

Spiral Dynamics and the Nature of Cultural Evolution

This month's briefing follows on from our consideration of Ken Wilber's Four Quadrant model in February. Wilber himself has made extensive use of insights from Spiral Dynamics in his recent books, since it adds a dynamic dimension to his own ideas about the development of consciousness. The best-known current exponent of SD is Dr. Don Edward Beck, from whose work we will draw.

Origins of Spiral Dynamics

Spiral Dynamics is based on the seminal work of the late Professor Clare W. Graves, Union College, New York. He described a series of "Levels of Psychological Existence" as an emerging pattern and priority of worldviews, value systems, and complex adaptive intelligences arising in response to 'Life Conditions'. This picture of human nature is neither finite nor static, but rather evolving and dynamic. As Graves explained it:

Briefly, what I am proposing is that the psychology of the mature human being is an unfolding, emergent, oscillating, spiralling process marked by progressive subordination of older, lower-order behaviour systems to newer, higher-order systems as man's existential problems change.

Graves continues: '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, organising principles for business, economic and governance models, and ideas of what appropriate, effective living means.'

Through decades of research, Graves built "the emergent, cyclical, double-helix model of adult biopsychosocial systems development." When asked about the ponderous title once at a World Future Society conference, Graves responded with, "Well, dammit, that's what it is!"

Beck explains further: 'The human Spiral, then, consists of a coiled string of worldviews, each the product of its times and conditions. *Yet, when a new worldview emerges, the older systems do not disappear.* Rather, they remain subsumed in the total flow and not only add texture to the more complex ways of living, but remain "on call" in case the problems that awakened them to service reappear.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

Omnipedia readers will be familiar with the parable of the six blind men and the elephant: each describes a different aspect according to his vantage point, all of which are partial and none of which seem related to the others unless you can view the whole elephant.

Partial truths can only be understood within a larger framework that includes them. Spiral Dynamics embodies this kind of approach in

an eight-stage developmental model. Beck has used a values test to help identify which stage people are at by asking which views of the elephant would best describe you:

The World is

- a . . . a natural milieu where humans rely on instincts to stay alive
- b . . . a magical place alive with spirit beings and mystical signs
- c . . . a jungle where the strongest and most cunning survive
- d . . . an ordered existence under the control of the ultimate truth
- e . . . a market place full of possibilities and opportunities
- f . . . a human habitat in which we share life's experiences
- g . . . a chaotic organism forged by differences and change
- h . . . an elegantly balanced system of interlocking-forces.

Your answer to the question will situate you on the spectrum of so-called 'valuesMemes' (vMemes) on the table below. In this context a vMeme is an idea-information packet that is transferred from mind to mind and represents an overall world-view.

THE LIVING STRATA IN OUR PSYCHO-CULTURAL ARCHAEOLOGY (after Graves and Beck)				
LEVEL	COLOUR CODE	POPULAR NAME	THINKING	CULTURAL MANIFESTATIONS/GOALS FOR LIVING
Level 8	Turquoise	WholeView	<i>Holistic</i>	global community; cosmic spirituality; earth changes
Level 7	Yellow	FlexFlow	<i>Ecological</i>	independence; natural systems; change; uncertainty; gnosis;
Level 6	Green	HumanBond	<i>Consensus</i>	harmony/love; egalitarian; feelings; sharing; caring; community
Level 5	Orange	StriveDrive	<i>Strategic</i>	opportunity/success; status; competition; materialistic; consumerism
Level 4	Blue	TruthForce	<i>Authority</i>	stability/order; meaning; discipline; obedience to traditions, morality, rules
Level 3	Red	PowerGods	<i>Egocentric</i>	jungle: power/action; control; gratification; lives for now
Level 2	Purple	KinSpirits	<i>Animistic</i>	safety; tribal bonds; rites, rituals and taboos; superstitions
Level 1	Beige	SurvivalSense	<i>Instinctive</i>	biological drives; survival; food; water; procreation; protection

The colour codes were not part of Graves's original scheme but were introduced in the 70s for simplicity of graphic presentation. Graves used letters of the alphabet (eg A-N, B-O) to signify not only the overlap between the vMemes but also the interaction of external conditions with inner dispositions - hence his polarity image of the double-helix.

