

What Is Spiral Dynamics Integral? By Don Beck

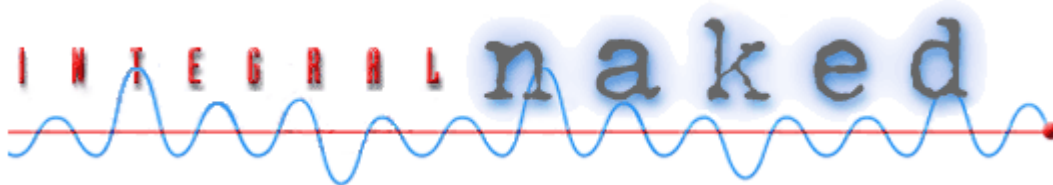
INTEGRAL naked

Spiral Dynamics is based on the original work of Clare W. Graves, who taught at Union College for a number of years. He was quite upset in teaching psychology because he would teach on each of the theories from Freud to Watson/Skinner behaviorism to humanistic approach of Maslow and Carl Rogers and at the end of the course his students would say, “Fine, Dr. Graves, which theory is right?” Well, that just about drove this man crazy because he didn't have an answer to that question.

So from that type experience he began a longitudinal research activity designed to try to figure out why people think in different ways about virtually everything from politics to religion to sports to architecture to economic theories to sex and marriage to a host of other kinds of issues. And what he discovered was that these different theories, rather than being contradictory of each other are simply different stages of psychological development.

So from that original research that lasted over about 30 years he finally reached a state of being able to describe what today we call Spiral Dynamics. The basic concept is based on a spiral, which means that as a spiral unfolds, it moves to greater complexity. While it is, in a sense, a single line because if you lay out a spiral it will be a line, yet each of the turns of the spiral represents a different worldview, a weltanschauung, a way of understanding reality, a bottom line and what today we're also calling a meme, a value system meme. We're able now to demonstrate what lies beneath the surface in relationships, in issues, in controversy, even in warfare, are these different core adaptive contextual complex intelligences.

Let's look quickly at the nature of these intelligences. Basically, there are three components that we need to understand. The first component would be the life conditions, the problems of existence that people are encountering. These, of course, are different in terms of culture and of time and a number of other factors.



So life conditions for most people can become more complex or, in case of crisis, can regress into being less complex. But first we need to recognize that these systems that we're trying to describe are not innate in people, not like IQ intelligence or EQ emotional intelligence. Rather, they are adaptive intelligences to these life conditions. So first we have life conditions.

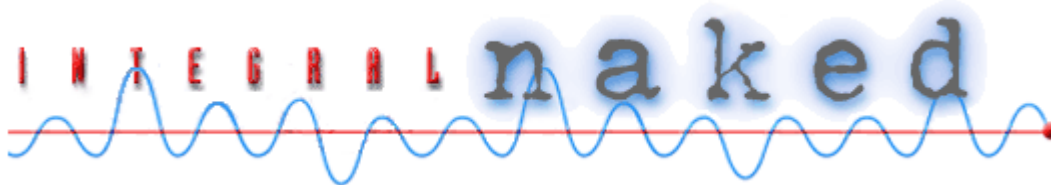
Second, we have the memetic code. That is to say, the way that we deal with those life conditions.

Now there isn't a single, one-to-one relationship between life conditions and a code. A person might be overwhelmed by certain life conditions like a deep-sea diver who gets the bends and the coping mechanism designed to deal with those life conditions may or may not be awakened. There is no guarantee of that.

Further, a person may, in an altered state kind of experience, begin to contemplate different memetic codes before they reach a threshold of replicating themselves and so they are, in a sense, from a less complex system in an altered state beginning to contemplate the more complex ways of thinking but have yet to reach a threshold where they become part of their every day life and part of their particular realities because those life conditions in which they're functioning simply don't support them.

So we have life conditions and then we have the awakened systems, and then third we have the way those codes are being expressed in real life, whether in a host of topics like religion, politics, lifestyles and so forth. Once again, no direct connection system between the awakened code and its surface-level manifestation and so this means when we look at these systems in just a moment the orange code, achievement and modern, doesn't always produce capitalism. Those are simply historic manifestations of the code.

