On Depth in Culture

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Abstract

What is 'depth in culture'? We argue the irreducibly metaphorical nature of 'depth' entails it cannot be approached through a logical analysis of conceptual material for which 'necessary and sufficient conditions' can be ascertained, but that its 'aspectual shape' can be described through exploration of experiential material. Using three examples to explore the question, we describe phenomenological, hermeneutic, inter-cultural, and dynamic aspects that we propose are 'criterial' for depth.

Reference

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Depth in culture: A preliminary sketch

We're asking the question, What is 'depth in culture'? Taking a cue for our way of working from French existential philosopher Gabriel Marcel, who rather than present the polished final version of a text about an experience would aim to engage the reader in actively participating in the work of thinking through the phenomenon, we present here a sketch based on an iterative process of refining rough and inadequate initial characterizations, primarily through some examples. We have chosen three examples to address this question: a comparative one (the experience motivating articulations of 'transcendence' made by the thinkers, sages, and visionaries of 'the Axial age'); an individual one (C. G. Jung's experiences as expressed in *The Red Book*); and a contrastive case (the visionary experience of Crow leader Plenty Coups). In recognition of the multifaceted nature of the depth metaphor, our approach is to try to flesh out what might be called the 'aspectual shape' of depth. Engaging these examples in the context of our depth question will provide a more specific vocabulary and terminology for articulating depth, empirically grounded in examples we propose are particularly vivid and salient in exemplifying 'depth in culture.' In what follows, we suggest phenomenological, hermeneutic, inter-cultural, and dynamic aspects that could be said to be 'criterial' for depth.

Examples of Depth

The Axial Age: Transcendence and depth

Karl Jaspers (1949/1953), in the immediate wake of World War II, argues for a 'truly universal world history' as a way for humanity to gain its bearings in an epochal moment.[1] In his effort to define the contours for such a universal world history, he offers his thesis of an 'Axial age' as constituting 'the axis' for such a history. The Axial age thesis, all too briefly summarized, is as follows: a very limited number of Old World civilizations – Jaspers claims 5, later scholarship rejects the inclusion of Zoroaster and Persia and reduces the number to 4 – experience an 'Axial revolution' or 'breakthrough' within their self-understanding, in the centuries 800-200 BCE ('around 500 BCE').[2] This breakthrough amounts to an evolutionary transformation in human self-consciousness (Bellah, 2011). This revolutionary breakthrough in ancient Greece, Palestine, India, and

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[1] The technologically-enabled horrors of the war, whether the bureaucratic techniques of genocide of the death camps, the phenomenon of 'the masses' and their control by propaganda, the world-spanning logistics incurred by modern nation-states waging 'total war', or the beginning of the Atomic Age that ended the war, motivated Jaspers to interpret the fact of an emerging 'globality' made possible by modern technology as creating the imperative for humanity to try to guide itself with some degree of consciousness toward a global future, rather than blindly hurling itself into the next moment. The next moment could well be the next horror, or a moment of self-destructiveness and peril now global in scope.

[2] See Jaspers (1953; 1962), Bellah (2011), Bellah & Joas (2012), Eisenstadt (1986), Arnason, Eisenstadt, & Wittrock (2005), *Daedalus* (1975); for a somewhat different take on the Axial age, restricting it to Judaism and Greece, that is provocatively articulated in terms of a slow, collective, historical process in the interplay between symbolization and experience, cf. Voegelin (1956 – 1974).

China, articulated by philosophers, prophets, holy men, and sages, seeds the advent of unprecedentedly complex metaphysico-religious systems that accompany the development of civilizational cultures which prove to overreach and outlast the numerous shorter-lived particular empires and dynasties that invoke and believe in those systems, and that temporarily carry and elaborate those civilizational cultures. Each of these 'post-Axial' formations (China and neo-Confucianism and Daoism; India and Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism; 'the West' and Judaism, Greek thought, Christianity) unlike 'non-Axial' or 'pre-Axial' thought and societies, has a dynamic tension toward some particular version of transcendence, some particular claim staked on the nature of 'universality', that defines it; and somehow, this aspiration or 'strain' toward transcendence or 'the universal' contains a dynamism that has the empirical outcome of 'world-historical civilizational forms'.[3]

Within the complexity of Jaspers' ambitious thesis claiming 'world-historicality', we want to suggest a particular focus on one strand: in the 'breakthrough to transcendence' characterizing the Axial age revolutions, emerges a particular conception of depth that is of a 'qualitatively different' sort than whatever type of depth had been experienced before.[4] The substance of the thesis on which multiple lines of Axial age scholarship converge is that of a strain, tension, or breakthrough, from the mundane order of ideas (the extant symbolic/semiotic system of the culture) toward the idea – what we are calling an *idealization* – of transcendence. The tension between mundane/transcendent or immanent/transcendent, manifests both the potentiality of an infinite critique (of the extant culture) and the equally unending, because in principle unachievable, striving toward universality. Through this tension (between mundane and transcendent; between criticism as avowal of particularity, as revelatory of limit, on the one hand, over against the affirmation of an unattainable universal, on the other), the individual as conscious site of this tension undergoes a transformation of conscious capacity that is an enhanced reflexivity, creativity, or self-referentiality, which is then 'returned' to the collective from which the tension that motivated the transformation first issued. Or, to put the same set of points into different terms, which are the terms of

