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## **The Deep Seer and the Four Tests**

Ross R. Maxwell

At last, he knew his true name. When he was young, he wandered, unsure of himself. He knew he was a generalist — not satisfied with mastering only one thing. He wanted to explore. He wanted to fill in blanks in his mental map of the world. He was good at science, and he understood concepts quickly, but he rarely stuck around long enough to gain real expertise in a field. His curiosity was ravenous, always seeking new realms to explore.

Later in adulthood, out of his wide reading, he had insights that pulled things together in new ways. However, when he tried to explain to others how things fit together, they did not understand. He found that he was ahead of the curve — seeing things others were not ready to see. Eventually some did recognize some of what he had seen. But he uncovered yet more insights. And so, he wondered if he were not too far ahead of the curve, and that recognition would only come after he was dead. And yet even more insights piled up — more than he could write up and publish in his lifetime. This troubled him.

After several years, he partially calmed himself with the thought that though he might not be rich in money, he was rich in ideas. Nevertheless, he needed some way to be clear about who he was in the world. Finally, he realized that his true nature — his true name, as it were — was that of a deep seer.

Though he might be a deep seer, few paid any attention to the truths he saw. He saw deeper than others. He saw to a depth that others were either blind to, ignorant of, or so proud of the knowledge they already had that they were uninterested in varying viewpoints. Or these deep ideas upset established truths and so he received either indifference (the usual case) or hostility: “How dare he!”

He even began to think that his deep seeing was a curse — it kept him from leading a normal life. Who had cursed him that he was not like other people?

Yet, he believed what he saw in his deep seeing. He knew he was seeing underlying patterns. He also knew that there was little or no market for deep seers, unlike that for far-seers. For, if a far-seer successfully predicted the future just one time, people would flock to him, hoping to learn the future. But deep seeing brought no such obvious immediate benefit. No one would pay him for his deep seeing, because they were wrapped up in the day-to-day business of living by selling to others what they had, or knew, or made. In a market, who cares about the deep? Rather, will it sell today? Or tomorrow?

However, he also knew that if he were lucky or skillful enough to write an engaging book, a scattered few might find and buy it. But he felt that he lacked the skill to produce a book written well enough to sell well — or to sell at all. So, he was down, not sure where to turn or what to do.

One day a good friend died, one who had lived alone and was not found until several days later. Worse yet, he had seen this friend only a few weeks earlier, when the friend seemed okay.

Such thoughts were depressing, leading nowhere. Nevertheless, he realized, whether cursed or not, he remained a deep seer. This was his gift, a gift the world needed, especially since the world and his country was in a crisis, and desperately needed the deep vision his gift could bring.

“Well,” he thought, “I may not be the best writer, but I could collaborate with someone who is a good writer.” A wise woman had told him that the very act of committing to creative action brings with it the help and tools that are needed. Since writing learned articles for small academic audiences seemed to be leading nowhere, it was time to write a book for a bigger audience. Any articles he wrote would become chapters in the book. But could he really commit to this? Writing a book is a daunting task.

Then he thought, “But which book comes first?”

There is the rub. His gift was generous. He saw depth in many fields. Often reading a book, he saw how it could be made better.

So, which of his deep insights should he work on first? How was he to figure that out? Should it be the potential size of his audience? Should it be an improvement on the idea of someone who was already well known, so he could capitalize on their fame? Should it be what is truly unique, that no one else had yet seen, even though it is right in front of their faces? Should it be what he felt was most urgent, or what he was closest to completing, or what was the deepest and most profound?

In his quandary, he remembered as a small boy attending with his parents a talk given by a very wise man, long since dead. He searched high and low looking for something by him. At last, he found stuck behind a ledge a piece of paper, written in his mother’s hand, containing some of the wise man’s sayings. These, among other things, said that it is right and proper to actively seek and pray for that which one desires and truly wants, provided it can pass four tests.

**Test One**

One needs to love the spirit of what one desires, not the outer appearance, such as fame or respect for one's wisdom. So, what, he thought, is the spirit of deep seeing? Humility, it occurred to him, is the spirit of deep seeking. One could be wrong. It is easy to be fooled by one's metaphoric thinking. (He remembered the radical philosopher's comment that the role of science is to correct for metaphoric error.) Relying solely on intuition can lead one astray. Moreover, charismatic charlatans have given deep seeing a bad name. And let us not forget, arrogance will turn other people off, so they will not listen to what you do have to say. So, yes, humility is essential.

