

# Foundations, Principles and Inspirational Resources of **Integral Politics**



Illustration: Harald Schellander

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## **3. Clare Graves: The Development of Consciousness and Culture (II)**

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## Chapter 3

### Clare Graves: The ECLET Model of 8 Levels of existence The development of consciousness, culture and worldviews (II)

The next inspirator to be portrayed here was a contemporary of Jean Gebser, but to my knowledge, not familiar with his work. Similar to Gebser, he did not receive wider recognition for his work until after his death. Today, Clare Graves is known and widely acknowledged for his groundbreaking contribution to our understanding of the development of human consciousness, culture and worldviews, which, via the work of Don Beck, Christopher Cowan and Ken Wilber has significantly shaped our current notion of “integral”.

#### *Biographical notes*

Clare Wray Graves was born on December 21, 1914 in New Richmond, Indiana. Unfortunately, we know very little about his childhood (Krumm & Parstorfer: 2014: 19). His academic career and professional life was dedicated entirely to psychology. After a Bachelor degree in mathematics and sciences (Union College, New York), he completed his Master in Psychology (Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio). After three years of teaching at Fenn College, Case Institute of Technology and Western Reserve University, he came back to teach at Union College where he took on a professorship in 1948 and where he remained until his retirement in 1978.

So, different from Gebser, Graves did have the opportunity to develop his work from the “safe basis” of an academic position and career. And like Gebser, he developed his model as a lifetime endeavor that gradually emerged as a kind of by-product of his regular teaching work.



Besides his duties as a researcher and lecturer in clinical psychology, Graves was also an active advisor to many companies, as well as state bodies such as various health and medical services, the penal system and the Juvenile Court of the State of New York, serving as a clinical, criminal and rehabilitation psychologist. This provided him with extensive opportunities to anchor his theory-building in real-life experience.

However, despite his thriving academic career and numerous publications, his main body of work and ideas focusing on what he called the “Emergent, Cyclical, Double-Helix Model of Adult Human Biopsychosocial Systems” (1981) and development – did not get published in its entirety during his lifetime.

It first gained a broader audience through Don Beck and Christopher Cowan’s book “Spiral Dynamics. Mastering Values, Leadership and Change” (1986). Both Beck and Cowan had been students of Graves and had been working closely with him during the last years of his life. Cowan helped Graves to prepare his last two summary papers (1981 and 1982) and Beck used Graves’ model in his work to overcome apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s and 90s.

But only twenty years after Graves’ death (on January 3, 1986) did Christopher C. Cowan and Natasha Todorovic edit his collected set of data and methodology in a book called “The Never Ending Quest” (2005), allowing a broader public to access and discover the hidden riches of Graves’ work.

### **Summary Box: Key concepts, claims and elements of Graves' work**

- \* Based on life-time **clinical work** on adult psychological development and **conceptions of maturity**
- \* **Levels of being** as evolving systems of perceiving, thinking and behaving
- \* **Methodology**: gathering conceptions of maturity from students over 15 years, empirical observation, field testing and double-blind definition of clusters and categories for sorting the material, leading to an evidence-based model of adult human development
- \* Description of **eight consecutive levels of existence**, shifting between “express self” and “sacrifice self”, increasing in complexity and repeating at a higher order at every seventh level
- \* **No end to development** as long as humans face new life challenges. Psychological development is an infinite, open-ended, hierarchical process of increasing one's capability to manage complexity.
- \* Graves' 7<sup>th</sup> level largely corresponds to Gebser's “**integral**” structure, seen **as the globally emerging new cultural force**.
- \* **Overview of Graves' levels of existence**:
  - **AN/automatic** (later: BEIGE): behavior is driven by physical needs and instincts as that of other animals. No excess energy or cognitive capacity for thinking; the individual is one with the world.
  - **BO/animistic** (later: PURPLE): tribal existence creates strong social bonds and vital communities, the world is made sense of in a magical way, tribal ways, rituals and taboos govern social life.
  - **CP/egocentric** (later: RED): totally self-centered, egocentric thinking, primarily concerned with “what's in it for me?” Dominant-submissive mindset: might makes right, pursuit of power, no sense of abstract rules
  - **DQ/absolutistic** (later: BLUE): submits to a higher (often religious) authority that defines what is good and true, explains the order of things and provides safety & security, rules are followed strictly.
  - **ER/multiplistic** (later: ORANGE): self-empowerment and goal-orientation (accomplishing, getting and having more), rational thinking, scientific method, pragmatic experimentation, conquer nature, capitalism, entrepreneurship, secular power, individualism, rule of law (*my rights*), liberal democracy
  - **FS/relativistic** (later: GREEN): questioning the materialistic ER lifestyle, search for subjective happiness, inner peace, good relationships and harmony, overcome individualism through community, altruism, deep empathy and spirituality. Deliberation, participation and deep democracy
  - **A'N'/systemic** (later: YELLOW, integral): new order of conceptual thinking: global, systemic, flexible, differentiated and kaleidoscopic perspective, largely ego-free, coherence between thought and actions, free of fear, striving for self and societal development, best prepared to develop the coming mode of life through wisdom, quality and end-orientation, healing man's misuse of his world
  - **B'O'/intuitive** (later: TURQUOISE): deep exploration of the meaning of human existence
- \* Graves' theory has gained widespread attention via Don Beck/Chris Cowan's “**Spiral Dynamics**”.
- \* **Practical socio-political benefits**: a much more adequate understanding of socio-political problems enabling decision-makers to come up with much more effective responses, solutions and cures.

### *Essentials and framing of Graves' work in a nutshell*

Clare Graves' main merit is that through his life-time work, he essentially confirmed and further differentiated what Jean Gebser called structures of consciousness, yet on an empirical basis of longitudinal clinical studies. While Gebser had built his structures based on a huge number and panorama of sources from the field of cultural studies in the broadest sense of the term, Graves came up with a similar, yet even more articulated model based on clinical psychological experiments and field studies over a period of several decades.

Driven by his interest in what constituted a **mature adult personality**, Graves was increasingly annoyed by the cockfights between the different competing theories in the field, which, according to Rainer Krumm and Benedikt Parstorfer (2014), almost had him resign from teaching. Luckily, he did not, but rather turned his (and his students') curiosity about which theory was "right" into a mind-blowing research project, using his students as "guinea pigs" to find out what adult psychological development and maturity are all about.

Over a period of over nine years, he gathered data, had it evaluated by independent judges and let the latter build categories and types to make sense of it. The result is a framework of **eight systems of perceiving, thinking and behaving** called "levels of being", which, similar to Gebser's structures of consciousness, **shape the totality of a person's being in the world**.

In other words, Graves' theory accounts for fundamental differences in the ways in which individuals see and make sense of the world and, accordingly, behave based on their perceptions and understandings. It can therefore explain conflicts in the social and political realm at a much deeper level than they are usually looked at. As part of this, it offers insights and tools for addressing the roots of socio-political conflicts in much more effective ways.

As a researcher, Graves insisted on thorough procedures and high quality standards of saturation and validity for his findings before publishing any results. Working as a consultant at the same time, he had ample opportunities not only to apply, test and validate his findings practically in various contexts, but also to make recommendations to his clients based on them. Judging from his success, his emerging model proved to be of high value in many areas of the public education and welfare systems. Its discovery, recognition and use in the wider realm of politics still lacks far behind its potential though.

### *Research approach and methodology*

In order to underpin the solidity of Graves' model of adult psycho-social development, let us take a closer look at his research methodology first.

As indicated above, Graves' work revolved all around the question **"What is a healthy mature adult personality?"** In an attempt to move beyond competing theories, optimistic or pessimistic, from psychoanalytic, to behaviorist, humanistic points of view, he chose an empirical approach, consisting of four phases, stretching out over 15 years.

In the **first phase**, Graves asked his students to think and discuss about the issue, and to each come up with a personal statement of what they believed was a psychologically mature personality. These statements were then subjected to two rounds of feedback and reflection, first, by their peers and second,

based on studying concepts of academic authorities on the topic, to see whether or not students changed their views based on any of the feedback they received. So he ended up with several statements on the topic by each student (Graves, 2005: 44f). He repeated this exercise every semester over a period of nine years with changing groups of students and thereby built up a cumulative database of a large number of conceptions of maturity.

Note that Graves' set of respondents included adults of all age groups and backgrounds, among them not only regular students, but also people in the middle of their professional life who attended his evening classes. Furthermore, the dataset was enriched by Graves' work with different groups of clients of the various welfare services that he was serving as an advisor to.