So here are the three components—life conditions, awakened systems to deal with those life conditions and then the particular way that that code is being expressed in that person's repertoire of adaptations to those life conditions. So if



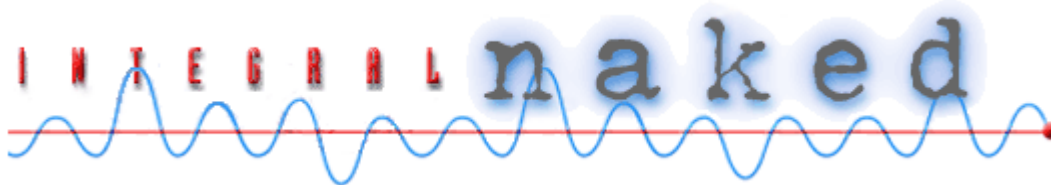
we look quickly at these codes you can begin to get a sense of why they are what they are. Each one, then, is designed to deal with certain conditions in the environment and when the new one is expressed, as you can see in the graphic, the older codes don't disappear. Rather, they continue because those life conditions that gave them birth are still two paychecks away from a person.

With beige we have the basic instinctive survivalist system, making it through the day, making it through the night. You see it in newborn infants, you see it in the elderly, you see it in times of great crisis like in 9-11 when there's a temporary regression into beige. So the only thing important now is survival.

Out of the beige system came the purple system. During the Ice Age, when clans began to bump into other clans, a need to form a more complex system and what happened in the brain was the awakening of the cause and effect linkages and thus we had the emergence through purple. And you can even watch these in young children as they suddenly have animistic belief about their dog or their dolly or bonding to their blankets or if you saw some of the current movies then you can begin to see how purple develops itself in response to crisis.

And so out of purple, then, comes red, the first of the strong, egocentric, self-centered, "I am me," "I am the greatest," "I am all there is," assertion of egocentric and power. You see it in the terrible twos. You see it in adults in various expressions of macho and you see it in entire nations today in terms of the only bottom line is to assert power. It becomes a very predatory system, yet it's also a very positive stage in human emergence in which the first raw self concept becomes apparent.

Out of red will come blue. Obviously the chaos and anomie of red, each one doing what's right in their own eyes, reaches a stage where there is a need for order and a shift out of looking only for self today into a recognition that "thou, too, are mortal," and there will come some time in the future the reality of death. And often these trigger the search for meaning and purpose which are the key



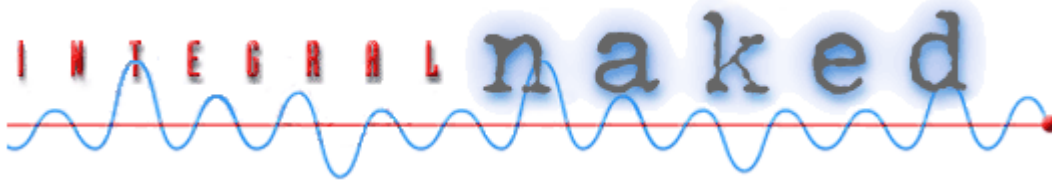
elements in blue. It's a system that's designed to enable people to find deeper meaning and purpose in their particular life and when this particular means begins to express itself, one is quite willing to conform to rules, regulations, to some kind of plan for that person's life because they will guarantee something in the future. And so the code here becomes sacrifice self now to obtain later.

Out of blue, historically, comes the autonomous self of orange. If you think of blue in terms of kind of a fatalistic, "I'm simply along for the ride and whatever will be, will be," out of that will come, "Well, maybe I can change things. Maybe I can influence my own course. Maybe we need not accept the inevitability of whatever "ism" that we have embraced. Maybe we can make a difference."

So out of the Enlightenment came the whole notion of individual freedom and independence and when Martin Luther was able to, on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, to nail the 95 Theses, that in itself was an assertion that each individual could interpret the Bible on their own and his friend Gutenberg put a Bible in the hands of everyone because of the technology of the printing press and thus we had the surge of orange to create the good life here and now and not wait until the pie in the sky when we die.

So the orange value system meme is certainly the dominant force today in our society, aided and abetted by our amazing technological successes and by our capability as humans to go anywhere on the world, down beneath the oceans and even to the planets. So orange, then, is that expansive value system and because, like red, it's a warm color, the focus is on self versus the focus on some kind of collective.