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[3] The great majority of human societies, from small autonomous hunter-gatherer bands, through the many types of increasingly more complex organizations up to the most complex civilizations of the archaic states (ancient Egypt, Sumer, Chaldea, Persian, Incan, Mayan empires, and so on), do not undergo an 'Axial age'. That they do not contribute substantially to the present global moment, nor endure into this moment as significant 'players' alongside other world civilizational forms, in the same way in which post-Axial cultural civilizations have and do, suggests that there is something of world-historical importance within the dynamism of the Axial 'tension toward transcendence'. Perhaps, and it is certainly a tempting implication, this 'dynamic something' is none other than 'the depth dimension' in human consciousness. However, we prefer to resist this temptation at this point as it is surely premature to draw any such substantive conclusions, and the troubling association of the post-Axial world civilizations with extraordinary empirical, imperial power is entirely at odds with and a betrayal of the sort of 'depth' implied by the Axial visionaries; as Jaspers (1953) puts it in this regard, 'The Axial period too ended in failure. History went on.' (p. 20).

[4] One could go provocatively further here, and claim that pre-Axial cultures did not experience, and had no conception of, depth. As much of that claim turns on semantics and the abstruse problem of 'translating' across the Axial divide, as well as again risking the mistake of drawing premature conclusions, we will not engage that provocation.

interest to this paper's thesis, the individual undergoes a 'transformation into depth'. It is the 'world religions' of Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Greek philosophy – the lattermost normally not described as a 'world religion' or 'religious', of course, about which we will say more below – that above all explore this experience and elaborate this conception of depth, in terms of 'spirit', 'faith', 'inner life', or particular 'states of consciousness'.

C. G. Jung's 'Confrontation with the Unconscious'

Jung's 'confrontation with the unconscious,' as documented in his posthumously published *The Red Book*, offers a particularly salient example of this transformation into depth (Jung, 2009). This work issued from a serious of visionary experiences that followed in the wake of Jung's break with Freud in 1913. In an effort to come to terms with this visionary material, Jung set out over a series of evenings to sink down into it, give voice to it and subsequently bring it to expression. Jung's *Red Book* inquires began with an intentional act of letting himself 'drop' into the psychological depths: 'it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plunged down into the dark depths' (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 179). This was accompanied by a distinct sense of risk entailed by the kind psychological self-exploration he was about to undertake; it was a matter of leaving behind the familiar security of ordinary consciousness and sinking into an unknown realm of psychological experience with all of the dangers and uncertainties that potentially lurk there. This personal act of *dropping into* the psychological depths was accompanied by a more public *dropping out of* his professional and academic commitments to the European psychoanalytical community of the time. Appropriately, the opening dialogue in *The Red Book* is between the *spirit of the time* and the *spirit of the depths*, the former representing the surface world of Jung's academic and professional commitments, and the latter pointing to the more soulful life that he felt calling to him in midlife. As a condition of his opening up to the spirit of the depths, then, Jung had first to dethatch himself from the spirit of the time.

Compositionally, *The Red Book* is a multilayered work. The first layer consists of Jung's initial record of his experiences, usually in dialogical form; the second is his interpretive commentary on this initial record, as supplemented and reworked following feedback from colleagues; and the third layer consists of graphic elements in the form of the pictorial illustrations and calligraphy that provide a non-linguistic elaboration of the original material. This kind of hermeneutic layering constitutes a form of depth that is distinct from that of the original experiences—interpretive as opposed to experiential depth, so to speak. It is noteworthy that the vocabulary of depth is intrinsic to the original material and not something subsequently imposed upon it. Jung himself spoke of the 'spirit of the depths,' of dropping 'down' into his experiences; Searle (1983) has described the nonlocal, intercultural background corresponding to Jung's spirit of the depths as the 'deep background'; and the notion of 'depth of interpretation' is familiar enough from hermeneutics.

A Contrastive Case: Plenty Coups

By way of contrast with these two examples, we present a brief summary of Jonathan Lear's (2006) rich and profound exploration of Plenty Coups, the Crow leader, whose visionary response to the potential demise of his people provided them with 'radical hope' to survive through times of cultural devastation. As we have seen in looking at Jung and the Axial sages, an acute cultural crisis appears to be preconditional for 'depth experiences', at least in the examples we look at. What is striking about Lear's presentation of Plenty Coups, is that he proposes a vocabulary around radicality, risk, courage, hope, virtue, and ideals, without ever proposing a 'depth' register to it. Therefore it is a case of a cultural crisis – and as we shall argue, to argue for 'depth' is at minimum to invoke some kind of 'crisis', at the least in that life on 'the surface' is insufficient – without any reference to depth; in a sense, Lear's presentation of Plenty Coups is a 'horizontal' solution to a cultural crisis.

