

COLORS of Thinking in Spiral Dynamics®

The Spiral Dynamics model is derived from the original thinking of Dr. Clare W. Graves. Here is a brief introduction to the Gravesian point of view as it has evolved thus far:

Human nature emerges along a developmental path from one equilibrium state to the next. These can be viewed as stages wherein each layer adds new elements to all that came before; in turn, each stands in preparation for a next phase which may or may not come. Every "level of human existence" offers a particular viewing point for *the real world* as defined by its unique set of perceptual filters. These diverse reality views lead to very different decision-making approaches, organizing principles for business, economic and governance models, and ideas of what appropriate, effective living means.

Through decades of research, Dr. Graves built "the emergent, cyclical, double-helix model of adult biopsychosocial systems development." (When asked about the ponderous title once during a conference, he responded with, "Well, dammit, that's what it is" and a wink.) He used pairs of letters to designate the interaction of *conditions-without* and latent *systems-within*. His labels for the eight core ^vMemes take the form of A-N, B-O, C-P, D-Q, E-R, F-S, A'-N', B'-O', etc. (They are noted below.) But there are also two transition states between each pair. For example, the transition stages between smug Yuppie and communitarian chic are E-R/f-s and e-r/F-S. Between raw idinal power drives and purposeful orderliness are C-P/d-q (the realm of many violent zealots) and D-Q/c-p (self-righteous absolutism). It's very powerful, but also pretty complicated until you become used to the letter language. There is also a clear sequence to the alphabetical labels that can erroneously be taken as a "better-than"/"worse-than" stacking. (The levels are not qualitative markers of human worth, but quantitative markers of expansiveness of conceptual space.)

Though Graves used the term, "double-helix," a Spiral is also a useful way to visualize this process of emerging systems. (Many of his original graphics infer that form, but Graves' draftsman could not execute the drawings.) As a Spiral builds, each whorl represents the flow from one reality to the next. Individuals, organizations, and entire societies move along this spiral trajectory, shifting their priorities, values, and essences as they go toward their various futures. Since *the future* may be almost anywhere along the Spiral, the question is: What is next for *this* person or group, sensing the world in *this* way, changing from *this* way of being to the one that is next. Likewise, rather than asking, "what kind of person is this?" the Gravesian approach is to ask, "How is this person thinking about this thing in these circumstances, and why?" Thus, the model is not a typology but a flowing process of emerging, nested systems.

Another tributary of Spiral Dynamics is the burgeoning science of memetics which describes the notion of *memes* -- idea/information packets that transfer virus-like from mind to mind, community to community. (See the [book reviews](#) section and search the Web for "meme" or "memetics".) Spiral Dynamics connects memetics with yet deeper forces in human nature -- the core intelligences of the human spiral which are the attractors (and repellers) of memes. These are the ^vMemes (rhymes with *vee-themes*) which determine *why* and *how* people process ideas as they do. (Other non-memetic language includes "value systems" and "levels of psychological existence." The memetic connection arose with the 1996 book, *Spiral Dynamics*, and was not a part of Dr. Graves' original work which stands quite well without it.)

Movement and stasis along the developmental Spiral - either up or down - are reflections of the interaction between *Life Conditions* (the *conditions-without* which combine the historic times, physical place, psycho-social existence problems, and socio-economic circumstances) and the ^vMemes accessible in the individual or collective mind (the *systems-within*). Generally, the evolution is toward more elaborated, more complex and inclusive ways of being - "higher" levels. However, life is without guarantees and there can also be regressions to previous, less complex, "lower" level structures. In either case, the active ^vMemes are the containers for ideas and the essence of value systems, *weltanschauuns*, and the many "real" worlds that exist in parallel - sometimes in conflict, sometimes in confluence - on earth today.

So, for simplicity, we introduced a color-code system back in the late 1970's to label the Gravesian levels ('Memes) in their peak conditions. The color choices were based on convenience for making title slides and training aids - there is no deep significance intended. However, these metaphors may help in remembering the sequence:

Beige - savannah grasslands and survival

Purple - color of royalty and the first common dye

Red - blood and hot emotional energy

Blue - sky and heavens

Orange - steel taking form at the furnace

Green - plants and ecology

Yellow - solar energy and life force (correlates to Beige as survival in complexity)

Turquoise - earth's color viewed as a whole from afar (correlates with Purple as a global village)

Coral - life beneath the seas' surface (correlates with Red - a new collective energy core)

Teal - spirit and life connecting (correlates with Blue)

etc.

Although Dr. Graves never used colors himself -- he used his letter-pairs and sometimes even numbers for the levels -- he expressed no objection to this simplified set of labels *except* that it mixes the two double-helix forces into one term, just as numbers do, thus suggesting a simplicity which is not there. For those unfamiliar with the model, here's a quick summary of the landmark zones along the Spiral. Remember that these are ways of thinking about a thing, not types of people, so several can coexist in admixtures and clusters. There are shadings, mixtures, and blends within individuals and ranges in organizations and communities.

Eight Value Systems / 'Memes that have emerged to date and still exist side-by-side on earth . . .