Another aspect of the spirit of deep seeing, related to humility, is the spirit of inquiry that remains open to ideas from others. Who knows? An idea, which one instinctively thinks is wrong-headed, may in fact be the key to deeper understanding.

The spirit of deep seeing also includes skepticism of partial answers. Or to put it another way, to be skeptical that one has discovered a whole, when in fact one has discovered only a partial answer. Knowledge grows only one step at a time. Each step brings new intellectual tools that enable us to understand the new. Or as Thomas Kuhn put it, during an intellectual revolution created by deep seeing, the deep seer may have one intellectual foot on both sides of the revolution, and it may take the next generation of thinkers to free themselves of the old way of explaining. On the other hand, the act of seeing something new shines a spotlight on it, which may cast into shadow valuable insights of the old way of thinking. Too often, we think that since the new knowledge is correct, the old must be wrong.

**Test Two**

One needs to love all aspects of what one desires. First, one needs to respect the whole — to be open to all facts — and not just that part which supports one's pet theory. While searching widely for facts that support the deep patterns one has seen, one may overlook other facts that do not support this deep pattern. However, if the deep pattern brings order and structure to many different facts, then it may be appropriate, initially at least, to ignore these seemingly non-digestible facts.

What is more, the ability to order diverse facts and views provides a clue that one has indeed found a deep pattern, rather than some shallow pattern based on coincidence. But eventually one needs to confront the non-digested facts, since they may point to the fallacy of the whole deep pattern, or the act of integrating them may provide deeper or wider insight. By far the best way to discover these other facts is to talk to the experts in the field — reading books is not enough.

Second, it is not enough to discover deep things for one's own isolated delight. One has also to bring these insights back and communicate them to the world. This means that one has to present them in a way that others can understand.

Now this is a serious problem. Deep seeing inherently involves more than one field of knowledge, so how can one master all the fields one needs to know? He remembered a deep seer severely criticized all around because his broad theory covered many fields. Experts in each of those fields invariably could find some small error relating to their own field, which gave them the excuse they wanted to dismiss him out of hand, without attempting to really understand what he was saying. So, one needs to be willing to face criticisms over small details from those who fail to see the full picture.

### **Test Three**

One needs to be willing to pay the price for what one desires. Obviously, significant effort is involved in mastering the various fields sufficiently to write coherently about them. One needs to dig deep, and not be satisfied with partial understandings.

However, it is possible, if one's deep seeing is too advanced, that one may not be recognized during one's lifetime. On the other hand, true deep seeing potentially brings new insight to established fields — insights that practitioners of these fields may have sensed without being able to articulate clearly. So, the deep seer may bring a gift to such a field that some may recognize and use to their benefit.

But one never knows in advance who of these practitioners will respond to the deep seeing, who will ignore it, and who will become upset and antagonistic. One needs to be open to the possibility that the antagonistic person may have a valid point. So, it is critical to avoid becoming upset by these antagonists. They are attacking the idea, and one way to attack the idea is to attempt to shame you. "How dare you!" One needs calmness and moral courage not to take this shaming personally.

### **Test Four**

One needs to be willing to give it all away. Deep seeing is not for one to keep and control, but a gift for all humanity — for life itself. It is antithetical to deep seeing to attempt to control this knowledge. Moreover, one does not live forever. At some point, one needs to let go and let others take over.

Being willing to give it away also means not to expect monetary rewards. Deep seeing and judging the commercial worth of an idea potentially mean pulls in opposite directions.

However, the thought of giving his hard-won deep insights away was the hardest of the tests for him, because above all he craved recognition — his personal immortality. What he really wanted was for others to recognize the value of his insights.

On a number of occasions, he had written letters to insightful people, attempting to show how their idea connected with other ideas, but rarely had he gotten any response at all. His letters were ignored. Had he gone too far? Had he claimed too much? The lack of response depressed him. What do I need to do? This lack of recognition seemed to mean that his ideas were not being communicated.

On the other hand, the goal of deep seeing is to give birth to an idea that will help the human race to understand more profoundly the world we live in, a world that includes ourselves. It is good and proper for a community to recognize someone who has brought new understanding. Thus, to hold an idea too tight is not to give it room to breathe.

