human well-being cannot be exhausted by the satisfaction of bodily or mental needs. From Western ethics we learned that flourishing involves virtue, autonomy, and meaning; from African and Cameroonian philosophy we discerned that communal harmony, moral rectitude, and cultural rootedness are essential conditions for human fulfilment. The question that now arises is how these insights can be integrated into a coherent philosophical framework capable of addressing the contemporary African and global condition. The answer, I propose, lies in the *Afro-Constructivist synthesis.*

Afro-Constructivism, a term popularized by Pius Mosima (2018, 2019a, 2019b), designates a reflective and creative posture that seeks to reconstruct African philosophical heritage through dialogue with modern global thought. It is *Afro* because it draws its inspiration from African ontology, ethics, and epistemology; it is *constructivist* because it insists that knowledge and meaning are products of active human construction rather than passive inheritance. Afro-Constructivism thus rejects two extremes: on the one hand, cultural conservatism that treats tradition as static and closed; on the other, uncritical Westernization that alienates Africa from its own sources of wisdom[10]. Within this framework, philosophy becomes an instrument of renewal; a method of thinking that critically engages inherited values, reconstructs them in the light of reason and experience, and applies them to present existential challenges. Mosima (2019a) insists that the purpose of African philosophy is not to romanticize the past but to *recreate* it: to transform cultural heritage into a resource for social innovation and moral growth. In this sense, Afro-Constructivism is both epistemological and ethical as it tells us *how* to know and *how* to live. It should be noted that the Afro-Constructivist approach treats well-being as a *constructive integration* of multiple dimensions; biological, psychological, moral, cultural, ecological, and spiritual. This integration reflects the African understanding of reality as interconnected and dynamic. The individual is neither an isolated self nor a mere appendage of the collective; rather, personhood is realized through constructive participation in a moral and relational cosmos (Menkiti 2004; Tangwa 2009). This synthesis dissolves the classical dichotomy between body and mind. In Western philosophy, particularly since Descartes, the human being has often been conceived as a dual substance; "*res extensa"* (body) and "*res cogitans"* (mind). Afro-Constructivism transcends this dualism by viewing human existence as a continuum of interrelated forces: the physical, psychological, social, and metaphysical flow into one another. Well-being therefore cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of either bodily appetites or mental desires; it is achieved when the totality of life forces is harmonized within the moral order of the community and nature. From this standpoint, health and happiness are not private achievements but communal accomplishments. As Ubuntu teaches, one's wholeness is sustained

[10] This dialectical posture recalls Hegel's "*Aufhebung"*; a process of sublation, in which contradictions are preserved and transcended in a higher synthesis, though Afro-Constructivism reverses its Eurocentric teleology.

by the wholeness of others. Afro-Constructivism thus redefines well-being as *relational self-realization*, that is, a dynamic process of becoming human *with* and *through* others in a shared world.

Through the lens of an *Ethical and Epistemic Dimensions*, the ethical core of Afro-Constructivism lies in its commitment to *responsible creativity*. Human beings are moral agents entrusted with the power to construct realities that enhance or diminish life. This recalls Fonlon's (1969) insistence on moral rectitude and Tangwa's (2009) call for ecological responsibility. Afro-Constructivism demands that the creative act (whether intellectual, political, or technological) be guided by the principles of respect, solidarity, and sustainability. Ethical progress, in this view, is inseparable from epistemic progress as *knowing well entails living well*. Epistemically, Afro-Constructivism adopts pluralism. It recognizes that truth is not monopolized by any single tradition or method but emerges through the interplay of perspectives. Indigenous wisdom, scientific inquiry, and philosophical reasoning are complementary modes of accessing reality. This epistemic inclusivity recalls Tosam's (2019) concept of *epistemic ecology*, where diverse forms of knowledge cohabit for communal benefit. It also resonates with Dewey's (1929) pragmatism and Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities approach, which both emphasize the dynamic, context-dependent nature of human flourishing.