Plenty Coups (1848–1932) lived through the period of 1870-1940, what Lear calls a time of 'cultural devastation' for the Crow people. The expansion of white settlement from the east into the mid-west and the corresponding increase of pressures on the Crow way of life – the intensification of warfare with their traditional enemies the Sioux, Blackfoot, and Cheyenne, their increasingly precarious reliance on horse and buffalo, the effects of disease epidemics like smallpox, and the culmination of this series of culturally devastating changes in their moving to live on reserve land – were the context for Plenty Coups' life, his visionary experiences, and his leadership of the Crow through these times. Lear argues that a genuine appreciation of the meaning of Plenty Coups' courage in facing these times poses a profound problem for 'moral psychology' (Lear's term). We quote him at length here as the problem is central to Lear's argument, and crucial for our own considerations of depth as well:

> …it is through training and habituation that a person's character is shaped – in particular, the character and outlook of a virtuous person. This outlook is deeply ingrained, and psychologically stable. …If one has been brought up, say, in the patterns of Crow excellence, one will likely have an internalized shame-mechanism that reflects the Crow understanding of courage. But what if actual historical circumstances make that understanding of courage no longer a possible way to live? If we consider this moment of historical crisis, it seems as though there ought to be courageous ways to face the breakdown of traditional forms of courage. But if we take a person's psychological makeup into account, there is a serious question of how a courageous Crow could make that courageous transition. Everything in his training has facilitated the formation of a solid psychological structure. He can't just change it as a matter of will or decision. A person's character is not directly under his conscious control. …This is the problem: If he has been trained from earliest youth that courage consists in going on *like this*… it is not clear how we can expect him to make the psychological changes needed to see things differently. … If we think of the self as partially constituted by its most basic commitments, then in jettisoning those

commitments one would be disrupting one's most basic sense of being. It is hard to imagine any courageous way of doing *that*. (Lear, 2006, pp. 63-65)

Plenty Coups faced a seemingly impossible dilemma: between courageously (in the traditional Crow sense) continuing to live a Crow way of life that was ending, and thus, dying with it, or courageously (in an anti-traditional, non-Crow sense) of giving up on a Crow way of life and living in a very different untraditional, non-Crow way. In Crow terms, the former is courageous but involves the death of their culture; the second is a cowardly way of surviving and the cost is 'a fate worse than death'. Lear's essay centers on Plenty Coups' solution to this dilemma, which 'offered the Crow a *traditional* way of going forward' (p. 154; original emphasis). The severe crisis of Crow culture that Plenty Coups lives through presents a number of themes that we elaborate on below: first, on the importance of crisis or risk, to *both* the individual and the culture; second, the emphasis on culture as providing a field of possibilities and meanings, in our terms culture as an extant symbolic/semiotic system, and the notion of something 'other', 'beyond', or 'transcending', that field or system; and third, the importance of extant ideals over against the experience of conflict, and the individual's inner life. In every case, what Lear's exposition provides is a contrastive example of how none of these components *must*, necessarily, invoke depth; there can be risk to self or culture, there can be a 'transcendent other' to a culture, and there can be ideals and inwardness, without any accompanying appeal to depth.

The context for Plenty Coups is that of the cultural devastation of the Crow; i.e, the culture was at risk. Lear discusses how this is the sort of upper limit of risk for the individual; that is, risk is a basic constitutive feature of being human:

> As finite creatures we are vulnerable: we may suffer physical and emotional injury, we may make significant mistakes, even the concepts with which we understand ourselves and the world may collapse – and yet as erotic creatures we reach out to the world and try to embrace it. …As finite, erotic creatures it is a necessary aspect of our existence that our lives are marked by risk. (Lear, 2006, p. 120)

Cultures form around such a constitutive center by symbolizing risk and rendering its meaning, in terms of concepts, but also rituals and practices and customs and institutions; in short, through an entire semiotic system. The devastation of a culture constitutes the 'upper limit' for risk for an individual in that the entire symbolic/semiotic system that has developed a time-honored tradition for making sense of risk, itself is now threatened – the risk implies an unknowable something beyond the horizon of intelligibility or field of possibilities the culture understands – and the individual is faced with a risk 'beyond' or 'transcending' any possible sense that can be made of it.

Analogously, Lear talks about transcendence as a constitutive feature of humanness insofar as humans as situated, contextual, and limited, are surrounded by a world that situates, contextualizes, and limits them.

> Plato saw that it was a condition of our finite erotic natures that we intuit that goodness outstrips our ability to grasp it. …We do not have to agree with Plato that there is a transcendent source of goodness – that is, a source of goodness that transcends the world – to think that the goodness *of the world* transcends our powers to grasp it. …Even the most strenuously secular readers ought to be willing to accept this form of transcendence. (Lear, 2006, p. 121)

Lear is at pains to present Plenty Coups' case to an imagined 'secular audience', whose secularity denies any reality to spirit, which were the terms in which Plenty Coups and the Crow understood his case, or to any kind of transcendence or depth as somehow of a qualitatively different kind, 'spiritual' or not, which are the terms with which we are presenting our own case. Lear applies this scrupulous caution to the notion of 'inwardness' as well; on Lear's psychoanalytically-derived account, the internalization of a culture's ideals is key for the development of a virtuous, courageous person (like Plenty Coups). However this very internalization becomes the greatest obstacle for seeing 'beyond' the cultural possibilities for reality, and thus Lear finds Plenty Coups' courageous and creative revisioning of cultural possibilities to reside in his 'inner resources':

> Might there be a certain plasticity deeply embedded in a culture's thick conception of courage? That is, are there ways in which a person brought up in a culture's traditional understanding of courage might draw upon his own inner resources to broaden his understanding of what courage might be? The issue would then be one not simply of going over to the thick concepts of another culture, but of drawing on their traditions in novel ways in the face of novel challenges. (Lear, 2006, p. 65)

With the exception of the 'deeply' adjective in the passage just cited, which is clearly a way of characterizing an 'embeddedness' in a 'thickness', what is notable about Lear's entire account of Plenty Coups, is his provision of an account of inner conflict and visionary experience of an individual in a time of radically acute crisis wherein his entire way of life and entire system for making sense of that crisis are at risk, with no recourse to any conception of 'depth'. Lear discusses risk, ideals, cultural crisis, psychic conflict, the inner life, and so on, but never with any reference to 'depth'. Plenty Coups sums up the life of his people following their transition to the reservation by telling his biographer that "after that, nothing happened" (Lear, 2006, p. 2). This strikingly succinct expression of a life without depth indicates that this was an aspect, not just of Lear's reconstruction of the case, but of Plenty Coups' own self-understanding.

