

Archetypes and Stories Beyond The Hero's Journey

Transcript of Charles Eisenstein's Interview on Future Thinkers

<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/archetypes-and-stories-beyond-the-heros-journey/>

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M: So, in this kind of world that we're talking about, I feel like we're trying to build a vision of what the future would look like. And we've covered some fundamental flaws in the Hero's Journey, which kind of pits us against an external enemy; the eternal struggle; all that kind of stuff that comes along with the traditional narratives. How would you rewrite the narrative in this kind of world, where you can involve yourself into a project or a cause that you care deeply about - to make it happen or make it better - what does the narrative look like for that framework?

C: Well, let me just say about the Hero's Journey: I don't think it's a useless Archetype. I think it's a powerful Archetype. It's just that, we've made everything about the Hero's Journey. You know, someone says... or someone mentions... say, Joseph Campbell, or mentions mythology or something, and it's just "OH ya the Hero's Journey"... as if that is the map for life; the hero map.

So, I've pointed out that the Hero Archetype is actually a boy Archetype, not a man Archetype. The man Archetypes are Jester, Magician, Lover and King, and they each have a boy counterpart. The Hero Archetype is the boy counterpart of the King. Yeah... the champion, you know (arms raised sarcastically) like the hero... I've done it! That's not what the King seeks.

The King... the King is uh [searches thoughts] my friend Claudio Maranda says ... he's a musician ... he says "the best musician is the one who makes the others play well.

E: Ya, we actually just finished a multi-part podcast series on the archetypes, and so we talked about this literally a couple of days ago, that one of the roles of the King is to bless others, which means to see them as whole, and to elevate them, to encourage them, and to want to see them thrive.

M: And the role of the Hero is to go out there and test himself, to prove something to himself, so there's no narrative of service in that boyhood Archetype. It's just testing your own [inaudible].

C: Right. Ya, you don't see, like, Luke Skywalker conferring blessings on others [all giggle]. So that's... and this is tied into some of the stuff we were talking about earlier... the war of each against all, the mode of problem solving where you find the thing to overcome, the thing to test your limits against, the challenger. You need that, at a certain stage of

psychological development, and perhaps humanity as a whole has been through that Hero's Journey, in a way where the opponent (or adversary) was nature and self. And, through this struggle against nature, I mean this is defining of human history. This is how human history was narrated, if you look at the history of history. For a long time, glory and even goodness itself was associated with overcoming the wild; with pushing the boundaries of civilization farther and farther. It had a political dimension, it had a scientific dimension. Conquering the world meant more and more of bringing mystery into quantifiable phenomena, understanding and things we can predict, and therefore control. So, that Hero phase of development, it defines so many aspects of our civilization. I think we can say now, that we've completed that phase. That we have tested our limits, we have bested the adversary (in a way), though some people say "nature bats last", and that the future of the planet is not in doubt, it's only the future of humanity...

In my book I say, maybe that's not true, and I paint a picture of a concrete world with food grown in vats, carbon sucking machines, bubble cities, and digital displays of all the nature that's been lost. Like... I don't know... but, we're moving toward that. Each generation, more distant from nature, and nature more dead than the last generation. So, ya, you could say that the Hero Archetype on the collective level has been completed. We don't need to... it's like... the Hero has defeated Darth Vader or whatever... he's won, he's defeated his challenger, he's discovered himself, and now he's like "well, now I need a bigger challenger. Now I need to find some even greater evil to fight". It's like getting stuck there. What about turning toward Kingship? What about turning toward blessing, turning toward service; what do I use these powers for? More glory for myself? More control, more domination? Or, am I ready to go through the next phase of the journey? It's not the Hero's Journey anymore, and it's a phase of unlearning things. It's a phase of humbling. What would that look like collectively? Now, I know this in my own life, you know, like when I was in my twenties and thirties, like... ya, I wanted to be a big shot. I wanted to be a respected thinker, you know? And now I'm at a phase of "who cares". No matter how big a shot I am and no matter how respected I am, someday I'm going to die, and everyone will forget me. The only thing that can live beyond me is what I give to the world, because it's no longer "in me", I've given it away, that survives me.

