

focus: spiral dynamics

OF MICE AND MEMES

The theory of spiral dynamics is the most compelling explanation of human development to date, arguably. Proposed by Clare Graves and modified by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan, spiral dynamics places individuals at different levels of development, called memes, within a dynamic spiral of consciousness.

The beauty of spiral dynamics, although a complex model, lies paradoxically in its simplicity (as well as in its evidence found all over the world).

COLOR MY WORLD

Beck and Cowan colored the memes for ease of understanding. First-tier consciousness includes the following levels or stages: Beige; Purple; Red; Blue; Orange; Green. Second-tier consciousness includes the following: Yellow; Turquoise; Coral. The chosen colors are arbitrary representations used for clarity.

SLIP-SLIDING AWAY

The importance of the spiral model is that it is not fixed, the stages are not rigid, but rather dynamic waves. As such, we often find ourselves going “up and down” the spiral in first-tier thinking. All the levels are available to us, as needed. As we move up the spiral, each stage “transcends and includes,” says Wilber, the previous stage of development, until we reach the second-tier of thinking and integrate all levels of first-tier consciousness.

This explains why we find so much conflict between memes. Each meme argues from a subjective point

of view, and it cannot see the other memes’ worldview. Each meme is right; the others, wrong. There is no equivocation.

Further, this explains why we also have conflict between individuals within the same level of development. Argues Wilber, individuals not only argue from their worldview, but we also argue from expressions or manifestations of our individual memes. Thus, religions do not agree for the simple reasoning that, although one could argue that religion is the foundation of the blue meme, the *expressions* of that universal order are markedly different. All in all this is a beautiful, simple, and elegant explanation that is found in spiral dynamics.

HOLON, I’M COMING

It is at second-tier thinking of the spiral where we are able to recognize the importance of the entire spiral and development and importance of all the levels of human consciousness.

According to Wilber, we are at a crucial time in the world’s history and evolution. A great number of people are moving into the green meme. Thus, we are on the verge of an evolution of consciousness, or at least, it is within our capacity to jump to second tier and a truly integrative approach to relating to and explaining our world.

But the problem is what Wilber terms Boomeritis. This affliction is the irony, it is the paradox, of the egalitarian green meme. In its approach to viewing the world as pluralistic, the green meme still does not recognize the lower memes, let

alone the notion that the other memes helped to shape the green meme in its own development. Green stands for equality; thus, it is still a relativistic approach. What’s good for you is good, plain and simple. There is still an element of subjectivism inherent in green. Thus, while trying to embrace all, green argues from its own worldview as well, similar to the other levels. This resistance to any hierarchy is what impedes us from moving from green to yellow, and thus jumping to second-tier, according to Wilber.

Wilber also speaks about his quadrant model and approach to human development, in which the entire human experience can be summed up in four quadrants. In order to be whole, we must strive to embrace the entire quadrant in our experiences.

| Memes in Spiral Dynamics |
|----------------------------------|
| Coral (holons, growth hierarchy) |
| Turquoise (holism) |
| Yellow (integration) |
| 2nd-Tier Consciousness ▲ |
| Green (pluralism) |
| Orange (empiricism) |
| Blue (universal order) |
| Red (power) |
| Purple (mysticism) |
| Beige (survival) |
| 1st-Tier Consciousness ▲ |