In **phase 2**, Graves then went ahead and asked independent groups of 7-9 judges each from outside the class and with no knowledge about the project to **classify and cluster the material** in any way they found meaningful. He also repeated this exercise every semester over the same period of nine years with changing groups of judges. Thereby, over the years, the classification became more and more differentiated and concise (see below). Note that the ever clearer classification that emerged was not that of Graves, but was agreed upon unanimously by each group of judges. Graves himself did not intervene into the interpretation of the data at this stage.

In **phase 3**, Graves used other seminars he was teaching on Organizational or Industrial Psychology to continue working with some of the students he had obtained material from before. He put them into small groups based on the similarity of their conceptions of maturity and gave them a set of interactive tasks. Essentially, students were asked to self-organize in order to solve specific problems together. This allowed him to find out more about typical ways of thinking and behaving of the different groups and about how well they generally managed to solve the given tasks.

In an ongoing **fourth phase**, Graves continuously confronted the empirical data and classifications with existing literature in the field, hoping to find cues as to how to make sense of the data and test the available theories on these grounds. Ultimately, he found that only one of them was able to accommodate what he had found through his experiments, while all the others had a rather partial and reduced view of the mature human being.

To sum up the methodological dimension of Graves' research, it was based on a solid, double-blind approach for evaluating and interpreting the data. While he himself only acted as the designer and evaluator of the overall research process itself, the process of building the model was constructed such that his own potential bias was designed out of it. This is why he could bona fide speak from an attitude of "letting the data talk".

When he finally presented the entirety of his theory in a **lecture on April 17, 1978**, he confessed that it took him 15 years of examining and re-examining his rich body of data to come up with a convincing interpretation: "You never saw such a God-awful mess. It was incredible. It was so confusing, so full of conflict and contradiction that I had to work from 1961 to 1976 to really make sense out of it" (Graves, 1978). But what he ultimately managed to come up with turned out to be an elegant model, despite its complicated name: the "Emergent-Cyclical, Phenomenological Existential, Double-Helix Level of Existence Conception of adult human behavior". The latter caused Graves to add: "And I'm sorry to have to call it that, because it is all of that". Its short title came to be "The Emergent-Cyclical Levels of Existence Conception (ECLET)". So what is Graves' theory all about – and how is it relevant to integral politics?



### Graves' theory (building) and basic findings

As indicated above, Graves' theory development was a long qualitative research process of making sense of his data, which "simply could not be rationalized within any existing conceptual system" (Graves, 2005: 133). It is worth stating that all of the data contained (more or less) reflected positions expressed by biologically mature human beings about what psychologically mature human behavior looks like. Thus, the first important finding was that there is a huge **variety of conceptions** and beliefs about the nature of maturity, which could not be accounted for by differences in respondents' levels of intelligence or temperament. The latter had been tested and found to be of no relevant influence. Graves' and his team's process of making sense of the overwhelmingly confusing set of data happened in steps, circles and layers of gaining deeper insight, as the body of data expanded and more groups of judges went through it. In the course of this, the following patterns gradually became visible, and were subject to an ongoing refinement of the classifications suggested by the judges.

In a first round of theory-building, **two main categories** emerged: conceptions of maturity had been found to either be based on (different versions of) the idea of *expressing* the self or (a range of positions) suggesting to *sacrifice* the self in favor of some other values. In subsequent rounds of classification, judges came up with three (and later four) **subtypes** to each of these two main categories that they described as follows:

Table 1: Graves' two main categories with four sub-types each (adapted from Graves, 2005)

Subtype	<i>Express self... (E)</i>	<i>Sacrifice self... (S)</i>
4	...but never at the expense of others and in a manner that all life (not just my life) will profit	Sacrifice the idea that one will ever know what it is all about and adjust to this as the existential reality of existence
3	...calculatedly, but never so blatantly as to raise another's eye	....now to the ways of the times in order to get (acceptance) now
2	...to hell with others	... now to get reward later
1	...as if just another animal according to the dictates of one's imperative periodic physiological needs <sup>1</sup>	... forever to the ways of one's elders

Next, Graves could observe the **nature of change and stability between these types**. Based on his repeated experiments with the same set of students in different contexts, he could track how individuals moved between types as a result of being exposed to feedback from and exchange with peers and authorities. He found that if respondents changed their position, they did so in a very specific, non-arbitrary and predictable way. Without exception, respondents changed their positions from E1 to S1, from S1 to E2, to S2 to E3 to S3 to E3 to E4 and from there to S 4. In his own words, this wave-like development implied "that peoples' thinking about what is mature human behavior **changes in an**

<sup>1</sup> The first level description is based on library research, not from written responses in the empirical study (Graves 2002: 199).

**ordered hierarchical fashion**, alternating between the idea that one should express self and one should sacrifice self”, between a focus on outer world and the effort to change it and the focus on the inner world and coming into alignment with it (Graves, 1978).

From this, Graves concluded “that the conceptions of maturity represented in one way or another *psycho-social conceptions of life* [my highlights, EF] and how to live as a human being. They represented in other words **basic paradigms for human existence**” (ibid.). Very similar to what Gebser had described as “full body contact lenses”, these paradigms constitute systems of being in the world which shape and determine the totality of a person’s perception, sense-making and behavior, in Graves’ words: “small personality systems”.

As to the question **what influences a person’s development** through these paradigms or personality systems, Graves found a dynamic interplay between two factors, first, social life challenges and second, the person’s neuro-psychological responses to them. As to latter, Graves found that the two main types of personality systems each correspond to one hemisphere of the brain, even though that part of his work is spelled out in less detail. One core observation in this regard is that “cerebral dominance in the even-numbered systems is by the right hemisphere of the brain”, while “in the odd-numbered systems, beginning with the third, cerebral dominance is shown by the left hemisphere of the brain” (1978 and 2005: 185).

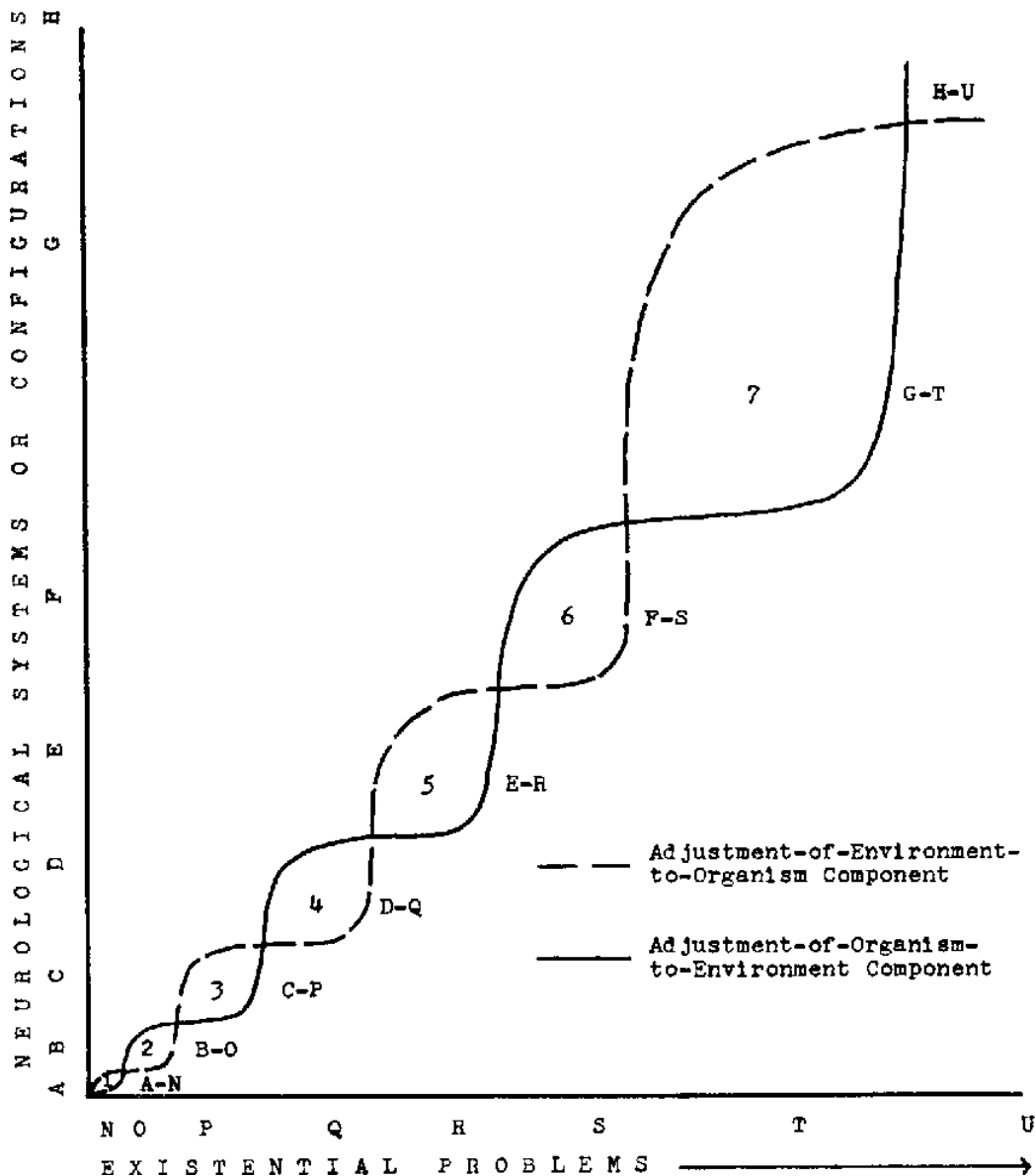
Note that despite this reference to the two hemispheres of the brain, Graves’ concept of evolving personality systems goes beyond cognitive-mental operations and cognitive contents. As explained before, what he calls “**levels of existence**” establishes a very comprehensive notion of the structures that determine a person’s way of dealing with social life-problems, including the whole underlying neuro-structural and bio-chemical setup.