Well, as you might expect, out of orange came green, a shift again from the I/me/mine of orange into the we/us/our of green, into the more subtle humanistic concerns that happens only in societies that have enough money in the bank. That's why you don't find green in Afghanistan and recently in a project in Mexico where the top-level government officials they said there's very, very little in green



in Mexico other than from colonies of Americans and others who come down there on vacation.

So what triggers green is the awareness that maybe in the search of success and material pleasure we've lost our soul, we've lost what it means to be human. We've become so automated by our technology and, in one sense, enticed by our material gain and our affluence that maybe it's time that we began to ask, "What's it all worth?" And thus we've had the shift out of orange into green.

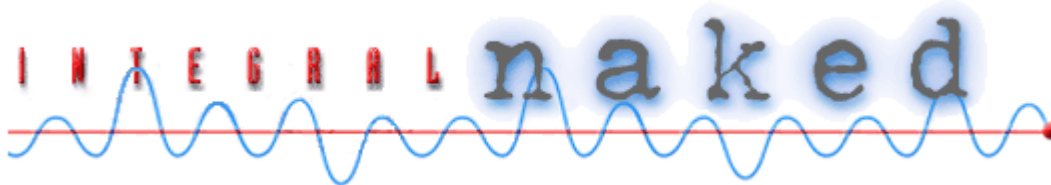
In some cases, that experience of green will be more conceptual than realistic in terms of the full array of sensitive emotions that often captures a person in green. It may lead to all kinds of social concern in terms of business organizations without moving into a heavy green grope kind of emotive experience. It may take a number of different forms.

But likewise, it looks down-spiral at orange and blue and sees in them elements that divide people, that bring harm to people, that separate people. And so one of its first obligations, it thinks, is to deconstruct what orange has produced because it produces winners and losers and what blue often produces because it locks saints and sinners into categories.

And so green's goal is to try to clean up the spiral in terms of what the other systems have done, which it views to be dangerous and detrimental to humans themselves. So it has that cleansing kind of effect on people.

But green, by its very nature, is a short-term and very, very expensive system because in spite of all of its good intentions, in spite of its egalitarian motives to see to it that everybody has an equal share of our bounty, it lacks in itself the codes to actually make those things happen. Consequently, out of green will come what we call the second-tier systems.

In Clare Graves' research, he found a momentous leap. He found in the people that he was studying a capacity in what he calls G-T or yellow. He found the ability to make decisions far beyond what any of the other subjects that he's

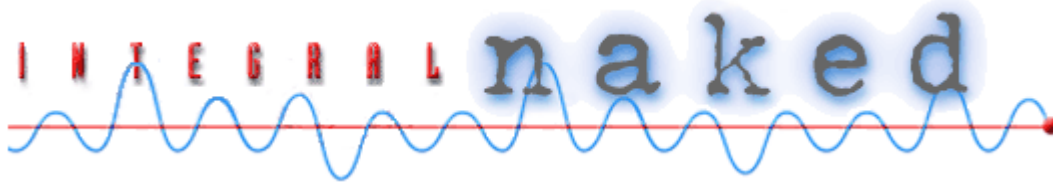


been studying for years were able to accomplish. He didn't know why. He had no idea why it seemed to be that this next system was not the next in the series of ratchets of systems but of something quite different.

And so that's why in his research he said the first six systems represent our attempt to leave our more animalistic nature and with green, that's the capstone of that search. But he said in second tier is when, for the first time, having met most of our needs as humans we simply don't have the same kind of predators, we can find food down at the local grocery store, we have access to what happens around the world instantly, so here we are now, as species Homo Sapiens, standing up once again to say, "What in the world are we and where are we going?" but asking these questions with a full array of skills that have been added to us by these different meme codes. And so the crossing over of this great Rubicon from green to yellow or from first tier to second tier describes the cutting edge of society today.

In yellow, which is a warm color, which means it's an I/me/mine focused on self, we're going to define a whole different kind of human, one that's not driven as much by obsessions, one that has a good internalized compass, one that has is more comfortable inside his or her skin, one who understands reality in terms of natural flows, one who is able to focus on human nature, not as a fixed type as the first tier meme codes tend to do, that is a final answer, but recognizes the inevitability of the flow.