So, it's maybe through the Hero phase building up, and after that, sending out, until there's nothing left, or until the world has been saturated with me. And, there's nothing left, because I've become the world. I've given everything that I'm meant to give, and from the perspective of the separate self, that means I've been extinguished. But, from the perspective of interbeing, it means that I have merged with who I truly am.

E: Integrated.

C: Yes. So, for humanity, part of that process is to really see ourselves as part of a larger whole, as part of nature, and in service to the health but also the development; the evolution, of the planet. As an organ... we are an organ of a living planet. Like the heart, like a liver. What is our goal here? It's a living planet that's not just a static being, but one that wants to grow. In a certain way, it's going through a metamorphosis. I don't know the answer to "what Earth wants to become". All I know is that that's the question. And, we can ask that question for a thousand years, and still we might not know. But, we would know the first step. Because the sincerity we breed will magnetize the next step. And, that's all we

need to know. And, I think the next step is obvious: it's to heal the damage that has been done on the Hero's Journey.

M: It's interesting how many of our narratives do focus on that struggle period... I mean... that's the major excited part. I think of "The Avengers: Civil War" when in the previous movie they defeated the aliens, and then all of a sudden they're fighting amongst themselves. The narrative of struggle had to continue in order to be entertaining, but how interesting would it be if they just decided "disband, let's focus on peace, let's teach, let's share our gifts", that sort of thing. There aren't many narratives like that, and I'd be curious to see how they actually... what (kind of) narratives of emerging Kingship would look like nowadays, and would they actually take-on.

E: I think, maybe part of why the Hero's Journey is so prevalent is, well, it's still obviously in our collective consciousness, but it is also (sort of) the loud and exciting part of a person's life. And then, the really deep development and the giving tends to happen more privately and quietly. Like, people aren't really seeking glory for that, when they're truly in service.

C: Ya, it doesn't make as much of a spectacle.

M: I'd still watch it [all chuckle]. I want to know what Iron Man's doing when he's [inaudible]

C: I think this is a deep movement that wants to happen in story telling. Like, we need to recover, and these Archetypes are ALL present in Mythology, folk tales, fairy tales, things you can find... you can find all of the Archetypes there. Archetypes themselves go through a life span. When I say that, I speak of everything as alive... the sun... you know, the water, the soil. That also goes for stories, and for Archetypes. The ancients understood that. They personified the Archetypes as Gods, and Gods had life stories; they were born, and they went through evolutionary processes. That is saying that Archetypes themselves change over time, and sometimes new Archetypes are born. I'm not an expert Mythologist, but I am like you, really curious... I would love to see films or something that... and maybe there are astute people out there that can say "yes, actually Charles, this is happening... look at this film or look at that film". I'm not really so up on popular culture. But, I know that when I see film that invokes some other Archetype than the Hero's Journey, some other Archetype than good defeating evil, that I feel a heart opening. When the resolution isn't that 'good finally overcomes evil', when the resolution is (especially) when the resolution is that 'evil has a change of heart', I'm like "YES!" ... so satisfying.

E: Do you remember... [M starts at the same time, E holds her thought]

M: At the very least when it's not just evil for the sake of evil, lets just see some depth and reason behind it. You know, because then it would be possible to think about reforming the villain. If the villain is just evil because it's something to point at, then it's incomprehensible,

and the only objective can be to destroy it. There's no conversion; there's no helping that person.

E: Do you remember in Moana, that animated Disney film, the whole goal of the journey is to restore the heart of the island Goddess?

C: I haven't seen that film.

E: Like, they're not trying to defeat anything, they're trying to restore her heart. And, when they do, she turns from this angry fire monster looking lady into a peaceful green island Goddess.

C: Mm-hm. Ya. That's a healthy movie. That's the kind of thing I would be willing to show my little kid. I've got a five year old as well as grown kids. One movie that was also like that was... Kiraku, I think it was called? Based on some African folk tales, where there was an evil sorceress who's causing all sorts of problems for the village. One after another, the young warriors go to destroy her, but they end up becoming enslaved by her. And finally, Kiraku, who's this baby that is born walking and talking, he goes to try to solve the problem, and learns that the reason this sorceress is so wicked is that she has a thorn in her back. So he goes and has many adventures, and ends up pulling the thorn out from her back. And she doesn't want the thorn to be pulled out from her back, she's become comfortable with it. But when he does pull it out, she transforms into a magnificent goddess.