As challenges grow, the brain develops (or unfolds) new capacities to cope with the challenges: “Constant solution of existential problems, constant creation of new existential problems, and constant activation of more complex neuro-psychological systems” (Graves, 2005: 172).

This implies that there is **no end to development** as long as humans are faced with new life challenges. Rather, psychological development is an infinite, open-ended, hierarchical process of **increasing one’s capability to manage complexity**. “There is not, even in theory, any such thing as a (ultimate) state of psychological maturity. Instead, one’s psychological maturity is a function of one’s conditions for existence”. Neither is there “an ultimate set of ethics, values, and purposes by which humans should live. (...) The Utopian society can (n)ever come to be. (...) Instead, there is a hierarchically ordered, always open to change, set of ethics, values and purposes by which people can come to live” (Graves, 1978).

Because of the encompassing, life-determining nature of the “levels of existence”, any change from one system to another can be compared to a **quantum leap**, both for the person concerned and for their environment, as will become clearer when we look at the individual levels (see below). This is the case to an even larger degree at the transition from the sixth to the seventh level of existence, because, as Graves found, at every 7<sup>th</sup> system, “the change in human behavior is almost unbelievable, a change just beyond belief”. He compared this feature of the development of adult psychological life to “a symphony built on **six basic themes** which repeat in higher order form every set of six” (Graves, 1978).

Figure 1: Graves' Double Helix Representation of the Oscillating, Spiraling Development of Adult Human Psychosocial Existential States (adapted from Graves, 2005: 187)



Source: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Levels-of-Existence%3A-an-Open-System-Theory-of-Graves/052f58799d11ac2e44a01b754613aae02d631924>

Interestingly, Graves' 7<sup>th</sup> level very largely corresponds to what Gebser has termed "integral". Both of them agreed that this is the level that is **globally emerging as a new cultural force** in our times – and the one from which real breakthroughs can be expected in dealing with the existential problems that the previous levels have produced over the last centuries.

In fact, based on his broad empirical database (see section above) and his systematic anthropological approach, Graves claimed his theory to be "applicable to any adult human being, **regardless his culture**" (Graves, 2005: 4). This, in turn, had him conclude that his levels of existence were **anthropological givens** with an explanatory power "reaching into the past, carrying through the present", and even useful to "project into the future" (ibid.).



Even though this historical dimension has not been a major focus in Graves' work, his extensive library research helped him to make tentative claims about the **historical appearance** of the different levels in time, and thereby to add a bio-socio-psychological dimension to human cultural history. Note that the German sociologist Günter Dux has later detailed the first emergence of particular cognitive levels of psychological development and connected them to major civilizational transformations in human history (Dux, 2011). These findings are well in line with Graves' work, although not explicitly referring to them.

Graves' model and theory thus have a **unique** and – for the time being – largely underestimated **value and power** in view of both understanding historical societies, and for predicting potential avenues of development (what is possible – and what is not) in the future. For his Emergent-Cyclical Levels of Existence (ECLET) model clearly shows that development can only occur to the next hierarchical level of existence respectively, and that no level can be skipped, at least if it is activated for the first time in a given context. At the same time, inversely, when moving on to a new level, the previous personality systems of meaning-making still remain latently present in both individuals and societies and can be reactivated when the need arises, i.e. when complexity needs to be reduced.

From an **integral politics perspective**, the **unique value and relevance** of this thorough, multi-method body of knowledge and insight lies in its far-reaching implications, covering not only individual bio-socio-psychological development, but through it “the totality of human life”, as Graves put it (Graves, 2005: 4). By mapping out firmly rooted deep structures of universal socio-cultural dispositives, the ECLET model is an extremely helpful orientation and tool for understanding individual and collective behavior. On this basis, it also helps to facilitate processes of emergence and transformation towards greater levels of complexity in our individual and collective ways of meaning- and decision-making.

While Graves did not have the time to fully establish his theory in the academic mainstream of his time before his death in 1986, the elegance of the ECLET model speaks for itself. In fact, Graves himself stressed the “structural similarities or isomorphies” with phenomena observed in other fields, as described, for instance, by **General systems theory**. Indeed, complexity theories have long pointed at analogies across different domains when describing “ordered revolution(s) from some less organized state to some more organized state” (Graves, 2005: 152). This is another indication that Graves was onto something very meaningful.

Let us now take a more detailed look at ECLET's levels of existence and their overall socio-cultural and political implications.

### *A brief overview of Graves' levels of existence and their socio-political relevance*

Graves' levels of existence have been described at length in the posthumously published “Never Ending Quest” (2005). Shorter descriptions have been made available in Graves' articles and in the work of Christopher Cowan and Don Beck (1996). In order to avoid repetition, we will limit the following presentation to what appears necessary in order to understand the political dimension and relevance of Graves' work.

*The first level of existence: AN / automatic (later: BEIGE)*

*Express self as if just another animal according to the dictates of one's imperative periodic physiological needs*

Note that the description of the first level of existence has not emerged out of Graves' above described empirical study, but is based on his library research. The reason for this is that obviously, a person on this level can hardly be a college student, and thus, there were no examples of AN in Graves' samples. Nevertheless, college students – as anyone else – can well regress to this level if conditions enforce it.

The first level is called “automatic” or “animalistic/reactive existence”, because humans at this stage are **“behaving much as other animals do”, driven by their instincts**. They are aware only of the presence and absence of physiological tension, such as hunger or thirst, and use all of their effort and energy to cope with what is arising in the given moment. When a tension arises, they automatically react in order to satisfy the need that is causing the tension (Graves, 2005: 201).

Beyond these physiological needs, there is no awareness of subjectivity, let alone any abstract capabilities enabling formal organization, leadership or management. Since all effort is expended in response to immediate needs or desires, there is no excess energy or cognitive capacity with which to plan, to organize or to foresee the future. In turn, when the individual's needs are met and surfeited, much like children, they play rather than engaging in any organized planned (work) effort.

This points at another analogy with Gebser's work. According to Graves, people who operate at this level are not even aware of their own existence or of being different from the outside world. In other words, **they simply exist**. Similar to Gebser's description of the archaic structure of consciousness, this is an undifferentiated psychological “condition in which the individual is one with the world” (ibid.: 203).

More practically, people at this level tend to live in herds of 12-15, often including large numbers of children. If survival is assured, they have no need to rise above their given mode of existence.

While this description seems to essentially characterize **pre-historic forms of existence**, Graves does mention a number of **current examples** of the first, “automatic” level in adults, namely the Tasaday on the island of Mindanao (Philippines), people in the Kalahari Desert, and a nomadic African tribe called the Ik. Beyond that, this level is only dominant in newborn babies and, inversely, old people who are subject to mental degradation. However, Graves also notes that it is “often found in pathological cases” (Graves, 2005: 200), in other words, in conditions of existence which force the person to reduce their focus exclusively on survival and on fulfilling basic physical needs.