Consequently, one of the first things yellow has to do is look back at the first-tier systems and see where there's serious trouble. Now it does this on its own behalf. It wants to live in a world where it can pursue its own interests, but when it's threatened by drive-by shootings in red, when rather insidious, malignant "isms" can come out of a version of the jihad in blue endanger its survival, when orange has so contaminated the environment it can't breathe and when green's naivete is such it refuses to put in the kind of disciplines necessary for others to

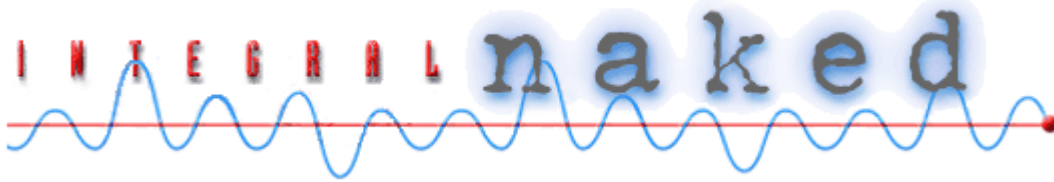


climb this existential ladder, that impairs upon the capacity of yellow to be free and to live the kind of lifestyle that it chooses for itself.

And so its first task, in a sense, is to put on a toolkit and surf up and down the spiral to repair each of the systems to enable life to continue. And when it's joined with, in a sense, its compatriot, turquoise, that is right brain with data, it is, more or less, brains with feelings. Then we have both an I/me/mine system in yellow joined with a we/us/our system in turquoise. And just as yellow's task is to repair the first-tier systems and to stitch together the wounded world, turquoise, because it is a collective we/us/our system tuning in to energy fields and to life itself—not just human life but all life—engulfs the spiral in the warm, healing bond that makes possible humans, for the first time, freeing themselves from the gravitational tug of the more primitive systems and, therefore, enabling humans to move ahead.

So those are the first eight of the memetics which have emerged to date and since the whole Clare Graves Spiral Dynamics concept is not a final stage it means there will be coral. Then there'll be teal and as each of these life conditions warrant, then we'll begin to see the more complex systems start to emerge, many of whom have already been experienced because of altered states. But until they reach that threshold where they replicate and begin to solve human problems they have yet to reach the stage of being a value system meme.

Well, to conclude this very quick trip, we want you to see that these are systems in people and not types of people. We want you to understand that each of us may, at certain times in our life, even though we have advanced to more complex views of the world, may under circumstances when life conditions get worse, regress back to the essential coping systems to deal with those life conditions. And what exists inside the individual, likewise, exists within the core of a company, within its sacred Ark of the Covenant that determines how that company does business. And, likewise, these same codes exist within the core of cultures and entire societies.



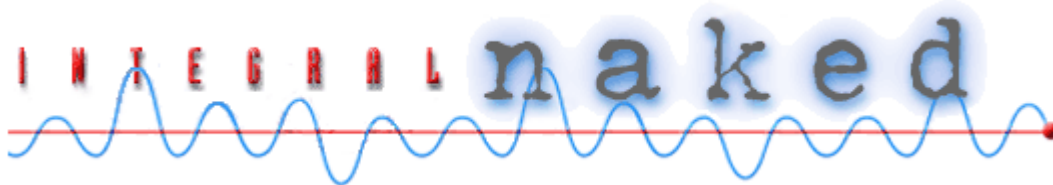
One of the most important aspects of what we call second tier is that Spiral Dynamics is now integral. This is a major development in the whole Graves paradigm, one that he encouraged me—the last time I talked to him before his death in 1986, he said, “Don, you must continue the work. The research I’ve done has been important but my whole theory says it itself has to emerge.” And so in my promise to Clare Graves, I said that’s what my role will be, to continue your research and to add on to it elements that you could not have seen back when you were gathering data back in the 1960s and 1970s. And certainly the influence of Ken Wilber here was such that it began to open a whole new horizon to those of us who have been working with the Graves concept for a number of years.

So we’ve added the term “integral” to suggest that even the whole Spiral Dynamics concept is emerging, it’s evolving. And what this means practically in what we call second tier will be both a vertical integration and a horizontal integration.

So by integral vertical, I mean that what happens in second tier is a recognition that all of the meme codes and first-tier systems need to be healthy. And so the task of the integral approach is to show people how they can integrate and awaken and refresh and certainly empower each of these systems in them.

And so rather than debate between the various meme codes or listen to people say this one is better than that one, our approach in Integral is that each of these represent ways to be human and since the spiral is inside the person, then it is critical that each of these systems resonate, be exercised, in such a way for them to contribute to the further evolution of the spiral itself. And so yellow and turquoise both attend to the question, “How can we keep the whole first tier set of systems in their healthy version and how can we keep the entire spiral open for movement if and when life conditions trigger that movement?”