The case of Plenty Coups is in powerful contrast to the examples of the Axial Age and of Jung, which we used to expound some understanding of 'depth'. It also provides strong evidence for the difficulty of working with metaphor, as such an analysis cannot obviously or easily claim 'necessity' for any of its descriptions, but either has to develop new grounds for necessity, or has to make its case on other grounds.

The Depth Metaphor

Our very rough initial formulation of depth, then, is based on what seems most initially obvious: the notion of depth is taken from a vocabulary of space perception and thus in applying depth to culture is to be working, above all, metaphorically. Something 'deep' connotes 'that which is, or leads, far away from here'; deep space, the watery depths, the depths of the forest, and so on. In every case there is a potential to move from 'here' to far away, and in every case the far away suggests some unknown and perhaps essentially unknowable component, the possibility of losing one's way, if not being lost or disappearing forever, as part and parcel of the traveling into distance. A very close synonym, sensorily, is darkness, as depths imply a loss or diminishing of visibility. Just as depths imply traveling into distance, visually they imply a 'beyond visibility', a receding from view, an exceeding of the immediately perceptible. As well, part of the sensory aspect of 'depth' as spatial is that it is vertically 'down'. The inverse is 'heights up', which does not connote the same sense of unknownness, possibility of getting lost, darkness, or unfamiliarity. Perhaps this is because in the domain of spatial-visual perception, to move up affords synoptic overview and topographic orientation, and is to go up to the light rather than down, where shadow and shade and darkness become common. Going down 'into the depths' refuses provision of perspective – crucial to the depths is that they are 'immersive', such that the person is 'lost in them' and must undertake exploration fraught with risk rather than being capable of overseeing or navigating them.

Despite the cursory nature of this initial sketch of some of the spatial connotations of 'depth', we consider it already insightful. Obviously, the sketch could be extended. For example, the sensory-spatial aspect of near and known and visible over against distant and unknown and dark, slides easily into a corresponding cognitive sense of habitual and familiar over against the uncanny and unfamiliar. And so on; however, the key point is that the move from spatial depth to depth in culture is *irreducibly metaphorical*. In moving from 'depth' in a spatial-perception sense, to 'depth in culture', or in the transposing of physical connotations of 'depth' to the domain of culture and experience, we are employing metaphor. This is unavoidable. While presumably the phrase 'depth in culture' immediately assumes a whole cluster of spatial depth meaning connotations, that this cluster of 'far away-down-unknown-unfamiliar-unnavigable-immersive-dark-lostness' meaning of 'depth' is being transposed into and applied to 'culture' – itself a whole complex 'cluster' or network of meaning and metaphor! – means that our method of working is descriptive, evocative, and suggestive at best, and that this is unavoidable.

This metaphorical understanding of depth in culture as 'vertically down' stands in sharp contrast to an alternative, horizontal metaphor that now dominates much of modern life in our current global industrial and post-industrial culture. We refer specifically to the contemporary 'flattening' of cultural and inter-cultural horizons, as

manifest in global networks of information exchange and the distribution and production of goods. This alternative metaphorical framework makes it especially clear that depth has nothing to do with mere complexity, as these global networks are infinitely complex, but they are not deep. The modern malaise that is evident in the shallowness and superficiality of much of contemporary culture, including various social media, instantaneous electronic communications, the 24 hour news cycle, myopic financial planning, and the like, is a manifestation of the current dominance of the horizontal metaphor, which thoroughly occludes any living relationship with the more enduring, existential realities of human life. The horizontal perspective corresponds to what Jung in his *Red Book* inquires called the *spirit of the time* and it is noteworthy that he felt it necessary to separate from the horizontal pull of its demands before engaging the vertical realm of the *spirit of the depths*. In a later work, Jung traces the origins of the modern horizontal impulse all the way back to the Renaissance:

> The ideal of spiritually striving for the heights was doomed to clash with the materialistic earth-bound passion to conquer matter and master the world. This change became visible at the time of the 'Renaissance.' The word means 'rebirth,' and it referred to the renewal of the antique spirit. We know today that this spirit was chiefly a mask; it was not the spirit of antiquity that was reborn, but the spirit of medieval Christianity that underwent strange pagan transformations, exchanging the heavenly goal for an earthly one, and the vertical of the Gothic style for a horizontal perspective (voyages of discovery, exploration of the world and of nature). (Jung, 1969, para. 78)

In short, we see depth as lodged somewhat precariously between Axial transcendence and post-Axial horizontality, which makes the work of recovering it an especially urgent undertaking at this time.