Thus, Afro-Constructivism is not relativism but relational realism, that is, the belief that reality and well-being are co-constructed through rational dialogue, moral engagement, and lived experience. On the *Socio-Political Imperative* scale, philosophy, in the Afro-Constructivist sense, must engage the concrete conditions of life. Mosima (2019b) warns that abstraction without application risks making African philosophy sterile. Therefore, the Afro-Constructivist approach extends its concern for well-being into the socio-political sphere. It insists that ethical reflection must inform policies on education, governance, health, and development. In this regard, Afro-Constructivism aligns with Nkrumah's (1970) socialism and Nyerere's (1968) *Ujamaa* philosophy, which both argued that social justice and collective advancement are indispensable to human flourishing. However, Afro-Constructivism adds a philosophical nuance: development must be grounded in the creative synthesis of tradition and modernity. Instead of importing models from outside, societies should construct their own frameworks rooted in cultural realities and guided by universal ethical norms. This approach offers a critical alternative to both Western technocracy and populist nationalism. It views well-being as *development with identity*; a moral, intellectual, and cultural project aimed at humanizing progress.

At the juncture of transcending body-mind reductionism via the heart of the paper's guiding question; *whether human well-being is reducible to the satisfaction of bodily and/or mental needs*, Afro-Constructivism provides a decisive and categorical response of No. The human being is an integrated, relational, and historical entity whose flourishing cannot be captured by physiological or psychological parameters alone. The satisfaction of basic needs may secure survival, but not necessarily meaning or fulfilment. Following Viktor Frankl's (2006) *'logotherapy'*, the Afro-Constructivist perspective affirms that the search for meaning is an irreducible dimension of human existence. However, whereas Frankl grounds this in existential psychology, Afro-Constructivism situates meaning within community and moral participation. The individual attains fulfilment not in isolation but in shared pursuit of justice, harmony, and creative transformation. In short, Afro-Constructivism transcends reductionism by fusing the material, moral, and metaphysical into a single continuum of well-being. It echoes Tangwa's (2009) ecological ethics and Fonlon's (1969) moral pedagogy, reminding us that the true measure of progress is not wealth or comfort but the degree of moral and communal flourishing[11].

Thus, the Afro-Constructivist synthesis has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it bridges the gap between African and Western paradigms, demonstrating that philosophy can be intercultural without being derivative. It validates African conceptual resources as legitimate instruments of global philosophical inquiry. Practically, it provides a normative compass for development ethics; a framework through which policy, education, and environmental governance can be evaluated in terms of

[11] Both Fonlon and Tangwa converge on the notion that ethics must sustain life in all its dimensions; spiritual, human, and environmental, anticipating today's discourse on sustainability and global justice.

their contribution to holistic well-being. By integrating virtue ethics, communitarian morality, ecological responsibility, and pragmatic pluralism, Afro-Constructivism articulates a vision of the *good life* that is both universal and context-sensitive. It affirms that philosophy, far from being an abstract pursuit, is an indispensable tool for shaping human destiny. In conclusion, the Afro-Constructivist approach asserts that human well-being is not a static state to be achieved but a continuous process of ethical and creative construction. The good life, from this perspective, is the ongoing work of aligning human potential with moral responsibility, cultural identity, and ecological balance. From here into our next evaluation, we therefore explore how this integrated understanding informs the psychological, anthropological, and sociological dimensions of human flourishing.

6. Interdisciplinary Reflections on Human Well-Being: Psychological, Anthropological, and Sociological Dimensions

Philosophy provides the conceptual architecture for understanding well-being, but its full realization demands dialogue with other disciplines that study human life in its concrete dimensions. Psychology, anthropology, and sociology each illuminate aspects of well-being that philosophy alone cannot exhaust. From the Afro-Constructivist standpoint, these disciplines do not compete with philosophy but complement it, enriching our comprehension of what it means to live well. Integrating these perspectives underscores the claim that human well-being transcends bodily and mental satisfaction to encompass moral, relational, and structural harmony.

