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1. Becker believes his book represents a distillation of the insights of modern depth psychology (Freud, Jung, Adler, & Rank). His main thesis is taken specifically from Rank, for whom the principal problem of human life is the fear of living and the fear of dying.

(Ch. 2 in Becker)

For Rank, man has always been haunted by the terror of death and by an equally strong desire to cling to life and to achieve immortality. The source of all of man's cultural creations, for Rank, lies in the desire to overcome death, to deny in some way or other that death is our final destiny. Rank constructed an ideal-typical history of human culture, showing how this urge for immortality in one form or another was expressed in various periods or epochs of human history. We need not go into this history, for our principal concern at this point in our course is our current situation, and for this we can rely on Becker's presentation.

2. Ira Progoff has traced the main stream of psychoanalytic insight from Freud to Rank, thru Adler & Jung, in his book The Death and Rebirth of Psychology. His point is that, with the insights particularly of the later Jung and of Rank, a radically different view of man emerged from the one with which psychoanalysis began. This radically new view completely reversed the relation of psychology to religion posited by Freud. For Freud, psychology would replace religion, destroying the latter's illusory quality, and substituting a scientifically verifiable vision or understanding of life for a vision that was essentially neurotic. For Rank and the later Jung, religion would supersede psychology, which, when all is said and done, only demonstrates in a contemporary idiom man's inextricable need for religion, for transcendent experience, if his life is to have any meaning. Psychology for Jung & Rank shows that only a relation to transcendence will do, will satisfy us. Progoff shows quite successfully how Jung & Rank join forces in this conviction. Becker's book spells out this conviction from the standpoint of Rank.

Death constitutes such an enormous problem for us, because it threatens us with the ultimate futility & meaninglessness of our lives. Our cultural creations are our attempt to deny this futility & thus to claim immortality for ourselves.

143, Mar. 17, 2

The particular way in which Becker will show this is to tie the dev. of modern psychology back to Kierkegaard,

who was a psychoanalyst before his time.

The cumulative insights of modern depth psychology hook up with the religious insights of Kierkegaard, and thus argue for a merger of depth psychology and religion.

Thus B. can state on p. xiv

that a major aim of his book

is "the closure of psychoanalysis on religion,"

and the key to the closure

is how we deal with the twin fears of living and of dying.

3. For Otto Rank, our age is the "psychological age," but psychology is a transitional phase in the evolution of the human animal.

Ultimately, all psychology can do is to explain human motivations. It does not help us live.

To get stuck in psychological analysis, then,

is to use psychology

as a means of escape from the twin fears of living and of dying.

Psychology can only point the way toward the horizon that will enable man to live ^{creatively} and to face death honestly, and the only horizon that can do this

is the horizon of transcendence, the "soul beyond psychology."

143, Mar. 17, 3

Becker's book is an argument that
man needs this absolutely transcendent horizon
to which to surrender,

if he is to live creatively and to face death with equanimity.

2.4. The fear of living and the fear of dying
constitute the problem of human heroism
which is so central in the book.

Bec. of
the fear of
death,

We have an inescapable need to feel secure in our self-esteem; but such a sense can only be provided by some system of heroics, a cause in project which provides us with a justification for the worthwhileness of our existence.

terrors, threat
of meaninglessness
represented by
death

5. Religion & Psycho-analysis join in showing us the truth of what we are doing to earn our self-esteem, but only religion provides a system or horizon of heroics that is empirically true.

Any horizon short of the religious is a falsification of the truth about human life & human death.

Ultimately, assurance of the worthwhileness of our existence, the need for which drives us in all ways, can come only from a surrender to the beyond, to what the religions call "God."

This will be the central point of the book: our modern recapitulation, thru depth psychology, of the movement from the hero to the saint.