Examples of that are traumatized soldiers at war or socially very deprived people, some of which Graves apparently encountered in his work as a counselor to welfare institutions in the US. Moreover, he blames some of the more developed levels to be contributing to keeping the AN structure down where it is by misguided welfare approaches. For instance, the more widespread views that success, or inversely, failure in life are either one's own responsibility or, alternatively, God's will, fail to see the first level's actual needs and capabilities. Hence, they fail to meet these people where they are and to ultimately help them to grow out of their misery.

This already illustrates one **practical political benefit of Graves' theory**: a much more adequate understanding of socio-political problems enabling decision-makers to come up with much more effective responses, solutions and cures.

Another practical insight is that the features of the first level of existence apply to each and everyone, since everyone "is always a physiological organism" and therefore, "no man will ever be without some reactive values" (ibid.: 213). Even though this level is not the dominant mode of being in adults in most parts of the world, it is present in all of us and becomes noticeable whenever our basic physical needs are neglected.

*The second level of existence: BO / animistic (later: PURPLE)*

*Sacrifice self to the way of your elders/ancestors*

The second level of existence emerges when first level problems, i.e. pure physiological subsistence, are solved, in other words, when human beings have developed a certain, workable way of subsisting that allows them to continuously save some of their energy. This can now be spend on other activities and challenges. According to Graves, the next problem they then need to solve is to preserve their established way of life and protect it against harm from various, a-periodically occurring dangers.

The primary **need and topic** at the second level of existence is therefore **safety and stability**, to allow for the "satisfaction of non-imperative, aperiodic, physiological needs, such as avoiding pain, cold, heat, etc." (Graves, 2005: 216). Hence, the challenge posed to the neurological system here is to pick up, transmit and deal with any conditions threatening one's existence. The primary **means** for doing so is the **tribe and its traditions** as handed down by the elders. The tribal community allows its members to persist and continue their established way of life. However, its safety and security values "bring some order, (...) but no peace" (ibid.: 223), simply because safety is permanently threatened from all directions.

With basic physical subsistence assured by the tribe, part of the freed up energy goes into social strategies and rituals to preserve that safety, while another part goes into the formation of a "**very full inner life**", as the person – and group – start to try to make sense of their experiences. In the social dimension, the vital tribal bonds imply strong dichotomies, between life and death, good or bad, for-us or against-us, in a very physical sense: you are either in or out of the tribe – whereby the latter equals death. Therefore, "you never raise questions about (...) the way the tribal elders have taught you to live; (and) never in any way whatsoever do you change it" (Graves, 2005: 217). This makes clear that the individual as such does not count on this level of existence, and is totally subsumed to the tribe, because quite simply there would be no survival outside of it (ibid.).

As to the inner, cognitive-psychological dimension, the emerging new capacity to distinguish between oneself and other (human) beings enables an experience of things outside of oneself as being alive. This leads to the belief that everything the self interacts with, including people, stones and trees, is alive and has a spirit. For this reason, this level is called "**animistic**".

At the same time, the thinking capacity of this level is still very limited and rudimentary, lacking any conscious awareness of intent or larger wholes. **Present experience** is all there is, and **the world is perceived in a magical and atomistic**, non-connected and non-rational way (there is a name for every bend of the river, but not for the river as a whole). The vivid inner universe of this level consists of

“indwelling spirits, magical beliefs and superstition”, helping to make sense of what happens and how things are. This reminds of Piaget’s observation of the world view of children at the pre-operational level as demonstrated in his experiments (Piaget, 1971), as well as Gebser’s description of the magic structure of consciousness (see chapter 2).

With Pavlovian conditioning determining behavior, **rituals, totems and taboos** watch over the “right ways” and the boundaries of the second level universe (i.e. tribal stability). Spirits who are thought to provide protection from danger and evil, including from other evil spirits, must be appealed to or, inversely, avoided in order to stay alive and to protect the tribe’s existence. In short, life is assured only if one accommodates to the way of life laid down by the elders and the demands of the governing spirits. Consequently, the latter are attributed the same magical power and the same unalterable belief as the elders of the tribal community.

Interestingly, Graves assumed the second level to be “probably the dominant system on the surface of the globe” at the time when he wrote down his theory, notwithstanding a lack of “means with which to count” (Graves, 2005: 216). So what are **examples of this structure in past and present** contexts? Besides tribal societies in rather remote areas of the world, Graves explicitly mentions incidents of a “breakdown of values” as it was the case in “the awakening Congo and the fire scarred ruins of American cities (1960s)” (ibid.: 224). Beyond that, one might think of family systems operating on the basis of blood ties and deeply rooted traditions, including clans and mafia groupings practicing blood feud, as well as of religious sects and any close-knit social community characterized by conspiratorial bonds.

Ken Wilber would later refer to unquestioned, magical belief in certain social bonds and to the total absorption of the individual by the respective group as the “unhealthy” side of this level (from a contemporary, postmodern point of view). As to its positive aspects, Don Beck and Christopher Cowan have pointed out that if close family bonds are not anchored during a person’s childhood, this can produce a sense of emptiness in adulthood, which the person might later try to compensate by joining gangs, cults or fragile marriages (Beck/Cowan, 2007: 309).

In practical terms, Graves also mentions some strategies for **managing people on the animistic BO level in organizations**. For them, a sense of being accepted is very important, as well as the experience of strict limits, in combination with relatively easy tasks or behaviors which they can imitate. Leadership for them needs to take the face and shape of a friendly parent and provide close and immediate supervision.

Considering Graves’ assumption of this level as being very widespread even today, chances are that it does play a role **in organizations and societies** that are traditionally ruled in an authoritarian or totalitarian way (i.e. not as a result of regression in response to a violent, overwhelming takeover).

Similar to the automatic level, animistic existence continues until it is severely challenged or disturbed, either from the inside or outside (Graves, 2005: 221). For instance, its safety and stability values can break down, if members of the tribe move into a severe dissonance with them, because they get bored or want to experience something more. In that case, those people can – and need to become “savages”, attacking the tribal world, in an effort to satisfy their own needs independently. This is the beginning of the transition to the next level of existence.

### *The third level of existence: CP / egocentric (later: RED)*

*Express self, to hell with others and the consequences*

As mentioned above, one of the typical triggers for transitioning into the third level of existence is the impulse to break out of the tribal system, either by boredom or conflict with its established way of life (Graves, 2005: 226). In terms of bio-socio-psychological preconditions, this demands a more developed and articulate sense of self, which, indeed, is a core new feature of the third level of existence. For the first time, the individual now has a distinct consciousness of self, enabling them to break out of the tribal ways and thus, of their protecting community. This implies that their **primary need and focus** henceforth is their own survival as an individual. For now, the person is alone in their struggle to get by.

Consequently, the whole **psychology** of the CP level is built around this need. Their **thinking** is totally self-centered, even plain egocentric (ibid.: 227) and primarily concerned with “what’s in it for me?” Their basic assumption is that the world is a dangerous place (“a jungle”) where one must strive for power and control over others, so as to not be controlled by them. You are with me or against me, and this dichotomy is acted upon accordingly.

Convinced that “the whole world is organized to keep them out” (ibid.: 243) or down, they have a **dominant-submissive mindset**: They stubbornly resist any power exercised by others, but show obedience to others, either when the latter overpower them, when they are afraid, or when they lose power over their own self (ibid.: 226). Social organization as it is first emerging on this level can therefore only be simplistic, top-down and exploitative. For the egocentric individual, it is simply “the person on top of the hierarchy who runs the show” (ibid.).

This is true in a general sense. Their “might makes right” approach doesn’t “give a damn about anyone else”, but unconcernedly adjusts their environment to their own needs (ibid.: 230), including violence of all kinds. Moreover, “right is demonstrated in violent action”, as one CP respondent put it: “The heroic thing is to attack the system and if there is nothing ...to be attacked then, if he is truly a hero, he will create a dragon to be destroyed” (ibid.: 234).

From a more developed perspective, this **behavior** is likely to come across as **immoral**, due to the very raw, self-assertive, and uninhibited manners of the CP/egocentric individual (ibid.: 233). But it is more correct to say that they are *amoral*, because morality as an abstract concept has not yet developed at this level, and the CP person has no capacity to display more pro-social behaviors. Their rugged, impulsive behavior is simply driven by self-protection and/or their striving to **avoid the shame** of not being able to do so.