Firstly, from a psychological standpoint grounded on meaning, motivation and flourishing, we hypothesize that psychology has long grappled with the question of what constitutes happiness or mental health. Classical theories, such as those of Abraham Maslow (1954) and Martin Seligman (2011), emphasize needs, motivation, and positive functioning. Maslow's hierarchy of needs identifies physiological and safety needs as foundational[12], yet he maintains that true self-actualization arises only when individuals pursue higher goals; creativity, morality, and meaning. Similarly, Seligman's *PERMA* model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) broadens the notion of well-being beyond mere pleasure or the absence of distress. These frameworks resonate with the Afro-Constructivist emphasis on moral and existential fulfilment. However, mainstream psychology often retains an individualistic bias. Well-being is typically measured through subjective reports of happiness, life satisfaction, or resilience. The Afro-Constructivist approach offers a correction to this narrative by insisting that psychological flourishing is inseparable from ethical and communal contexts[13]. Viktor Frankl's (2006) existential psychology already hints at this when he writes that meaning is discovered not within oneself but through engagement with something or someone beyond the self. In African thought, this "beyond" is concretized in the community, the family, and the cosmos. Thus, psychological well-being, from an Afro-constructivist perspective, is not merely intrapsychic but relational, that is, it depends on the quality of one's participation in the moral community. Likewise, contemporary positive psychology's focus on optimism and self-efficacy finds a cultural counterpart in African communal optimism with the belief that individual hardship can be transcended through solidarity and shared hope. This explains why in many African societies, social rituals, storytelling, and collective celebrations mostly during end of year or cultural festivals like the Ngondo, Nguon (Ngouon), Maloko ma Mboa (Cameroon) and Durbar (Nigeria), Homowo (Ghana), Fespaco (Burkina Faso), eSwatini (South Africa)[14] etc, function as therapeutic

[12] Maslow's framework has been criticized for cultural bias, yet its upper tiers (self-actualization and transcendence) align closely with African communal aspirations for moral and spiritual excellence.

[13] In African psychologies of the self, personhood is not defined by inner states but by the quality of one's moral relations. Healing and identity formation thus occur through communal participation.

[14] - The *Ngondo* is an annual spiritual and cultural festival of the Sawa coastal peoples of Cameroon, particularly the Douala. It symbolizes reconciliation with ancestors and renewal of communal harmony through water rituals at the Wouri River. Beyond its spiritual function, the festival strengthens social cohesion and transmits collective identity across generations (Ayissi, 1993). - The *Nguon* (or *Ngouon*) of the Bamoun people is a centuries-old festival of justice and governance during which the king (Mfon) presents an account of stewardship to the people. It blends ceremony, accountability, and moral pedagogy, reaffirming

mechanisms that restore balance and reinforce belonging. Such practices illustrate the convergence of psychological health and cultural meaning within a holistic conception of well-being.

Secondly, from an anthropological perspective grounded on culture, ritual, and symbolic order, anthropology deepens our understanding of well-being by situating it within cultural systems of meaning. As Clifford Geertz (1973) observed, humans are *"animals suspended in webs of significance they themselves have spun."* Well-being, therefore, cannot be understood apart from these webs of the symbols, myths, and moral codes through which people interpret and organize their lives. For African societies, these cultural matrices include cosmologies that link human life to nature, ancestors, and divinities. In traditional African anthropology, as seen in Bronislaw Malinowski's (1984) field studies, rituals and communal ceremonies are not merely aesthetic but functional because they reaffirm collective values and restore equilibrium in times of crisis. A funeral, for example, is both an emotional and metaphysical act of reintegration by binding the living and the dead in a continuum of existence. Health, prosperity, and social harmony are therefore not isolated conditions but manifestations of balance within this symbolic order. From the Afro-Constructivist point of view, anthropology validates the idea that well-being is *constructed* through cultural practices. Each society shapes the conditions for development according to its worldview. Nonetheless, Afro-Constructivism adds a philosophical layer as it urges societies to reconstruct these practices reflectively, preserving their moral wisdom while adapting them to modern challenges. For instance, environmental rituals that once governed traditional farming can inspire contemporary ecological ethics (Tangwa 2009). Similarly, initiation ceremonies that marked moral maturity can inform modern civic education and leadership training. In this way, anthropology and Afro-Constructivism converge in affirming that culture is not static tradition but a living, dynamic resource for well-being.