Commentary and questions on Becker, Chs. 2 + 3

1. The reason we are driven to heroics is that we are afraid of death. Heroics is our way to immortality, our denial of death. We are the only animals with a foreknowledge of our own death, and this foreknowledge brings with it a universal terror at the prospect. It is an expression of our instinct of self-preservation, our drive to maintain life and to master the danger that threatens it.
2. While the fear of death is ever-present in our normal biological functioning, we are utterly oblivious of it in our conscious life, to the extent that this conscious life is split off from the rhythms of our biology. The affect of fear is repressed, but: "I don't believe that the complex symbol of death is ever absent, no matter how much vitality and inner sustainment a person has" (22). In fact, a favorable upbringing of a child only serves all the better to hide the fear of death.

Discussion questions on Becker, ~~Part 1~~.

1. Becker tells us in his ~~in~~ Preface that he believes his book represents a distillation of the insights of modern depth psychology (Freud, Jung, Adler, & Rank). This distillation of psychology after Freud ties the whole development of modern depth psychology back to Kierkegaard, and thus argues for a merger of depth psychology and religion. The major aim of his book is "the closure of psychoanalysis on religion" (xiv).
2. Chapter One articulates the reasons for this merger. It lies in the fact that "everything painful and sobering in what psychoanalytic genius and religious genius have discovered about man revolves around the terror of admitting what one is doing to earn his self-esteem." (6)

This admission is tantamount to an understanding of the dynamics of human heroism. Man's tragic destiny, says Becker, is that "he must desperately justify himself as an object of primary value in the universe; he must stand out, be a hero, make the biggest possible contribution to world life, show that he counts more than anything or anyone else." (4)

Depth psychology and religion converge in their concern to articulate what people do in order to justify their existence.

- The need for self-justification and self-esteem flows from a duality in man's nature. We are animals, and thus concerned with self-preservation, ~~(or narcissistic)~~ and we are conscious, i.e., aware of our uniqueness in regard to the rest of nature. The combination of animal self-concern with consciousness produces narcissism: a need for self-esteem. [Our societies and cultures have been systems for acting out this need, systems created for human heroes. Psychoanalysis has attempted to render us conscious of what we are doing to earn our self-esteem, our feeling of heroism. It poses to us a potentially liberating
6. →

Becker, 2

question: how empirically true is the cultural hero system that sustains and drives us? How true is the system we have created to make us feel and believe that what we are doing is truly worth while? Culture itself is "a living myth of the significance of human life, a defiant creation of meaning." (7) How true is our myth? On this question of cultural criticism, the best insights of depth psychology and religion converge. In this sense, depth psychology has come to support the kind of questioning of civilization's presuppositions that originally was the impetus behind the axial religions. These religions originally offered an alternative hero system to that of civilization. To the extent that they now support a civilization that itself is recognized as a false heroic system, they no longer command allegiance, especially from disaffected youth. Some new force has been needed to question the presuppositions of the cultural hero system. That new force has been depth psychology, which, willy-nilly, is performing the role vis-a-vis culture once enacted by religion.