Moreover, their whole **sense of self** revolves around heroic deeds, which they perform in order to win power over others and to feel important. Note that it is precisely this strong experience (or fear) of weakness and shame which defines the personality at this level. It is acted on by adopting a heroic power ethic which is prepared to take high, including vital risks, putting all one's eggs in one basket, in order not to be ashamed: “I may die, but they’ll remember me”, or: “One must join (the) battle even if one dies in the struggle, for less would make one less than a person” (ibid.: 232, 234).

If you now think of **young males in puberty**, often from socially deprived backgrounds, roaming around with peers, trying to demonstrate their “honor” and masculinity through conquest or domination of what or whoever comes their way, that is the perfect association. Furthermore, Graves mentions that according to his studies “about **33 to 35 percent of any adult prison population**” are operating on the

third level of existence. “It’s a very, very difficult system to work with because our penal system is based upon the idea of punishment.”

However, “people at the third level (learn) only by positive reinforcement” (Graves, 2005: 237). This is because from their perspective, “they can do anything and still feel that they are doing the right thing”. They not only display **no feeling of guilt**, even if they cause severe harm to other people, but have no capacity to feel guilt in the first place. This has to do with the very limited capacity of perspective-taking at the egocentric level, which allows “no true two-way interpersonal relations” (ibid.: 228).

While this might seem strange from any more developed perspective, Graves refers to endocrinological studies exploring the underlying **bio-chemical dimension**. They show that the physiology governing human behavior has to do with the amount of adrenaline and noradrenaline in the body. Whereas the former activates (pro)social behavior, the latter is the “neurological activating force at the third level” (ibid.: 231). And while this condition can be manipulated chemically, i.e. by injecting adrenaline, this does of course not produce permanent structural development. “You might temporarily get a higher level manifestation [of behavior, EF], but (...) we cannot hold a person there” (ibid.: 232).

Besides the contemporary examples mentioned above, Graves again, also provides **historical illustrations** of this level. It roughly came about with the agricultural revolution, i.e. former nomads starting to settle down and build local communities. These generally took the form of fiefdoms built around some powerful center embodied by a heroic or victorious warrior, who had proven to be able to defend his lot and to assure loyalty and obedience. This, in turn, gave him the right to dictate his ways. More precisely, it is primarily those (few) authoritarian figures in power who likely displayed third level values and behaviors, while the many who submitted to them, accepting the might-is-right rationale as long as they were assured survival, more likely remained on the second level of existence.

As to the positive side of this level, Graves acknowledges that “it is a giant step forward for man”. It has enabled “some men, in their pursuit of power, (to) tame the mighty river, (to) provide the leisure for beginning intellectual effort, (to) build cities, (...) ancient aqueducts (and) roads that enabled other humans to travel” (ibid.: 234).

In the contemporary world, however, CP personalities usually play a less favorable role, as indicated above. This is especially true if they appear in leadership and decision-making roles, which can be observed in several countries across the globe. To illustrate the third level of existence in action – as well as its misunderstanding by most higher-level observers –, let’s look at one of the sad, but prominent examples of the **political relevance of Graves’ theory: Donald Trump’s presidency**, more precisely his overall personality structure and behavior.

Note that many western political leaders and analysts have taken very long to figure out how Trump and his political success could possibly be made sense of – and be dealt with in order to avoid more severe damage to both international relations and domestic US politics. This is presumably because it is relatively rare for a democratic political leader to be operating at this level. Given that most societies in the western world have their “center of gravity” between the fourth, fifth and sixth level, we encounter the CP structure mainly in children, youngsters and adolescents – or, in adults who don’t make it into leadership roles, precisely because of their egocentric behavior. Hence, it is difficult to imagine from a higher-level perspective, in particular if one is not familiar with developmental theory, that a leader is actually unable to behave in what we consider as “normal”, more civilized, more functional and more morally appropriate ways.



***Excerpts from “Fire and Fury. Inside the Trump White House” (2018)***

- \* “Does he get it?” (...) Did Trump get where history had put him? (Wolff, 2018: 6)
  - \* To say that he knew nothing – nothing at all – about the basic intellectual foundations of the job was a comic understatement (ibid.: 16).
  - \* Trump’s psychic makeup made it impossible for him to take ...a close look at himself. Nor could he tolerate knowing that somebody else would then know a lot about him – and therefore have something over him (ibid.: 17).
  - \* Few people who knew Trump had illusions about him (...) He was what he was. Twinkle in his eye, larceny in his soul (ibid.: 20).
  - \* The billionaires (...) had to see this odd, difficult, even ridiculous, and, on the face of it, ill-equipped person in a new light. He had been elected president.
  - \* His extreme self-satisfaction rubbed off. (...) “He was a big, warm-hearted monkey”, said Bannon (ibid.: 21).
  - \* Almost all the professionals... were coming face to face with the fact that it appeared he knew nothing. There was simply no subject, other than perhaps building construction, that he had substantially mastered. Everything with him was off the cuff. Whatever he knew he seemed to have learned an hour before – and that was mostly half-baked (ibid.: 22).
  - \* While everybody in his rich-guy social circle knew about his wide-ranging ignorance – Trump, the businessman, could not even read a balance sheet, and (...) was, with his inattention to details, a terrible negotiator (ibid.: 22).
  - \* Trump (...) was a character – a protagonist and hero. (...) So powerful was this persona, or role, that he seemed reluctant, or unable, to give it up in favor of being president – or presidential.
  - \* He simply had no scruples. He was a rebel, a disruptor, and, living outside the rules, contemptuous of them (ibid.: 23).
  - \* He (was) wholly lacking (...) the main requirement of the job, what neuroscientists would call executive function (...) His brain seemed incapable of performing what would be essential tasks in his new job. He had no ability to plan and organize and pay attention and switch focus; he had never been able to tailor his behavior to what the goals at hand reasonably required. On the most basic level, he simply could not link cause and effect (ibid.: 24)
  - \* Trump often offered people jobs on the spot, many of whom he had never met before, for positions whose importance Trump did not particularly understand (ibid.: 26).
  - \* Everybody in Trump’s billionaire circle (was) concerned about his contempt for other people’s expertise. (ibid.)
  - \* Priebus (...) came out of his first meeting with Trump... (and reported that) Trump talked nonstop and constantly repeated himself. “Here’s the deal’, a close Trump associate told Priebus. “In an hour meeting with him, you’re going to hear 55 minutes of stories and they’re going to be the same stories over and over again. So you have to have one point to make and you have to pepper it in whenever you can” (ibid.: 33).
  - \* In some sense, he wanted nothing so much as to be courted (ibid.: 35).
  - \* “What a fucking idiot,” said Murdoch (...) as he got off the phone.
  - \* This was his fundamental innovation in governing: regular, uncontrolled bursts of anger and spleen (ibid.: 48).
  - \* Bannon described Trump as a simple machine. The On switch was full of flattery, the Off switch full of calumny. The flattery was dripping, slavish, cast in ultimate superlatives, and entirely disconnected from reality (...). The calumny was angry, bitter, resentful, ever a casting out and closing of the iron door. (...) Bannon felt (...) that Trump could be easily switched on and off (ibid.: 35).
- ...And so on.

As a consequence, some assumed (or projected, based on their own way of reasoning) that there was some kind of clever, hidden strategy behind Trump's behavior, which, apparently, there was not. With the exception maybe of Steve Bannon's personal agenda (who supposedly understood quite well what Trump was all about, see quote box above), there was **no real strategy** at all, beyond the president's advisor's efforts of damage control and his own **ego's emotional need to be admired and applauded** as a hero.

As many biographers have described at length, Donald Trump displayed all of the core feature of the third level of existence to a considerable degree, clearly lacking both higher level (beyond egocentric top-down "my way or the highway") leadership qualities, basic (inter)personal and cognitive skills, as well as an even rudimentary understanding of the demands of the task at hand. While discussing this claim in more detail would go far beyond the limits of this chapter, we offer a collection of quotes from first-hand observers put together by Michael Wolff.

The analogies suggest that regrettably, Graves' description of the third level of existence is a very useful template for understanding and explaining Trumpism – including for predicting his behavior. So far, few have voiced this connection, maybe because developmental theories are not yet part of the standard political analysis, maybe also because it is a frightening truth – and almost an insult in the predominantly (post-) modern world to call somebody "uneducated" or even "undeveloped". Among the few who have repeatedly drawn this analogy from the start is [Jeff Salzman in his integral politics podcast "The Daily Evolver"](#).