Thirdly from the sociological perspective grounded on community, solidarity, and social justice, we postulate that sociology contributes a structural dimension to the discourse on well-being[15]. Émile Durkheim (2002) demonstrated that even personal acts, such as suicide, are deeply influenced by social conditions; levels of integration, regulation, and solidarity. His insight that *"anomie"* or normlessness leads to despair reveals that individual happiness cannot be separated from the moral order of society. Similarly, modern sociologists emphasize that well-being correlates with social equality, trust, and participation. The African communitarian worldview naturally aligns with these sociological findings. Concepts such as *Ubuntu* and *Ujama'a* (Nyerere 1968) embody Durkheim's intuition in ethical terms: *society thrives when its members are bound by mutual care and shared purpose*. Afro-Constructivism extends this by advocating for structures that institutionalize moral community; educational systems that cultivate civic virtue, economic policies that ensure distributive justice, and environmental governance that preserves common resources. Furthermore, sociological theories of social capital as expressed by Putnam (2000) find

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the unity between ruler and ruled; a practical model of communal well-being and participatory ethics (see Ayissi, 1993; Nguimeya, 2017).

- The *Maloko ma Mboa* is a contemporary Botaland cultural festival celebrating unity, creativity, and ancestral continuity. Through dance, traditional games, and communal feasting, it functions as a cultural therapy that restores identity and collective pride in postcolonial rural communities (Ewoko, field note, 2024).
- The *Durbar* festival, prominent in northern Nigeria, is a centuries-old royal procession marking Eid celebrations. It involves horse parades, music, and homage to traditional rulers. The festival embodies Islamic-African synthesis and serves as a public reaffirmation of unity, courage, and social order (Adamu, 1978).
- The *Homowo* festival of the Ga people of Ghana commemorates the end of a historical famine and celebrates the abundance of harvest. Literally meaning "hooting at hunger," it transforms collective suffering into communal thanksgiving; a symbolic act of resilience and psychological healing (Nukunya, 2003).
- The *Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou* (FESPACO), founded in 1969, is Africa's premier film festival. It celebrates creative expression, cultural identity, and continental solidarity through art. The event illustrates how collective creativity fosters intellectual and emotional well-being (Diawara, 1992).
- In eSwatini, festivals such as the *Umhlanga* (Reed Dance) and *Incwala* (Festival of Kingship) integrate music, dance, and spirituality in reaffirming national and moral unity. They embody communal purification and renewal, symbolizing the rhythm of life and continuity central to African metaphysics of well-being (Kuper, 1973).

[15] Durkheim's notion of *anomie* finds a social analogue in postcolonial African societies, where moral dislocation and corruption undermine collective purpose, issues Fonlon and Boulaga both sought to redress.

expression in African communal practices of cooperation, reciprocity, and kinship networks. These networks provide not only economic support but also emotional and moral security, demonstrating that well-being is both a social product and a social responsibility. When these bonds are eroded by corruption, inequality, or alienation, the entire moral fabric weakens, leading to psychological and political malaise. Therefore, Afro-Constructivism responds by calling for a reconstruction of these social ties through education, dialogue, and ethical leadership.