As a metaphor, the meaning-cluster that depth plays on when used in a sense perception way, becomes a particular *quality of experience* requiring the right kind of sensitive description to adequately convey and evoke the appropriate felt sense of that quality. Therefore one apparently possible option to pursue for provision of an answer, that of following the logician's demand for 'necessary and sufficient' conditions to elucidate a concept, can be ruled out as it would prove inappropriately applied to the notion of 'depth'. But while metaphors are never strictly *necessary* in the way a logical analysis might require, they may however be more or less *compelling*.[5]

Conditions of Depth

As a claim to a psychological reality the notion of depth is simultaneously experiential, metaphorical, and dynamically reflexive, such that it proves irreducible to

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[5] For example, the Lakoff and Johnson conceptual metaphor 'MORE is UP' is not a necessary way to understand quantitative concepts but it is nonetheless highly compelling, given the embodied conditions of human life in a gravitational field.

the discretely bounded concepts that propositional logic assumes and works with. To propose a first reformulation of the question 'what is depth in culture' which is, in this form, too rough and inadequate: What makes the depth metaphor compelling in the context of the cultural material wherein a 'deep phenomenon' is exemplified or experienced?

On the basis of this ascription – that there is a transformation of a 'horizontal' consciousness into depth by way of an orientation to transcendence, the latter the signal achievement of the Axial Age – we are going to sketch, in condensed and highly abstract terms, four criteria, or perhaps more precisely and less rigorously, the set of four minimal conditions, needed to characterize a psychological conception of 'depth'. We begin with the Axial age, as this provides the most inclusive context for articulating criteria for depth, but these criteria apply to our other examples as well.[6] What is intriguing in this context is the commonalty ascribed by Axial age scholarship to the experience of those individuals – the Hebrew prophets, Greek philosophers, Chinese sages, Indian holy men – who articulate 'transcendence', from which common experience (for example, of a radical cultural crisis because of the ever-increasing power of empires; of a profound dissatisfaction with the spiritual-religious formulations of the time, and their adequacy to address the psychic needs of that moment) we can suggest some conditions or criteria for depth.

First, depth is the psychic consequence of *conflict*. The conflict is experienced by a person as a tension between two realities vying for domination, continuation, and consolidation. Axial age sages and thinkers experienced an acute conflict between the mundane everyday world of accepted reality, and a vision of that world as dramatically transformed through a spiritual vision of a transcendent reality that grounded, fulfilled, redeemed, or in general, stood in a superordinate relation to the mundane world. Jung expresses an apparently identical conflict in terms of *the spirit of the time* versus the *spirit of the depths*. For the Axial revolutionaries or Jung to undergo conflict between these two psychic realities, the key psychological 'action' involved is *investment*, or perhaps more precisely, *risk*: the reality a self experiences is relative to the degree of self risked for that reality, the degree of self invested in that reality. For a reality to dominate, to continue, or to consolidate itself, the psyche of a person must invest in it.

Therefore, as a second criterion, for a person to invest, she needs to develop her capacity and ability for *risk*. This is not done out of the blue, in a vacuum, or in some solipsistic isolation; the development is from within the collective of a culture, from her developmental appropriation of its symbolic/semiotic system of how it understands

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[6] Throughout this characterization is a continuous and inextricable interplay between the individual person, as conscious site for the felt experience of depth, and the cultural system – the community, the tradition, its beliefs and practices – of which that person is a member, that provides the conditions and basis for the individual experience. The culture, as above all a symbolic/semiotic system, is depth-in-potential; the individual person as locus of consciousness is the experiential vehicle through which that potential is actualized. For this actualization to happen, the cultural conditions need to be brought to a tension-point, while within the culture, particular individuals with the right sort of sensitivity need to bring this tension into conscious experience, feel its conflicting demands, suffer unbearable pressure, and transmute this lived experience of suffering into, not necessarily an answer, but into a 'depth-resolution' of the conflict.

reality.[7] It is at the point of 'full development', of adulthood, wherein the person as mature member of the culture is 'fully functional', or 'successfully integrated', in that culture, that 'risk' as a 'real' possibility *not defined exclusively within* the cultural system emerges: a developed adult may *idealize* a possibility for the culture that runs counter to and challenges the culture's integrity as founded on the integration of desire, power, and self-interest currently dominant. Such an idealization threatens the integrity of the culture's symbolic/semiotic system; it threatens to 'dis-integrate' the culture. The idealization 'risks' the culture. In doing so, it also simultaneously risks the idealizer's self: in running counter to the culture's symbolic/semiotic system which the person has appropriated, the idealized possibility has a dis-integrative potential, for the sake of an ideal that, *qua* ideal, is largely an unknown.[8]

Such risky idealization runs *counter to realities* rooted in the current cultural integration of desire, power, self-interest, and locale and the future they promise. There

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[7] She, as a child, is almost entirely dependent, and what she as a child perceives as 'risk' and investment, is perceived by the culture to be 'normal stages of development'. By adulthood, what she has achieved as 'independence' is 'normally' not a radical separation from the culture, but an adequate level of competence of functioning within the culture (fluent in its symbolic/semiotic system), to meet 'normal' needs, etc. In other words, within the terms of the culture, and thus also for the developing person, the only 'real' risk is whether the person becomes a functioning, contributing member of that culture. Still remaining within the terms of the culture, the ideal at play individually throughout a person's development, and collectively for the culture as a whole, is 'integrity' or 'integration': the person should develop the 'integrity' to function competently within the culture, the culture should possess sufficient 'integrity' to maintain itself and ensure its members are 'properly raised' to function within it, and individuals as its parts or as members of its 'sub-cultural parts' ought to be integrated into the cultural system. Although we've named 'integrity' as an ideal, such integrity is more properly a 'self-interest': the culture's self-interest is functioning, and perpetuating. Individually, self-interest is desire; collectively, it is power. A culture's power is used to shape and conform individual desire to the 'good of all', i.e. to the functioning and perpetuation of the culture. In summary: desire, power, and self-interest, come together to maximize the integrity of a culture, the integration of both its symbolic/semiotic system and its individual members.