M: Oh, what a perfect narrative that is. I mean, that's what it is, a villain is always broken in some way.

E: It's about healing.

C: So, when Cary, my son, he's into super heroes... like... he's five, OK? Can't we grow up as a culture and being into super heroes and super villains? It's OK for a five year old, but we're still like... ya The Joker... why do you think the Joker is so mean? Like, we ask that. Why do you think Darth Vader is so mean? What happened to him? Just to get him thinking in that way, rather than the simple prescription of solving the problem by finding and destroying the bad guy. Osama Bin Laden [flailing arms sarcastically]

M: Trump.

C: Saddam Hussein [still flailing arms to suggest a false grandeur to the character]. The bad guy. The drug lord, you know? The criminal, etcetera, the terrorist. Kill the terrorist, and then everything will be fine [still gesturing sarcastically]. That is juvenile! And, it goes along with that whole mentality, like, the concept of 'evil' arose in the beginnings of civilization

when it was associated with the wild. The lion, the wolf, the wild... you know... that was evil. The good king was the one who domesticated the wild, who cut down the forest, who heeled the beasts; mastered the beasts. Hercules killing the lion, Gilgamesh, all these heroes. So, when we have the super villain, that is actually wild nature. So, the transformation of civilization's relationship to nature goes hand in hand with the shedding of these stories of 'good versus evil' and 'superhero versus super villain' and the Hero's Journey. Not that they don't have their place. They still do have their place. But, they have usurped the proper role of every other Archetype, and they need to be returned to their place.

M: Ya, I love what you said about the Hero's Journey being adolescent. The narrative being adolescent from start to finish. You know, I hate to bring up another super hero show, but in the latest Avengers movie, when they had Thanos get the Infinity Gauntlet, and he's got all the power in the Universe, and his first thought is "let's just kill half of all people because there's not enough resources". There's no thought of, well, maybe double the resources [laughs]. Like... what? I just thought of that the other night and I was like 'oh God'.

E: That was a fascinating movie, actually. I did see that on the airplane and I was like "Whoa... the bad guy just won". Like, without qualification. He didn't just kinda win. He won.

M: He fully did it.

C: He fully won.

M: And now he's on vacation.

C: [laughs] ... and now he's vacationing. There was this sinister thing, if you're tapped into any of the conspiracy narratives... the illuminati power elite etc. etc. are implementing a population reduction program through chemtrails etc. etc. you know, there's this whole conspiracy universe which has powerful Archetypal and Mythological resonance as well... it's truth does not depend on its factuality. That's a whole other thing I could talk about. But, it has a resonance with that film. It's almost like the film is preparing us for that solution: kill off half the population so that we can continue living as we lived before. And, there's something almost endearingly child-like about Thanos.

M: Very true. They spent so much time on that character, and they really dove in more than any other villain they've done in those super hero movies. So I think you might be onto something with them preparing us [nervous laughter] in that way for that idea.

C: I would love to see the sequel where somebody goes and reasons with him and he's like "look Thanos, I know you meant well, but actually, you didn't change anything. The population is just going to grow again, and everybody's traumatized, and that trauma is going to make them re-enact all of the horrors that make them miserable, so... it didn't work

man. You're going to have to come up with another strategy". And for Thanos, who means death, right... to go through an enlightenment process.

I don't know, there's a lot... hey [waving arms humorously] if anyone's watching this, I'm volunteering to consult the screenwriters. [all laugh]

There's so much potential in that story. That would be such (am I allowed to say?) such a mind fuck for people who are expecting certain narrative arcs. Like, it could be utterly novel for 99.9% of the people, and make them come alive. Ya, mind fuck in the positive sense of 'fuck', you know? Like "wow, that just ravished my brain". There is so much potential in that as a cultural psychedelic.

E: mmmmmm.

M: Ya. Ya, that's totally not going to happen though. They're gonna go back in time and they're gonna undo what he did and then they're going to kill him, and then everyone lives happily ever after.

C: Ya, that's boring. There's the gem of 'classic movie of the century' here, if they go for it. It would require some courage to go there.

[end]