So rather than debate between each of the meme codes, it’s so refreshing to be able to say, but each of these are critical aspects of being human and because



of our vertical sense, we can identify where people, companies, societies are functioning. Then we can begin to show what is next for them.

So each of us has a center of gravity and we have memes in our basement, those systems once used but today are not as congruent or relevant, and memes in our attic, which means those systems appearing on the horizon. So we live in tension zone between those memes used before and those yet to emerge. And so the basic concept now, rather than to discredit any of these meme codes is to show their importance in the overall emergence of the spiral. So that's what makes Integral different, even from those other people using this Graves concept.

But second, it becomes integral horizontally in that we're able to show in second tier how each of these codes operate in the full dimension of being human. And here, once again, using the Wilber all quadrants, all levels, all lines concept we're able to actually graph and demonstrate how these codes express themselves.

And if you're aware of the all-quadrants-all-levels approach, you have the two versions of the self, that is, the person. Those concepts about the person that are visible, external, such as the brain and the organism and what Graves would call "degrees of activation" of the central nervous system, the visible, biological features. You have those aspects of the individual in terms of what you can't see, what are intangible, those invisible states of mind. And here we find the levels of psychological existence.

If the approach to human development focuses only on one and not the other, then that approach is fragmented and this is a topic of concern to the field of psychiatry that now must be of two minds, one using Prozac in terms of an intervention into the physicality or what we call the upper right, individualistic exterior system, or the use of talk therapy or other tools of emergence in the so-called upper left, individual interior. And it becomes important to recognize the synergy between those two.

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Furthermore, the two lower systems, which are collective, that is to say the collective, interior system, which is invisible—and these are the webs of culture, relationships, norms, boundaries and customs—and the lower right system would be the visible societal structures—economic, political, laws, habitat—things that you can see about our collective sense.

And what is really powerful about this model is one can diagnose a particular situation and see what kind of intervention is necessary and flesh out that intervention in all four quadrants. Otherwise, we have efforts that appeal to only one quadrant and deny the importance of the other, like we give economic aid to a country and not pay attention to its interior capacity to handle that money in a responsible sense, or we expose children to pretty nifty training programs to keep them out of gangs and then what do we do? We send them back to the same gang-infested, lower-left culture that produced the dysfunctionality.

And so what is extremely powerful about this integral approach is that we can hone in on any particular situation, diagnose what's happening in all four quadrants, read the codes to see at what level these interventions are now being pitched and then do what we call “major alignment” to see to it that all the efforts in all four quadrants and, ultimately, in all the lines of development—social, emotive, physical, ethical—are, likewise, accommodated. So we come up with a full spectrum approach, one that has the capability to do a major shift in the whole critical mass.

Now while this sounds pretty complicated, it's actually quite simple. We even use the metaphor, “Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall,” to illustrate it. You know, he had a great fall and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put him together. Well, the reason is, so many efforts are fragmented, ad hoc, piecemeal. They all mean well, but the various stakeholders—home, church, school, law enforcement, business, government—all of these things are doing the very best they know how to do, but things get worse because they lack the ability to integrate their efforts and align them like laser beams on these meme codes.

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So what we've been able to demonstrate is what we developed in South Africa, is how to practically use this information in this integral fashion to deal with what are some of the most difficult problems that we encounter today. So this becomes very exciting work because we know exactly what we're trying to do memetically and we can show how the various entities', stakeholders', efforts may, unhappily, be contradictory, piecemeal, ad hoc, fragmented and, therefore, we can introduce at community levels, in companies, in communities, and in entire societies, ways to shift the focus and the efforts in such a way to impact the emergence of people.

And so we're able, because we're integral, to look at other entities that are traveling the same territory with us and begin to do some alignment. And we gain from them as they gain from us. But this becomes a very interesting and useful application of Spiral Dynamics, because our task (if we choose to accept it, of course) is to do things in the betterment of this human Spiral. So I've become a "Spirocrat;" I believe in the "Spiralocracy;" I think we can identify what I call the power of the third win. And if we can keep the Spiral healthy, if we focus on the undercurrents of the memetics, this is how we can enable emergence of people up the Spiral as life conditions warrant.