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Up, Down, and On the Ground.

Assigning value to containers based on their contents is faulty. There is nothing buoyant about the nature of a balloon: one can just as easily be filled with water as helium. Words are similar containers. They are neutral until filled with meaning and value according to different contexts and standards. Up, down, and on the ground are terms which each denote myriad spatial and social relationships, but each acquires meaning in association with overcoming resistance through demonstrations of force and ability.

Gravity, ubiquitous and uncompromising, is perhaps the most fundamental force that we can perceive. As a result, we laud going up. It means we've accomplished something and that we've overcome gravity's resistance – either metaphorically or in reality. Climbing a ladder and going uphill are colloquial testaments to this. Skyscrapers are built manifestations of it, and are valued proportionally to their distance from the ground. The views from them are just some of the secondary spoils of the labor. As small victories over gravity, even jumps have competitions and rewards. By contrast, going down to the ground harnesses gravity, and so we view this as barely any achievement at all. It happens naturally, proves nothing, and rarely comes with reward. Occupying the ground is a neutral and unexceptional condition in which gravity is constant and no one wins.

Just as moving up takes effort against gravity, going down below ground requires overcoming the similar resistance of material as well fear of the unknown. Digging, whether in a physical or an intellectual sense, takes effort and risk. As such, when we uncover something or acquire a deep knowledge of something, it is seen as an accomplishment. Here too, vision seems to be another reward from the uncovering but this time as the result of a subtraction rather than an addition. Familiar expressions are replete with such a sentiment. Beyond fundamental notions of *understanding*, getting 'to the bottom of' something is always important. Moreover, terms like 'foundations' and 'infrastructure' also allude to gravity's dictum that 'above' must ultimately be supported from 'below.'

Transgressing the resistance of physiology also grants particular values to kinds of vision. Like gravity, native sight can be thought of as neutral and commonplace. However, the ability to

see at exceptional scales above and below this norm is imbued with value. An overview, one in which macroscopic insight is obtained at the expense of some surface-level detail, is valued for its overarching perspective. Similarly, the ability to see underlying structure through the microscope compounds the notion of a depth of understanding to epitomize an aspect in which going down, this time in scale, is granted cultural import.

Distance is also a force to be surmounted. While going up may offer an overview and going down may reveal the foundations of an idea or a place, neither view is proximal. The immediacy, directness, and everyday aspects of locating oneself 'on the ground' make it a valuable perspective for its surmounting the forces of removal that distance implies. The relevance implied in this position as well its connotations of compromise render it useful. Rather than find value in abstraction, this perspective finds it in concrete understanding and balance between near and far, above and below, foreground and background.

As with material forces, words gain significance by connoting the overcoming of socio-cultural forces. Often the latter can be more potent than the former. The pressure to conform is among the strongest exerted, and aberrations draw scrutiny and censure. The ability to resist this force is responsible for creating both the cult of individuality as well as the notion of an 'underground' culture. Thus, a path downward to avoid the mainstream's stabilizing forces tends to produce non-conformity and its corollary, uniqueness. Both of these are valued as demonstrations of overcoming social pressures.

In conclusion, notions of up, down, and ground are constructed in reference to value systems. The forces that shape these systems combine physical phenomena, material forces, physiological limits, and societal pressures, and their interaction begets varying and contextual definitions. What is constant, however, is that ideas of up, down, and on the ground gain or lose value relative to the transgressing of boundaries and overcoming of obstacles. Societies set limits in order to create metrics of success and failure in economic, physical, and intellectual terms. When forces such gravity and conformity are defeated in order to surpass such limits, we create shared values with which terms can be imbued.