Hence, by engaging psychology, anthropology, and sociology, Afro-Constructivism positions itself as a truly interdisciplinary philosophy of well-being. It asserts that the human person is simultaneously a biological organism, a psychological subject, a cultural being, and a social agent. No single discipline can capture the totality of this reality. Therefore, a genuine account of well-being must integrate the empirical with the moral, the subjective with the collective, and the rational with the symbolic. Psychology reminds us that well-being involves emotional balance and self-realization; anthropology shows that it is culturally mediated; sociology reveals that it is structurally sustained. Philosophy, specifically Afro-Constructivism, unites these insights by providing an all-embracing ethical and metaphysical coherence. It interprets well-being as the moral equilibrium of these dimensions: a state of harmony between self and society, reason and emotion, tradition and progress, humanity and nature. This interdisciplinary synthesis carries profound implications for development policy and education in Africa. It suggests that health programs must address not only disease but also dignity; that education should form character, not just competence; and that economic planning must respect cultural and ecological contexts. It also demands that research and governance embrace epistemic pluralism, that is valuing indigenous knowledge systems alongside modern science, as Tosam (2019) and Tangwa (2009) have argued. Afro-Constructivism thus transforms the study of well-being into a *civilizational project*, that is one that aligns intellectual inquiry with the ethical task of building humane societies. In synthesizing these interdisciplinary insights, Afro-Constructivism anticipates what contemporary theorists call the "human science of flourishing." This emerging paradigm, advanced by thinkers such as Seligman (2011) and Nussbaum (2011), seeks to bridge the gap between empirical research and normative philosophy. Afro-Constructivism enriches this movement by grounding it in Africa's communitarian metaphysics and ecological ethics. Ultimately, the Afro-Constructivist lens reveals that human well-being is not a domain of specialized study but the very horizon of human existence. The psychological, anthropological, and sociological perspectives are not exterior to philosophy; they are its concrete manifestations in the world. When properly integrated, they show that to live well is to participate responsibly in the ongoing construction of a moral and meaningful universe.

7. Conclusion

Conclusively, the question that guided this inquiry; *is human well-being reducible to the full satisfaction of the needs of the body and/or the mind?* has revealed itself to be both philosophical and civilizational. In an attempt to elucidate on the philosophical essence of human well-being throughout this paper, we postulated that while the satisfaction of bodily and mental needs is indispensable, it does not suffice to capture the fullness of human prosperity. Human well-being is not a quantitative accumulation of pleasures or mental states, but a qualitative harmony of moral, social, ecological, and existential dimensions. Primo, beyond reductionism for an integrative nature of well-being, we observed that philosophical reflection from both Western and African traditions confirms that the human person is a complex unity rather than a composite of separable parts. Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, Kant's moral autonomy, and Frankl's search for meaning each affirm that human well-being is realized in rational and moral excellence, not in the mere satisfaction of appetite. Similarly, African philosophy articulated through the communitarian ethics of Mbiti, Menkiti, and Ramose, locates human fulfilment in right relationships with others, with nature, and with the divine. The Afro-Constructivist approach integrates these insights by treating well-being as an ongoing *process of construction*: a moral and creative activity through which human beings harmonize the physical, mental, social, and spiritual aspects of existence. This synthesis moves beyond dualistic reductionism to affirm a holistic anthropology. The body and mind are seen not as separate realms but as expressions of a single ontological continuum, what Tangwa (2009) calls the *"eco-bio-communitarian"* web of life. Secundo, the Afro-Constructivist paradigm, grounded in the works of Fonlon, Boulaga,