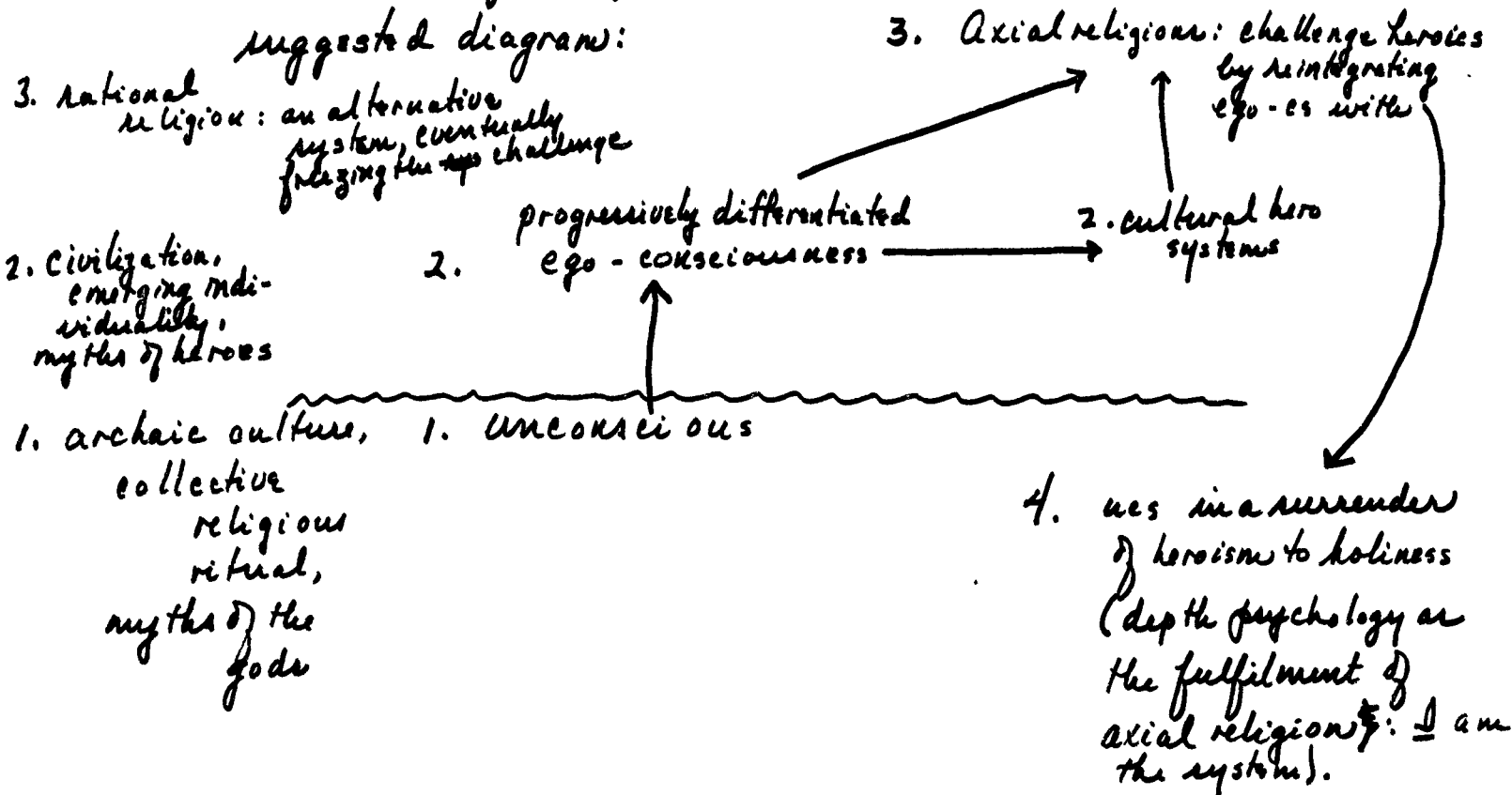
Questions:

1. How can we integrate this brief analysis with what we have already seen of the history of culture? That is:
 - a) where does Whitehead^{4 Mumford} locate the origins of narcissism? Is he in basic agreement with Becker on this point?
 - b) what does Becker's analysis add to the motivation that lies behind the movement from pre-mythic to mythic culture, and then from mythic culture to civilization? what does it add to the account we have already given of the reasons behind the emergence of the sense of individuality?
 - c) Will the answer of depth psychology to cultural hero systems be the same as the axial religions' response to civilization: from the hero to the saint?
 - d) Must the individual repeat the cultural system's history in their regard: i.e., first strive for heroic status, then realize its inadequacy.

Becker, 3.

and finally surrender to the call for holiness? Will depth psychology serve to underscore this movement? If so, what is the relation between the dynamics of heroism and sanctity, on the one hand, and the relations of the ego and the unconscious on the other? A

suggested diagram:



T.S. Eliot:

" We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."