So what could a developmentally informed integral politics do (differently) in response to a third level leader? Obviously, treating them in the same way as a fourth, fifth or sixth level person is doomed to fail, if not a recipe for disaster. So let's take a look at some of Graves' recommendations for **dealing with egocentric personalities**. Remarkably, he dedicates a lot of space to this issue. At the same time, it is important to note that Graves' considerations only focus on how (higher level) teachers or managers can "tame", manage or educate third level students or subordinates, not leaders. Here are some of his conclusions.

- Since the third level personality has limited cognitive capacity and a very **short attention span**, they need a "tough-paternalistic" kind of management: "You must lay down the rules and give immediate gratification" (ibid.: 238) and "never let him get away" with non-desired behavior (ibid.: 236).
- As the first truly self-expressive system which, however has ... **difficulty to control their impulse life**, they "can't hold (...) in long enough to listen to somebody else, (and) won't let somebody else finish a sentence". Teachers or managers must therefore provide a strong structure with small, changing tasks or units of maximum 15-25 minutes and keep them busy and focused all the time (ibid.: 235). When they get bored with a task, they just leave, no matter what the consequences are.
- Since this personality system "**does not feel or comprehend punishment**", learning happens only through immediate reward. "For him the best answer to any problem is the one that brings him immediate pleasure regardless of what happens to anyone else". No form of punishment will work (ibid.: 238). Hence, teachers or managers need a lot of patience and calm, ignoring the negative and accentuating the positive, and to have the person repeat a given task over again until it is performed correctly.
- Since for the third level, **everything is about power games** and intentionally manipulating the world, caretakers, managers and teachers must come across as sufficiently scalded, tough and competent (never admit mistakes!) in order to be respected as such.

- Conversely, since the CP personality **longs for being acknowledged as a hero**, give them opportunities to demonstrate independent action and due pride wherever possible.

What does this imply practically, in a political and especially leadership setting? For the purpose of integral politics, after all, these conclusions would need to be further elaborated – and fine-tuned to match the respective context. Obviously, once a leader has already gained power in a legitimate way, it is difficult to “supervise” them in the ways described by Graves. Unfortunately, we cannot expect them to respect given rules if these run counter their own interests. Therefore, a CP leader is a clear mismatch in a rule-based democratic society that more integrally informed politics should seek to prevent in the first place.

However, once a CP leader is in place, we assume that treating them as what they are – and not as a “normal peer” who happens to have a bad day – might already bring more clarity for both sides. Ultimately, **a democratically elected leader like this is also a mirror of their electorate** – which raises serious questions of a deeper, more structural nature.

Interestingly, this level has not been identified and described as a separate structure in Gebser’s work. One of the reasons for this could be that the latter is based on cultural history, whereas egocentric personalities tend to not particularly value or even produce culture. They rather destroy it where it stands in their way. Nonetheless, ancient civilizational achievements such as bridges, roads and cities, which Graves attributes to this level, might be a topic for discussion between specialists of the two models. For the purpose of this book, we will not enter more deeply into this academic question though.

What might eventually help and motivate someone on the third level of existence to move on to the next level from a developmental perspective, is primarily two things: being constantly confronted with crystal clear boundaries and with the felt consequences of one’s behavior.

#### *The fourth level of existence: DQ / absolutistic (later: BLUE / AMBER)*

*Sacrifice self now in order to receive reward later*

The fourth level of existence can be said to be the “almost polar opposite” of the third one (Graves, 2005: 252). As described by the meta-principle of Graves’ theory, personality levels switch back and forth between a focus on expressing and sacrificing the self. Hence, the fourth level now moves back from reckless self-expressivism to obeisance, from adjusting the world to one’s own needs towards **adjusting oneself to the world**, from being autocratic to **benevolently submitting to a higher authority**, from rule-ignoring to rule-abiding, and even prescriptive moralism. As much as the previous, ego-centric level resisted any kind of external authority, the fourth, absolutistic level of existence insists on religiously adhering to whom or what is considered *the true* authority. So how does this radical shift come about?

On the DQ level, more of the basic physiological and subsistence needs are more solidly met. A person having transitioned through CP before has likely built some kind of functional niche in life for themselves, which, in turn, makes space for a “flood of free energy” and enables their focus to go off into all directions. As a consequence, this has the person on this level exposed to “an influx of inner and outer stimulation (which they) can neither comprehend nor control”, and which therefore tends to frighten them for its unpredictability (ibid.: 253).

The **deep questions and concerns** of this level of existence therefore revolve around getting orientation and making sense of puzzling life problems, such as perceived injustices and inequalities, which the person encounters on a daily basis. For the first time, they also ask more fundamental questions about the meaning of life, death and suffering. And since they cannot answer these easily, they refer to a higher power such as God or nature's design for explanations.

Among their newly formed competences are both a higher degree of introspection and an enlarged capacity of perspective-taking which now also allow for "true interpersonal relations" (ibid.: 258). Others come to be seen as independent person(alitie)s in their own right that one can socialize and sympathize with and have compassion for. On a physiological level, this pro-social shift is supported by "huge amounts of adrenaline" in the brain (ibid.). Another new capacity of the fourth level brain that comes with adrenaline and growing social competence is its **ability to experience guilt**, which it tends to do a lot, based on its increasing sense of its own impact on other peoples' life and well-being.

Given the general overwhelm that results from DQ's expanding experience of inner and outer life, this level's **primary need** is to find **safety and security**, to reduce stress and to achieve a more tensionless state for itself. Unable to create these qualities on its own, security now comes through sacrifice and submission to those who can (or claim to be able to) provide them (ibid.: 268). Graves also speaks of the DQ level as "seeking salvation". Moreover, it perceives life as a test of whether one is worthy of salvation or not (ibid.: 261). So compared to the BO level, DQ's quest to release tension and to escape its frightened state now takes a new, (quasi) religious form, striving for a "saintly existence" (Graves, 2005: 253).

This world view gives birth to **two kinds of typical behaviors** at this level. First, a complete denial of one's own inner world and an effort to completely control it, and second, the yearning for an orderly, predictable and stable outer world, allowing to keep it safe from too many stimuli. In combination, these two constitute the essence of the **absolutistic personality and dispositive** that is as strict towards itself as in its perception of external political or religious truth and authority which it either exercises or submits to.

Viewed through the absolutistic lens, the world is full of dangerous forces stemming either from within man's nature or from outside their particular (in-)group (ibid.: 264). To confront the first, you have to master your impulse life, thereby "proving thyself worthy of salvation" (*sacrifice self now to get later*). In view of dealing with the many outer (and inner) threats, **authority is the answer**: "It is whatever the higher power says that it is and we must obey" (ibid.: 252). Absolute rules and "divine immutable laws of living" (ibid.: 254) are fully accepted, and no questioning of the given authority is permitted (ibid.: 253).

Obviously, this worldview and its behavioral patterns have immediate **social and political consequences**. They imply the readiness to accept one's position and role in life, as well as that of others as given. Inequality is a fact. Rather than trying to resist it, life is all about striving for perfection in whatever assigned role the person finds themselves in. This naturally goes along with a form of categorical, **absolutistic, bi-polar thinking**: There is only one right way to think about and to do anything. Things are either black or white, and the order of the world is impossible to change.

**Examples of this level of existence** in politics and society are first and foremost the great monotheistic religions, each of which claims to be valid for all of mankind, but also atheistic projects establishing some kind of universal order or theory (Graves, 2005: 255). All of them are built either on the conception of a Divine plan, or on some kind of (more or less scientific) notion of the laws of the universe.

Obviously, these differing “one right ways” are bound to produce clashes between each other at some point. This is why Graves sees the absolutistic DQ level at the same time as the “**most peaceful and (the) most warlike of all**” (ibid.: 263). It is peaceful in its willingness to accept and submit to a given order and way of existence, but it is also prepared to fight for its convictions and authority by any means necessary.

While Graves has not done more specific work on **politics and democracy** himself, he does comment on absolutistic level behavior in organizations. “Employees in the absolutistic existential state do not respond to autonomy and participation. When the opportunity for such is extended to them, they choose autocracy, not democracy” (ibid.: 270).

Based on his data, we cannot directly conclude that the same choices also apply to society and politics, especially if a certain type of democracy is already the dominant power (=authority) structure, as it is the case in the US. However, it is safe to say that DQ **does not bring forward democratic institutions** in the first place, which in themselves are products of higher level consciousness. As we know, there is considerable support for authoritarian figures also in the so-called western democracies. Subject to more thorough studies, chances are that the absolutistic worldview plays an important role in this. So what does this imply for integral politics?