Tangwa, Tosam, and Mosima, advances the significance of a philosophy of well-being that is dynamic, contextual, and participatory. It is *dynamic* because it views well-being as an evolving synthesis rather than a fixed state; *contextual* because it acknowledges the cultural and historical particularities that shape human fulfilment; and *participatory* because it demands the active engagement of individuals and communities in the moral construction of their world. In this light, well-being is not simply *had* but *made*. It emerges through ethical commitment, cultural creativity, and ecological consciousness. Fonlon's emphasis on moral rectitude, Boulaga's decolonial re-appropriation, Tangwa's bioethical humanism, Tosam's epistemic ecology, and Mosima's constructive philosophy together chart a distinctly Cameroonian path within the broader African discourse. They remind us that philosophy, when rooted in lived experience, is an act of liberation; a means of restoring harmony between knowledge, value, and existence. Tertio, the interdisciplinary horizon via psychology, anthropology, and sociology each affirm aspects of this holistic vision. Psychology teaches that well-being entails meaning and engagement, not just pleasure or satisfaction (Frankl 2006; Seligman 2011). Anthropology shows that cultural symbols and rituals shape the moral imagination that sustains communal harmony (Geertz 1973; Malinowski 1984). Sociology demonstrates that social cohesion and justice are structural prerequisites for individual happiness (Durkheim 2002). Afro-Constructivism at this juncture gathers these disciplines under a single philosophical horizon, emphasizing that human well-being or prosperity is co-authored by the self and the community, by reason and culture, by ethics and ecology. This integration offers a corrective to technocratic approaches to development that measure progress by economic growth alone. It proposes instead a *civilizational ethic* of flourishing grounded in dignity, participation, and care.

Hence, the practical implications of this synthesis grounded on philosophy for development and policy extend beyond the academic domain. In the African and Cameroonian contexts, the redefinition of well-being has tangible relevance for governance, education, and social policy. In *governance*, it calls for development models that balance economic efficiency with moral purpose, ensuring that policies promote justice, inclusion, and ecological sustainability. In *education*, it reaffirms Fonlon's ideal of the *genuine intellectual*: one whose learning is guided by conscience and service rather than self-interest. Education, in this sense, becomes the cultivation of character as much as of competence. In *health and environment*, Tangwa's bio-communitarian ethics reminds policymakers that human survival is inseparable from ecological integrity. Sustainable well-being demands care for all forms of life. In *cultural policy*, Boulaga and Tosam's insistence on epistemic autonomy encourages the inclusion of indigenous wisdom systems in national development planning, ensuring that progress remains culturally meaningful and morally grounded. In all these domains, Afro-Constructivism offers a *normative compass*, that is, a philosophical foundation for redefining the aims and values of modern African societies. It insists that the good life must be both humanizing and sustainable, both rational and relational.

Ultimately, this paper affirms that philosophy's task is not only to interpret the world but to *construct* it wisely[16]. The philosopher, in the Afro-Constructivist sense, is a builder of meaning, that is, a mediator between tradition and innovation, body and spirit, reason and life. Human well-being is the fruit of this mediation. In the global age of technological acceleration and cultural homogenization, Afro-Constructivism offers a countervailing vision, that is, a philosophy that values connection over consumption, community over competition, and wisdom over mere knowledge. It reminds humanity that progress without moral compass leads to existential impoverishment. True well-being is achieved when humans live in harmony with the moral order of the cosmos[17], guided by conscience, compassion, and creativity. The Afro-Constructivist understanding of human well-being therefore restores to philosophy its ancient vocation: *the pursuit of wisdom as the art of living well*. It affirms that to be human, and an '*ontodunatologist'*, is to be a co-creator of meaning within an interdependent universe. This view transcends the narrow materialism that dominates modern discourse and reawakens the ethical imagination

[16] This echoes Karl Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), but Afro-Constructivism reinterprets construction as ethical creation rather than revolutionary overthrow, a continuous, moral building of civilization.

[17] This reflects the African metaphysical principle of *vital force* (Tempels 1959), which conceives being as relational vitality. Harmony sustains this force; disharmony diminishes it.

that sustains civilization. In sum, human well-being cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of bodily and mental needs. It is an enduring process of becoming; of constructing a world in which goodness, truth, and beauty converge in the progress of all beings. As Fonlon would insist, *"the liberation of the mind"* remains the first condition for such a world; as Tangwa would add, *this liberation must extend to nature and community alike*; and as Mosima concludes, philosophy must always be *constructive*, that is, ever rebuilding the moral architecture of our shared humanity.

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