Nevertheless, he did hold one idea very tight. He did not talk to anyone about his very deepest insight for fear that someone, smarter and a better writer than he, would steal his insight without giving him recognition. At the same time, he was afraid that since this insight was very simple yet very profound, someone else might discover it on their own and publish it first. This fear had driven him for years. But after sixteen years, no one had yet found this deepest of ideas. So, he felt he had a little time to develop the idea further before he had to publish; all the same, the fear remained, and he knew he could not wait forever.

Eventually he realized that his craving for recognition was fueled, in part, by his own childhood. When he was very small his mother would pull back whenever he attempted to reach out to her. Her withdrawal was a refusal to recognize that reaching out was a part of him. He had known for a long time that she only recognized that part of him that was like her. What he finally realized was that he had trouble recognizing in himself those parts of himself that were not like her — creating a split. He needed to heal this split in himself caused by her. He sensed that an inner recognition of his whole self might lead to a calmer self which might make him more attractive to others. Maybe the reason his letters were not responded to was that they had sensed some driven-ness about him that turned them off.

To heal the split, he needed to recognize that which his mother did not recognize. He also needed recognition from a man. He needed mentors. His only mentor had died the year before. From his father he got the feeling that he might not ever make it, or that it would take a long, long time and require an immense struggle. Nevertheless, he missed his father. He wanted someone in his camp.

Still, he knew on a profound level that deep seers are effectively alone in their search. It is their role to bring new insight back to the community, but the journey to achieve this new insight occurs alone. Yet, he thought, could not several collaborators search together? Must it be the grand heroic act? Could it not be with collaborators, especially since deep seeing covers more than one field?

The process of thinking through the implications of these four tests gave him newfound insight on how to be a deep seer. It also allowed him to renew his meditation on which book to write first. Any of the possible books would require mastering considerable knowledge in a number of fields. Given limited time, he had to work smart by discovering the most important books and articles in a field, so he needed to avoid wasting time on lesser works. This meant that he needed someone in each field to tell him which were the most important books. Moreover, he would need help to find the right person or persons for each field.

The choices of book topics were: first, a book that would bring scholarly recognition, since it dealt with the nature and history of scientific revolutions, though, in his mother's words, it would seem esoteric to most. In the long run it might sell, since it would correct a book that has sold very well over the past forty years; thus, publishers could understand its potential audience and market it properly. Gaining scholarly recognition would help establish his general reputation, so publishers and the buying public would be more open to his other work. Also, this first idea was, he thought, the easiest of the three to understand and to defend.

The second choice was a book that looked at the nature of civilization. However, he remembered Darwin's fear of publishing about evolution because it would undermine established religious beliefs. He knew that his idea also ran counter to the established beliefs of the more orthodox and rigid religious believers. Is a controversy what he wanted? Would he shy away because it would create controversy? Would controversy help or hinder his other ideas?

As a deep seer, he had so far avoided controversy since he always tried to find commonality between diverse ideas and approaches. Yet he knew that the world desperately needed this book. He also sensed that no one else was taking this approach, and that it would not happen if he did not publish. On the other hand, he feared that publishing the theory about civilization might give some bright person a critical clue as to the nature of the approach, since it had evolved out of his third and deepest idea.

His third choice was a book on his deepest insight, one that connected many fields together. It dealt with a hot subject and so might be published relatively easily, but he felt that he was not yet ready. He had mastered two key components, but he needed to master two more, before he felt that he would be ready to publish. The danger was the someone else might publish first.

Thinking through it all, he renewed his conviction that all three ideas were not only unique and deep but also important in the bigger scheme of things, worth publishing.

He wanted most of all to publish the first idea on science, but he had already made commitments on the second idea of civilization, and at the same time, he knew that he had to keep working on the third idea if he were to beat potential competitors. For the first idea he was so far alone, but for the second he might have some potential collaborators. Also, since the second idea about civilization was a subset and outgrowth of the third idea, establishing it would help the third idea in the long run.

So, he resolved that, while he would continue to work on all three ideas, he would focus primarily on the second idea of civilization. The third idea was not ready yet to publish.

For the first idea, it is possible that all he needed was to find several key supporting examples from the history of science. With these examples he could fairly quickly write a scholarly article that would capture the essence of the idea, and then it might not be necessary to write a book.

This left the second idea as his primary focus for a book.

Later that day, someone he knew called, an expert on civilization, and he set up an appointment to discuss the second idea.