[8] The ideal might, for example, prove incoherent and therefore impossible to integrate into life, and thus the idealizer is challenging the culture's current integration for an impossibility; they are at risk for madness, delusional, deviant, criminal. The risk is incurred in running counter to self-interest; for the individual, the idealization is running counter to the individual's self-interest (desire), in the latter, counter to the cultural self-interest (dominant power). Further, because of the reaction to threat by the 'risked culture', especially its powerful elements, the self is further risked as the idealizer might be exiled, punished, or murdered by the culture it threatens. Socrates, for example, risks Athenian culture for the ideal of Reason; the prophets of the Old Testament, for example, risk Israel for the sake of Yahweh; Buddha risks the Brahmanic culture of his time for the sake of enlightenment or nirvana; Jesus risks Judaism, i.e. the Law and the Prophets, for an unconditional or universal love, etc. Each were thought mad or at least extremely abnormal for what they practiced and taught; each presumably risked madness to some degree insofar as they defied their dominant cultures for unclear and uncertain and largely unknown ideals; each risked (and often lost) their own lives to the cultures they threatened; and each radically transforms, in the long run, the cultures they defied. Post-Socratic Greece has an orientation to philosophy or reason that renders it quite foreign from the pre-Socratic warrior culture of Greece; the story of the Old Testament is of the slow emergence of the Jewish tribes as distinctive in their monotheistic practice from the tribes around them and relative to their own past; post-Upanisadic Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, are each radical departures from the Brahmanic tradition of ritual and sacrifice, and so on.

is a conflict between two possible futures. The conditions of possibility for each potential future are both complexly and pervasively embedded within the cultural tradition's symbolic/semiotic system, with the idealization resisting the currently dominant conditions. While both, as 'futural', are idealizations in that neither of them is 'real' in the sense of 'haven't happened yet', the future founded on perpetuation of the current integration of desire, power, and self-interest is the less risky, less idealized, one: empirically because it is most likely, and functionally because the ultimate aim is integration. *This future is presumed to be necessary*, in the terms of the culture's existing integration of desire, power, and self-interest. The other idealized future is not necessary, and precisely therefore more risky and tenuous, 'more idealized'.[9]

The way in which the idealization that runs counter to necessity is risky that is salient to our description of depth, and thus our third criterion for depth, is that it be a culture-threatening, 'dis-integrating idealization', an idealization that threatens the 'presumably necessary, currently dominant, cultural integration of desire, power, and self-interest'.[10] The dis-integrating idealization as criterion for depth is dis-integrative of precisely that qualitative horizontal level asserted or realized by the extant symbolic/semiotic system, in favor of a 'deeper' level; the dis-integration implies, or promises, a transformation of the symbolic/semiotic system such that a new level of depth irreducible to desire, power, or self-interest, becomes signified.

What the Axial age brings into view is the potential for a depth-idealization as response to the presumed *necessity* of the existing culture's symbolic/semiotic system. The claim staked is that there is more to reality than the symbolic/semiotic system

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[9] It is risky in four ways. First, it is risky because the idealized future can only come into being under difficult and tenuous conditions. Either sufficient members of the culture risk the current cultural integration for its possibility, such that their revolution or reform of the society 'disintegrates' its current form. Or, sufficient members leave the culture to establish an alternative society, as counter-cultural renunciates or 'sub-culture' dropouts. Either of these are risky because the 'sufficient membership' is an unknown quantity, and each member is up against the dominant power of the extant cultural integration. Second, it is risky because even having all these conditions in place, does not guarantee a realization of the ideal. It maximizes the possibility of its realization, but does not guarantee it will be realized; 'bad luck' in all its many forms can derail, prevent, or upstage in whatever way the ideal's realization, despite all the seemingly 'necessary and sufficient' conditions being in place. Third, it is risky because the ideal qua ideal might prove upon its being realized, to have some unforeseen or unforeseeable consequences that make its realization the realization, not of the ideal as it was idealized, but of a new different cultural form that is neither the old one (the revolution was successful) nor the hoped for one (the new order of things is a worse tyranny than the previous order); i.e., the ideal could prove a delusion, mistaken, false, a fantasy; immature, too unrealistic, etc.. These three ways of being risky we could call the sociopolitical, the contingent, and the idealistic, respectively.