**Shawn Rosenberg**, one of the few developmentally informed political scientists to date, has conducted multiple studies on the worldviews and reasoning structures of average US citizens, using a slightly different developmental model of his own. In a nutshell, what he found is that the majority of the electorate does not display the level of reasoning that would be required for making true deliberative democracy work (Rosenberg, 2008, 2007 and 2005).

As with the CP level before, it is important to understand that the fourth level is not authoritarian because it would consider domination, power-over or even the use of force as values per se, but, because of the specific inbuilt limitations of perceiving and handling complexity on this level of existence. This, in turn, has it sincerely believe and not question that its own way is really “*the right way*”.

DQ people too have a relatively short attention span and limited capacities for critical thinking. Thus, being confronted with so many problems, they likely just don’t have much energy left to address these in any more differentiated way (Graves, 2005: 267). On the contrary, having to deal with more than what they can handle is or would be an unbearable stress for them. This is why they find relief in **letting others “do the thinking** and structure the world for them” (ibid.: 267), as long as those others are trusted authorities.

So to be very clear on this and to avoid misunderstandings, a DQ person joyfully delegates complex tasks to others not because they don’t have time to do and think it all through themselves. This would likely be the next, ER level’s response to similar challenges. Rather, DQ lacks the physiological, cognitive space for more elaborate rational thinking, partly because that space is taken up by their **many fears and worries**. For instance, Graves explains that when teaching or working “with these people, (...) only about one third of your training (...) is content. About two thirds of it is, in essence, psychotherapy, (...) dealing with the anxieties the people have as to whether or not they can learn it” (Graves, 2005: 266). In addition, he also reports that absolutistic individuals “often experience guilt for going

beyond their parents”, i.e. their most natural authorities (ibid.: 265). This is true both in the area of learning and teaching and for work life in general.

From this follow some essential **practical insights and principles** as to **how to best work with this level of existence**. Again, these raise some interesting **questions with regard to politics**. As has probably become clear by now, the DQ structure needs a very stable and predictable setting to prevent stress and overwhelm. Consequently, highly organized work, life and teaching constellations are necessary, and sometimes even moralistic-prescriptive management (...) with a “rigid set of rules”, as in the army, for example). DQ people need continuous and constant, ideally benevolent supervision (ibid.: 268), not because they cannot be trusted, but because they have so little trust in themselves.

Contrary to the CP structure, they do have the capacity to control their impulses and rationalize simple cause and effect connections (ibid.: 266). Therefore, Graves claims that they **learn best through punishment**, i.e. by aversive stimulation (avoidant learning). While this may sound unethical or even “primitive” to higher-level perspectives, for the person at the DQ level, clear rules and boundaries simply reduce complexity and uncertainty stress and hence, make their life a lot easier.

A DQ employee will happily accept a subordinate position, classes unequal in rank, as well as direct lectures and orders (ibid.). They will expect the teacher, manager or leader to provide guidance, structure, routine and clearly defined tasks, besides duly representing the given group or organization. At the same time, leaders must not only have a certain, ideally high social status to be accepted as an authority. In order to work effectively with DQ people, they must also “be an incredible (saintly) father or mother to them”, i.e. to take time to deal with the socio-emotional issues that are connected to whatever DQ’s learning, task or challenge is.

In terms of leadership, this classically implies approaches ranging from paternalistic to plain authoritarian. Interestingly, as indicated before, **the “absolutistic” worldview and habitus is very well compatible with democratic governance**, as long as the latter is anchored in DQ’s value universe and supported by relevant authorities. After all, the Christian Churches, for example, have gradually reconciliated their socio-political teachings with the political order of democratic states in the western world, while holding on to more conservative, absolutistic views in the area of internal organization and theology proper.

While a deeper discussion of these issues goes far beyond this chapter, we can still harvest a few more crucial insights from Graves’ work here. One is that cultures, which have their “center of gravity” on the fourth level of existence, can well have functional democracies if their leadership is operating at the fifth level (as it has been the case in the US most of the time). But, if leadership regresses below that, democratic institutions are facing difficult times, as we have started to see during Trump’s time in office.

Another challenge to (political) leadership in a DQ context is for leaders to project their own, often higher-level ways of thinking, behaving and functioning onto everyone else without taking a differentiated look at whether their “people” can actually fulfill these expectations. Graves points out that “in 85% of cases where people behave ineffectively”, the reason is that **“management is not reading them correctly”**. Moreover, he observes – and warns, that, “when mismanaged, DQ will take the ship down” – whatever this means in practice (ibid.: 301f.).



This immediately links to the common mistake that western governments have often made when trying to “export democracy” to previously non-democratic, fourth level or lower contexts, wondering why their progressive institutions that had proven so successful in their domestic context did not (easily) take root in the target society.

Based on Graves’ work, we can say that what role the “absolutistic DQ” level plays in the political realm pretty much depends on the contents of its belief system, on the authority of its leadership and on the way and level on which it operates. While absolutistic leadership will likely engage in religious or culture wars with whoever challenges their truth, higher level leadership can to some degree “tame” and “civilize” DQ and thereby help it to develop further. This is at least what can be expected from a developmentally informed, integral politics in this regard.

Beyond the question of leadership, Graves mentions two typical drivers that indicate a “**readiness for change**” of DQ/absolutistic personalities. First, there will likely be some individuals who start to question the price for the absolutistic promise of safety and “salvation” at some point and who want to have some more pleasure in life. Second, these more critical members of the DQ community will likely grow weary of absolutistic paternalism and yearn for more power and independence of their own. These are the doorways to Graves’ next, fifth level of existence.

*The fifth level of existence: ER / multiplistic (later: ORANGE)*

*Express self for what self desires without shame or guilt, but in a fashion calculated not to bring down the wrath of others*

At the transition to the fifth level, the focus once again shifts from *sacrifice self* towards *express self*, based on the question “Why can’t I have some enjoyment now and create a better form of existence for myself, regardless what authority says?” (Graves, 2005: 308). With the previous system’s needs for order and stability fulfilled, the driving force now becomes the need to know more than God’s word in order to handle nature and achieve one’s goals connected to a better life. Overall, one can characterize the ER structure as an emancipation from DQ *absolutistic’s* embeddedness in strong, prescriptive socio-political and moral settings, in favor of bold **self-empowerment and goal-orientation**. Its focus on improving one’s material condition is based on materialistic values such as accomplishing, getting and having which are implemented in a pragmatic way.

This shift goes along with what Graves calls the newly emerging **R system in the brain**, capable of objective, logical and rational thinking. It brings forward the scientific method, seeking to analyze and comprehend the outside world by empirical observation and careful testing according to non-arbitrary standards. So instead of DQ’s moralistic truth claims, ER takes a positivistic and often even mechanistic approach, “breaking things into parts so as to understand and control them” (ibid.: 309f).

This is combined with a very **playful and experimental attitude**, assuming that what works, i.e. what brings one forward in the direction of a given goal is also what is healthy and desirable (ibid.: 311). With this pragmatic, utilitarian stance also comes a rather open, relativistic or, more precisely, *multiplistic* approach, which accounts for the name of this level of existence. Now, there is not one right way to think anymore (as on the absolutistic level), but many different possible ways. At the same time, ER is convinced that there is **just one good (or best) way** to think about and do things. And if only you try hard enough, you can find out what it is.

Moreover, the ER worldview and personality structure consequently thinks for itself, with no guidance needed, going by the data, without letting emotions interfere (ibid.: 312). It is a permission not only to **experiment with the world**, but also to **expand your control** over it. ER's **will to power** seeks to conquer the physical universe with the only restriction being man's limited control over the laws of nature (Graves, 2005: 310). Contrary to the CP structure, however, it conquers the world "not through raw, naked force, but by learning (and understanding) its secrets". Contrary to CP's physical power-self, ER's refined sense of self works with the power of ideas, that allow to effectively change things. The ER person has a calculating mind that seeks and "never gives up control over the environment (...), so he can do what he knows needs to be done" (ibid.: 312).

Note that even though this worldview is strongly anchored in the personal independence stemming from secular values, God still plays a role in it, both historically and in current versions of this structure. Historically, one of its sources was the critique of the Church's authority as voiced by Protestantism and other reform movements in favor of a more "enlightened" Christianity. This religious version of expressing the self might see its own role as carrying out what God designed but did not control. However, multiple critiques of religious authorities ultimately also lead to more radical emancipation processes, based on atheist or even nihilist conceptions.

