

# New Directions

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## Poems

Editorial Staff

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yet earned first class degrees from major Western universities, where the great-grandchildren of European literates had failed to make a better performance.

These African success stories are categorical denials of the racial inferiority usually associated with Africa's children.

My view is that the traditional African's conception of history, and his continent's material underdevelopment were the effects of his ontological response rather than the confirmations of his genetic deficiency.

32 In light of the above, I would now conclude that the traditional African man's concept of time is three-dimensional. This is to say that he believes in a past, a present and a future. Yet, in conceding this point, I need to add that the matter does not end with the three-dimensionality of time. The nature of such a conception needs further exploration; but because I do not have enough time nor space to explore these frontiers of African thought, I find it appropriate to make two observations concerning its nature.

First, it should be pointed out that the concept of unilinearity of time, as developed in Western history, is based on an illusion, which is detectable so long as man chases after the mirage of materiality. This illusion becomes exposed the moment the ontological response of a society shifts its focus from excessive love for materiality to excessive love for the social values and relationships between man and society.

To put this philosophical point over which African man differs substantially with his Western counterpart, in another way, I would like to argue that, whereas the Western theory of historical unilinearity is inspired by the matrix of causes and effects that govern the world of concrete reality, the African's conception of time is guided by his excessive concern for communal harmony in rituals, deeds and thoughts.

The idea of unilinearity of history is inspired by, and based on, the intercourse between the various elements in the hierarchy of ontological units in the universe. These two visions of history and life are very different indeed, and only a fool will absolutize the concept of unilinearity as developed out of one experience, and then try to impose it on the rest of mankind.

In summarizing the foregoing discussion, I think it is worth noting that the Afri-

ship between God, man and the non-human elements in the universe, is the key to the understanding of traditional African philosophy. This view not only sheds light on the self-image of African man, but also provides an intellectual map of the metaphysical world of the traditional African man.

Another conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing is that traditional African man sees himself as a party to an ontological and cosmological partnership and because of this understanding of his life on earth, he always sees harmony as the best form of human expression. To the traditional African man, life is chaotic so long as man's links with God and others in existence are shattered. Because of this fear of breaking the ontological bonds, traditional African man always prefers harmony and social order. □

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- 16 This is a restatement of his position as presented by Janheinz Jahn in his *Muntu*, p. 106.
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#### The Serpent

I may cringe in his presence  
but  
I am not unerringly afraid of the Serpent.  
His beauty is such that it circles to  
gloss  
but I know the degrees of his beauty  
in between  
though I have only perceived these  
in the pitch dark  
and into the darkness I must return  
where he snakes and slithers  
within the deep  
recesses of my skull.

My hairs stand from my scalp  
resembling him.  
They dance as he dances  
They frighten others as he frightens me.  
I am not afraid of the Serpent  
but he fills me with the fear of him  
the way he winds himself up tightly  
in the hollow of my head  
uprooting memories of mysteries  
which I had forgotten  
which I had learned to believe  
had never existed

He undulates into the depths of my soul  
and when my body dies  
my captors will think that the Serpent  
sleeping  
in my skull is  
an ordinary brain  
until he rouses and crawls out  
to strangle their life from them  
speaking  
my blues poems as they beg us  
for mercy and forgiveness. . . .

I will not be able to answer them  
I will have left my mouth  
I will not be able to beg the Serpent to  
have mercy on my oppressors  
down here.

I am not afraid of  
but I have fear for the Serpent  
for he holds the history of my people.

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