[10] It might not be entirely clear how this criterion is necessary, in part because it overlaps so much so with risk as a criterion, and could be seen as perhaps a subset of risk. To clarify further: the political revolutionary threatens the dominant cultural integration, and does so via a political idealization, and in doing so puts himself at risk. The criminal does so as well, albeit via an overextension of personal desire and not necessarily with any idealization. Each in their own way threatens the 'presumably necessary, currently dominant, cultural integration of desire, power, and self-interest', but not in the sense of threatening its symbolic/semiotic system. Each are operating on the same qualitative horizon of desire, power, and self-interest articulated by the symbolic/semiotic system of the culture; the revolutionary revolts for a different configuration of power within that system, as does the criminal, one for political-ideological reasons, the other for personal ones.

asserts and realizes, and that this qualitative difference in fact makes *all* the difference.[11] Such a response, in its religious-spiritual composition, is total (holistic), on the one hand in the sense of engaging the whole person (wholly), on the other because the quality of a religious-spiritual action is understood to 'suffuse' reality, not in the material-physicalistic sense of permeating space-time, but in an absolutist-metaphysical sense of 'qualifying' the whole (holy). As briefly noted above, this religious-spiritual reading is also characteristic of Greek philosophy; as Pierre Hadot (1995) convincingly shows, the aim of philosophy was not a theory as a propositional system or reason as a metaphysical discourse, but a transformation of the person through the practice of 'spiritual exercises'. As an engagement of the whole person, whether as love (of wisdom or of God), 'address', 'calling', ordeal, suffering, revelation, enlightenment, mystery experience, ecstatic, possession or so on, the religious-spiritual response is one equally weighted between the cognitive, the imaginative, the ethical, the affective, and so on, and has the consequence of *qualifying* the presumption of necessity and *differentiating* that necessity into a higher and lower value. It presents a radically alternative idealization for what is considered necessary to live, through denying the current necessity's claim to highest value.[12] Thus, 'qualitative differentiation of the whole' is the

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[11] Note this account of risk and transcendence differs from Lear's 'naturalistic' articulation of risk. Lear sees 'transcendence' as epistemologically necessary insofar as the world exceeds any culture's conception of it, and thus the concomitant constitutive factor for the individual is risk as we are finite, situated creatures within a greater world. The Axial age revolutionaries stake their claim on transcendence and risk with greater radicality, as self, culture, *and the world*, are *all* relativized and subordinated to a transcendence of meaning that is their higher, hidden, mysterious, universal, (deeper?) truth. That 'ultimately', if forced to choose between the two, the Axial thinkers claim one must choose the transcendent, sets their conception apart from Plenty Coups, whose overarching concern was for cultural preservation and not for some 'Axial transcendence'. In this respect, Lear's account continues to provide significant contrastive interest. For example: 'The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has said that every culture is a 'gamble with nature' – in the sense that it depends on the continued availability of environmental resources, and on challenges that it can continue to negotiate. The Crow gambled on the continued availability of buffalo and other animals to hunt; they knew that their existence depended on their ability to fight off the Sioux. But there was a different kind of gamble that they didn't understand: a *gamble with necessity*. This is a gamble that the entire field of possibilities will remain stable; that one will continue to be able to judge success or failure in its terms.' (Lear, 2006, p. 25. Original emphasis.) Following this reasoning, it would seem the very point of Axial transcendence is its 'gambling with necessity', and thus radically threatening in its dis-integrative possibility relative to extant culture, the existing power structures, and its symbolic/semiotic system. '…a culture does not tend to train the young to endure its own breakdown – and it is fairly easy to see why. A culture embodies a sense of life's possibilities, and it tries to instill that sense in the young. An outstanding young member of the culture will learn to face these possibilities well. The situation we are dealing with here, however, is the breakdown of a culture's sense of possibility of itself. This inability to conceive of its own devastation will tend to be the blind spot of any culture. …This is not an impossible thought to teach, but it is a relatively new idea in the history of cultures, and one can see why a robust culture would avoid it.' (Lear, 2006, p. 83) The Axial conception of transcendence might be, among other things, precisely this 'new idea' and 'near impossible' thought to teach. One trajectory the development of such an idea might take, for example, is nihilism (qua Nietzsche's and Heidegger's interpretations of Western history). Certainly the uncomprehending and violent reception of a Socrates, the Old Testament prophets, or Jesus, attest to the threatening potential of Axial idealizations.

[12] In refusing the desire, power, and self-interest, of the cultural integration, there is a generation of conflict for the idealizer, between the current culture she lives in, and the idealized future world whose

fourth criterion for depth; because of the technoscientific power of the contemporary 'Western' integration of a globalizing culture, the threat to it is experienced as an 'end of the world' kind of anxiety.

The idealization does not *only* threaten the existing culture's integrity (that would be nihilism or madness or egotism, etc.). It simultaneously promises a better or higher integrity; or, a deeper or more authentic engagement in reality. The idealization of transcendence (in whatever form) of the Axial age, that founds our current 'great world religions', is *both* idealized *and* practiced. As idealized it is upheld as a value and an ideal, as a ground or source of ultimate meaning. As practiced, it admits of being experienced by the practitioner and of being developed into a discipline, such that the claim to ultimate meaning of a transcendent reality is realized in certain qualities of experience, or certain gradations of depth, that transform the inner life of the practitioner. The 'qualitative differentiation of the whole', re-described in experiential terms, is 'inwardness' or 'inner life'. Superficially, nothing has changed; experientially, or inwardly, everything has changed, and 'the real' has transformed into the possibility of an unfolding depth beyond the surface. The risk to the culture that the idealization poses (which for defenders of the culture and its existing integrity, is their sole concern) becomes transposed through such practice into an inner life for the practitioner: to fail to realize, to fall from the right orientation to, the ideal, becomes the site of inner conflict. From this viewpoint, reality is no longer exclusively circumscribed by the symbolic/semiotic system of the culture and its ultimate aim of integration of its desire, power and self-interest, but rather that system has become a means for dis-integration of the meaning of reality and possibilities of experience, 'now' disclosed as horizontal and limiting, towards multi-levelledness and depth beyond it; the symbolic/semiotic system transforms into a platform or background to propose and embody evaluations of higher and lower meaning, quality, and value, relative to some transcendent ideal. The symbolic/semiotic system ceases to be something exclusively to be learned for the aim of integration (as it is, and should be, and needs to be, for 'normal' development of a person into a 'normal' adult of that culture), and becomes in addition something *to be unlearned* in order for its user to become opened up *experientially* to possibilities beyond it.