1 BEIGE (A-N) based on biological urges/drives; physical senses dictate the state of being

2 PURPLE (B-O) threatening and full of mysterious powers, spirit beings which must be placated and appeased

3 RED (C-P) I like a jungle where the tough and strong prevail while the weak serve; nature is an adversary

4 BLUE (D-Q) controlled by a Higher Power that punishes evil and eventually rewards good works and Right living

5 ORANGE (E-R) full of resources to develop and opportunities to make things better and bring prosperity

6 GREEN (F-S) the habitat wherein humanity can find love and purposes through affiliation and sharing

7 YELLOW (A'-N' or G-T) a chaotic organism where change is the norm and uncertainty a usual state of being

8 TURQUOISE (B'-O' or H-U) a delicately balanced system of interlocking forces in jeopardy in human hands

9 CORAL (C'-P' or I-V) should tend to be I-oriented, controlling, consolidating - if the pattern to date holds

What people in each world seek out in life . . .
(Goals of "Successful" Living)

- 1 BEIGE (A-N)** survival; biogenic needs satisfaction; reproduction
- 2 PURPLE (B-O)** safety/security; protection from harm; family bonds
- 3 RED (C-P)** power/action; asserting self to dominate others; control
- 4 BLUE (D-Q)** stability/order; obedience to earn later reward; meaning
- 5 ORANGE (E-R)** opportunity/success; competing to achieve results; influence
- 6 GREEN (F-S)** harmony/love; joining together for mutual growth; awareness
- 7 YELLOW (A'-N' or G-T)** independence/self-worth; fitting a living system; knowing
- 8 TURQUOISE (B'-O' or H-U)** global community/life force; survival of Earth; consciousness

How "rational" people might deal with such a world . . .
(Coping Systems)

- 1 BEIGE (A-N)** as natural instincts and reflexes direct; automatic existence
- 2 PURPLE (B-O)** according to tradition and ritual ways of group; tribal; animistic
- 3 RED (C-P)** asserting self for dominance, conquest, and power; exploitive; egocentric
- 4 BLUE (D-Q)** obediently as higher authority and rules direct; absolutist; conforming
- 5 ORANGE (E-R)** pragmatically to achieve results and get ahead; multiplistic; achievist
- 6 GREEN (F-S)** responds to human needs; affiliative; relativistic; situational
- 7 YELLOW (A'-N' or G-T)** build functional niche to do what one chooses; existential; systemic
- 8 TURQUOISE (B'-O' or H-U)** experiential to join with other like thinkers; holistic; transpersonal

Dr. Graves' model is open-ended, so new letters, numbers, or colors will need to be added as new levels of psychological existence are identified in human nature. His use of primes (A'-N' as an alternative to G-T, for example) suggests the notion that the process may be one of six-on-six systems rather than a simple series. Thus, the seventh is an echo of the first, the eighth an echo of the second, etc. This is where the "First Tier" and "Second Tier" notion presented in Spiral Dynamics comes from. There could theoretically be a third, fourth, and more Tiers as and if human nature continues to emerge. For more on Dr. Graves' original thinking, go to our <http://www.clarewgraves.com> site.

Spiral Dynamics® Colors and Transitions between Dr. Graves' Nodal States
from the
Emergent, Cyclical Double-Helix Model of Adult BioPsychoSocial Systems Development
(Reproduced from a handout prepared by Chris Cowan)

AN BEIGE (World1).....Survival/meeting biological needs/instinctive drives & urges

BEIGE / PURPLE Awakening of a sense of dependent self in a mysterious and frightening world where being with others means safety

BO PURPLE (World2).....Safety/tribal needs/adherence to ritual/obeying chief(s)/harmony/reciprocity

PURPLE / RED Awakening of an egocentric self determined to break the shackles of the family or tribe and become a powerful individual

CP RED (World3).....Power/action/excitement/proving individual prowess/shame/cunning dominance

RED / BLUE Awakening of a purposeful self with guilt in search of meaning in a purposeful existence and reasons why we live and die

DQ BLUE (World4).....Purpose/obedience to authority/stability/rules/meaning/guilt/duty

BLUE / ORANGE Awakening of a pragmatic, independence-seeking self who challenges higher authority and scientifically tests possibilities

ER ORANGE (World5).....Competition/success/making things better/autonomy/adroit control/growth

ORANGE / GREEN Awakening of a sociocentric self who strives for belonging and acceptance and needs to discover spirit, inner harmony, peace

FS GREEN (World6).....
....Affiliation/sustainability/collaboration/consciousness/fulfillment/sharing/connections

GREEN / YELLOW Awakening of an inquiring, interdependent self who no longer needs approval yet can collaborate when appropriate with diminishing compulsions or fears

A'N'* YELLOW (World7).....Being/functionality/discovery/integralism/responsibilities of living/connections

YELLOW / TURQUOISE Awakening of experiential self who seeks ways of being that use knowledge to restore natural harmony and balance

B'O'* TURQUOISE (World8)...Experience of holism/accept existential realities/integration of life energies

TURQUOISE / CORAL . . . the open-ended Graves theory continues as new thinking systems awaken and coping with life's existential dichotomies activates new neuronal systems

* A'N' = GT; B'O' = HU. For those unfamiliar with Dr. Clare W. Graves's original model, the letter pairs represent the emergent double-helix as Life Conditions (times, place, problems, circumstances plus the *conditions for existence*) interact with the neurobiological Coping Systems activated in the mind/brain. Thus, the model describes the awakening and submergence of deep values as conditions outside interact with systems inside persons, organizations, and our species. Changes of mind can lead to actions that

change the world. Shifts in the world can alter the perceptions in the mind. This is the preferred terminology, although the color-code, originally designed as a decorative element, has become something of a 'meme' for those unfamiliar with the depth of the model.

There are presently eight landmark systems with two transitional stages (entering and exiting) between each pair, along with blends and combinations. One view of the theory is as an emergent hierarchy of systems that build up in sequence, a progression through levels of psychological existence. Another is to look at the mixtures of 'MEMEs' active in a situation and to take a reading of the energies at work and the products of those interactions. Both are useful. (See FAQ for more.)

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Chris Cowan and Natasha Todorovic, Partners
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