Coping Systems

Graves characterises how 'rational' people might be expected to deal with the world, given their understanding of it:

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) asserts self for dominance, conquest, and power; exploitative; 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

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

Historical Evolution of vMemes

Cultural evolution is reflected in the Spiral Dynamics scheme, so that the earlier phases correspond with a gradual process of socialisation. Beck dates the emergence of the blue authoritarian vMeme to 5,000 years ago - arguably the emergence of a patriarchal system. The orange dates back 300 years to the beginning of the scientific and technological revolution along with the rise of mercantile capitalism. The green meme is dated back 150 years to the era of John Muir and transcendentalists like Whitman and Emerson.

All these are called 'First Tier' vMemes because people can only understand things from inside their systems, which they take to be the last word about truth and reality. Second Tier phases, by contrast have reached an understanding of the dynamics and development of the whole system and can see the logic of an unfolding evolution of consciousness.

The scheme can be applied to individual as well as cultural development. Newborn infants begin at Phase 1 with an emphasis on security and survival, moving through purple and red as they define and seek to assert their individuality.

The most interesting contemporary cultural changes are arguably going on at the interface between blue, orange and green, and with the gradual emergence of second-tier thinking, not least in Omnimedia readers!

Cultures and Power

Ken Wilber has estimated the relative distribution of population and power in today's world as follows:

1 Beige: Archaic-Instinctual - 0.1% of population, 0% power

2 Purple: Magical-Animistic - 10% of population, 1% power

3 Red: Power Gods - 20% of population, 5% power

4 Blue: Mythic Order - 40% of population, 30% power

5 Orange: Scientific Achievement - 30% of population, 50% power

6 Green: The Sensitive Self - 10% of population, 15% power

7 Yellow: Integrative - 1% of population, 5% power

8 Turquoise: Holistic - 0.1% of population, 1% power

If Wilber is right, then the central population and power axis is between Blue and Orange, with Orange exerting more power and influence. Greens are beginning to make their presence felt, but they are usually chronically short of funds as the research and education budget is appropriated by Orange and effectively perpetuates its influence within our institutions.

Blue, Orange and Green - A Complex Dynamic

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Scientific materialism (Orange) sees itself as having emerged through the triumph of Enlightenment rationalism (E1) from the authoritarian superstition of Blue and is therefore deeply suspicious of new forms of spirituality manifesting at the Green level and beyond. They commit what Wilber calls the 'pre-trans fallacy' by assuming that all spiritual paths are *pre-rational* when the more advanced forms are explicitly *trans-rational*. Reason is understood as the faculty for analysis, while gnosis or inner knowledge is achieved through exercise of the intuition. Greens who have emerged from Orange are

informed by the social, political and ecological concerns of the 60s and 70s. They are open to new holistic thinking in science, medicine and psychology and are probably engaged in inner and outer transformative work; they correspond to what Paul Ray calls the Cultural Creatives, while his Moderns are Orange and his Traditionalists Blue.

First tier vMemes are, as Wilber points out, generally resistant to the emergence of second tier thinking. Orange tries to reduce advanced interior stages to neuronal firings, while Green is suspicious of the reintroduction of hierarchy since they do not make a distinction between power-based "dominator" and emergent "growth" hierarchies.

A special hazard of the Green meme is what Wilber calls boomeritis, a form of narcissism involving a search for the self that arises within the Green context of pluralism, relativism, diversity and deconstructive postmodernism. We all have experience of meetings where everyone is inclusively allowed to share or process their feelings and no viable conclusion is reached.

vMemes and Intervention in Iraq

Shortly after the invasion of Iraq, Ken Wilber gave an interview in which he applied Spiral Dynamics analysis to the situation. Bush is blue-to-orange while much of the media reflects a contrasting orange-to-green view. Greens, he claims, are by definition against the war, but not all those against the war are necessarily green since there are in his view cogent second tier reasons for going to war as well as for not going to war. This is reflected in the confusion of motives now being expressed.

Removing tyrants may eventually be a function of a World Police Force rather than a self-appointed superpower with mixed motives. And given that societies will always find themselves at different stages, such a World Police Force will be necessary in the foreseeable future even if we can expect a gradual overall shift towards the more integrated levels.

Resources

Spiral Dynamics by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan (1996)

A Theory of Everything by Ken Wilber (2000)

Web Sites:

www.spiraldynamics.org
www.spiraldynamics.com
www.spiraldynamics.net
www.clarewgraves.com

4Q/8L

ALL QUADRANTS/ALL LEVELS

"Tetra-Evolution"

UPPER LEFT
INDIVIDUAL
INTERIOR

"I"

UPPER RIGHT
INDIVIDUAL
EXTERIOR

"It"

(transpersonal waves) self and consciousness

brain and organism