That is, to the symbolic/semiotic aspect of culture and its integrative aims, must be offset as counterpoint the mysterious existential fact that a member of that cultural system experiences the symbol, the semiotic system. The idealization of transcendence ends *not* in infinite banter (as an exclusively semiotic reading implies), but in an unspeakable doing, in the silence of practical realization, in *askesis*, to use Hadot's terms, meaning disciplined practice, spiritual exercises. To engage in such practice is to maximize the possibility of a transformation of experience into depth.[13] To use

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potential realization runs counter to the current cultural trajectory. Because of contemporary globality, the threat to the current cultural integration and threat to end its trajectory is taking place on a historically unprecedented geographic scale and is of a qualitatively different nature. Jaspers intuits this problem as requiring a universal history.

[13] Relative to this emphasis on discipline, practice, experience, exercise, i.e. emphasis on a way of life, the possibilities of *indirection* that speech and symbolization can effect to direct the person to experience and

contemporary terminology, what seems to be generated by Axial strategies toward transcendence that effect 'depth' is a feedback loop between the unlearning or deconstruction of an established system of belief (and where it would lead if it is not interfered with) and a creative learning of a new system built on, but going beyond, that now-critically distantiated system, toward an as yet unarticulated but intuited integrative orientation – putatively universal, but by that token also necessarily unknown in any substantive way; what Ricoeur dubs 'inchoate universals'. For the practitioner, experientially, the outcome is participation, in depth, such that more of the mysterious is known even as its mysteriousness deepens.

Although our criteria for depth have been articulated primarily with reference to the Axial age context, it is readily apparent that they apply to our other examples as well. As noted earlier, Jung's *Red Book* inquiries stemmed from an acute sense of *conflict*, not only with Freud and the extant psychoanalytic tradition but also between the horizontal pull of the *spirit of the time* and the vertical calling of the *spirit of the depths*. His imaginative engagement with the latter also entailed considerable *risk* — the psychological risk he experienced as he let himself 'drop' into his own depths and the social risks involved in severing his professional ties with the European psychoanalytic community. This work led ultimately to a *dis-integrating idealization* of unconscious mental life that challenged the hegemony of the Freudian psychoanalytic framework, in offering a *qualitative differentiation of the whole* in terms of the multi-leveled picture of the unconscious entailed by his notions of archetypes and the collective unconscious. These criteria are not, however, strictly sufficient for depth as they are also to a degree satisfied in the case of Plenty Coups, which on Lear's (2006) account, does not require description in terms of depth. Such insufficiency reminds us forcefully that we are not dealing with a logical analysis of conceptual material for which 'necessary and sufficient conditions' can be ascertained, but with metaphorical exploration of experiential material.

On the basis of this 'depth reading' of our empirical material, then, we have outlined four criteria, or conditions, for depth:

1. Psychic conflict within the individual;

2. Risk of self;

3. An idealization that threatens to disintegrate the current cultural symbolic/semiotic system as it coheres and integrates around self-interest, desire, and power;

4. A qualitative differentiation of the whole into multi-levelledness (of cultural meanings); which differentiation described subjectively, is inwardness (of the individual)

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practice become focal, while the possibilities of speech for self-deceptive evasion become anathema. It is in this light that we read the injunction to ineffability of the mystics, the silence of the Buddha, the Taoist turning of speech back upon itself until futility, Jesus' parables, Zen koans, Socratic irony and maieutic in dialogue, and so on, including expressions of the dynamic unconscious and the practice of active imagination, as developed by Jung, as a modern example. In this turning of speech back upon itself to block its propositional and conceptual potential, an inner conflict could be read as already at play, in that speech is used to resist a dominant or prevailing possibility of speech which is to name, to delimit, to conceptualize.

Conclusion

Our analysis shows depth in culture to be an irreducibly metaphorical notion. It is most naturally rendered in the language of space perception in terms of the vertically down, which connotes darkness, the unknown, foreshortening of perspective and the potential for losing one's way. As a metaphor, depth in culture cannot be circumscribed conceptually in terms of necessary and sufficient criteria; however, four conditions for the experience of depth are evident from the Axial Age sages and C. G. Jung's work on *The Red Book*. These include *conflict* within the individual, *risk* of self, a *dis-integrating idealization* that challenges the existing order, and a *qualitative differentiation of the whole* into multi-leveledness. These conditions are nonetheless not sufficient for depth, as illustrated by the contrastive case of Plenty Coups, whose 'radical hope' embodied a 'non-depth' resolution of a cultural crisis. Plenty Coups and his people suffered through a complete collapse of their cultural horizons due to the inevitable pressures of white settlement. With the continuing, irrevocable horizontal thrust of much of contemporary culture, we might wonder to what extent this kind of massive collapse of cultural depth is now happening on a global scale.

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Notes