Furthermore, ER's pragmatic habitus of scientific exploration and experimentation also has a **strong entrepreneurial dimension**, valuing action and risk-taking over hesitation and doubt ("better act and fail than do nothing and suffer the shame of not having tried"). Ultimately, it sees life as a game with precise rules that one needs to learn to master in order to win the game (Graves, 2005: 319). Competition, in this worldview, is the "spice of life" (ibid.: 318). This turns it into a very energetic and dynamic force that has played a key role in bringing forward the scientific, technical and economic progress which laid the groundwork for global capitalism and the industrial revolution, starting about 6-700 years ago.

The German sociologist Max Weber has later argued that what he called the "**Protestant (work) ethic**" based on the ascetics of Calvinism was a key driver in the emergence of "the spirit of capitalism" and the western economic model altogether (Weber, 2013). Its theory of predestination holds that God saves and helps those who help themselves and that, hence, material profit and success in this world are a sign of divine favor ("God's' purpose is shown when success is brought to him who conquers the world", Graves, 2005: 315). It is therefore not surprising that the ER structure was and still is of utmost influence and importance especially in the US. In fact, Graves assumed it to be the dominant structure at his time.

Now let us briefly take a closer look at the collective, **socio-political dimension of the fifth level of existence**. As indicated above, even though this structure has its focus on what is good for the self, having transcended and included the DQ absolutistic level, it is also very well aware of the role and functioning of certain rules in social life. Considering all life as a game, which is ultimately about winning over others, part of the challenge for it is to figure out not only what the rules of the game are, but also how to circumvent them in order to come out first (Graves, 2005: 315). Since its perspective-taking skills allow the multiplistic level to anticipate potential reactions of others, it can consider how far it can stretch the rules to meet its own goals. Its credo could thus be described as "gaming the system", in other words promoting self-interest by bending the rules, but carefully enough as to not openly breaking them (ibid.: 318f.).

If you now think of the **Machiavellian “smart power ethic”** or the figure of the US robber baron, these are accurate associations (ibid.: 317f.). Fraud and manipulation, even cruelty, force and fear are tools that the ER multiplistic self can and will cleverly apply in view of organizing, directing or controlling others, while trying to avoid unwanted reactions on their end. This illustrates that “ends are more important than and justify means” here (“business is business”, ibid.: 311).

The same rugged self-interest also holds on a collective, political level, for instance in the form of nationalism and colonialism. Its **morality of “assuming my rights”** often equals forcing them onto others “in the name of morality” (ibid.: 315). On this basis, ER experiences and displays “no guilt for receiving, no P whatsoever about taking whatever he can” (ibid.). In line with the capitalist **winner-takes-it-all philosophy**, its power ethic assumes that whoever is best in the use of certain techniques and practices has the right to set the rules and make the laws. It sees the power to change resting “in superior talents of the few who are capable of using force to obtain desired end” (ibid.: 317). This holds true from the “Divine right of kings” to that of the white man over indigenous people.

From today’s perspective, these characteristics may appear brute and reckless. Indeed, Graves notes that ER thinking “leads to war in all its nastiest forms” (ibid.: 318). Not surprisingly, the main **downside and limitation** of this structure is its **underdeveloped social competence**. Striving for complete autonomy in its race to win, the independent ER individual involuntarily disassociates from others. With the driving force behind this system being to free oneself from control, it is able and unafraid to do it all **alone**. The fact that it shows low trust and little empathy for others and does not rely on anyone’s judgements, comes at the price of having only rather weak **interpersonal relations**. Its own critical and often harsh, cynical feedbacks, combined with cold, quantitative evaluation and disdain do not help to build trust either (ibid.: 314).

#### ***Learning at the ER level of existence***

When it comes to unlearning habitual patterns, the ER structure is particularly stubborn, due to its strong aversion to and fighting to get loose of authority, as well as its identification with its own capacity to control the outside world. Therefore, learning (which includes letting go of control) is extremely painful for this structure. From his educational practice, Graves reports that ER learns best through its own experience and effort. It will **change** not as a result of feedback, let alone direction, but **only based on self-generated choices**. These are ideally combined with mild risk and appropriate challenges, inciting its motivation and joy of solving problems (Graves, 2005: 322). Its inability to learn whenever authority is watching calls for settings where it must work out problems privately, autonomously and anonymously (ibid.: 329).

Graves observes that the ER personality is unaware of the hostile character of its behavior (ibid.: 318): “The person has almost no capacity to perceive that he or she is hurting that other person” (ibid.: 315). Therefore, deeper connection is the primary growth edge for this level of existence, which will ultimately gain more attention in the transition to the next, FS level (see section and box below).

So even if ER thinking and behavior comes across as a rather **selfish**, its egocentrism is more refined than that of CP. While for an ER person, everything is always also a “tool of self-interest”, namely its striving to provide a better life here and now (not later), it has a rationale to its behavior that goes beyond CP’s simple, unreflected acting: It sees its own self-interest as synonymous with the interest of others (Graves, 2005: 317). A good example of this is Adam Smith’s famous **economic theory of the “invisible hand”** of the free market, arguing that if all individuals act in their own self-interest, this will

ultimately also increase the welfare of all. As already mentioned, ER's **welfare concept** is informed by the Calvinist attitude, considering only those to be deserving of some help who show their own efforts first (ibid.: 326).

Notwithstanding, and ironically in line with the theory of the "invisible hand", Graves claims that the fifth level of existence seems to be "the most necessary of all stages for man's movement to higher levels" (ibid.: 318), including a "necessary step forward in the moral growth of man" (ibid.: 315). It has brought forward gigantic civilizational, scientific and technical improvements of human condition by accumulating knowledge and information and by working against disease and poverty.

Other important achievements concern the political realm proper. ER "believes in and demands complete loyalty to the **secular power source** and that one should 'rule by the book' if one is in power" (ibid.: 311). This is the foundation of the "**rule of law**" that we now take for granted as a basis for democratic government. Along these lines, the ER structure has also developed the concept and practice of **bureaucratic management** in both the public and economic spheres, organizing work based on mechanistic thinking and its ideals of simplification, specialization and the strict observation of rules (Fein, 2018).

As I have shown in more detail in several developmentally informed studies on corruption (Fein, 2012, 2016, 2018; Fein & Weibler, 2014), bureaucratic management demands the capacity of abstract, logical and at least beginning systemic thinking. Before this is in place, people have no capacity to see themselves as representatives of a larger, abstract system and act on its behalf. This equally shows that the value of ER for today's politics, society and economy can hardly be overestimated.

In terms of current illustrations of this level, Graves himself, again, mainly focuses on business contexts, from where we can easily draw inferences to politics though. For instance, he observes that ER level employees need a high degree of **autonomy and self-management** wherever possible, while management should be limited to loose supervision and eventual checks of boundary violations. In these conditions, ER individuals will work diligently to attain goals in their respective domain, while accepting instructions from respected experts. They generally don't want to be taught, but rather figure out themselves what needs to be done. Furthermore, objective indicators of qualification and performance that come with the ER level cause workers to expect compensation as a result of accomplishment (Graves, 2005: 321).

In view of the functioning of an organization, much depends on what levels of existence leadership and the workforce are operating on. Graves found that fifth level leadership and fourth level followership are a good combination, provided that the former is good at organizing. In contrast, if both workers and management are operating on the ER level, this can lead to tough bargaining and even **battles for power** inside the organization (boom or bust), because everyone claims to be right.

On a societal level, similar power struggles and bargaining processes between employers and trade unions, supported by social democracy, have gradually lead to a transformation of the economic system to what Otto Scharmer calls "capitalism 2.0", i.e. a more regulated type of market economy characterized by legally binding social standards (Scharmer, 2009: 6).

Inside organizations, the experience of strong, self-managing workers can, in fact, be perceived as a problem or even threat by same stage leadership. So paradoxically, while training may be offered to help to develop workers, too much independent thinking on their end might as well end up undermining the power of management (ibid.: 323). Oftentimes, then, management is afraid of losing power and tends to over-systematize processes in order to extend or maintain control.

Very similar phenomena, challenges and pitfalls can also be observed in **democratic politics**. As indicated earlier, **liberal democracy** as we know it is a product of fifth level thinking. Its institutions and procedures are typical examples of the ER worldview and its ideal of **rational, secular power**, such as:

- free, equal and secret elections, according to the one-man-one-vote and first-past-the-post/numerical majority principles,
- a political culture characterized by discussion and debating
- decision-making processes revolving around bargaining and negotiating majorities.

Today's democracies assume and value the (fiction of an) **independent, rational and "responsible citizen"** (who is able and willing to feed their natural healthy self-interest into the political process) as the ultimate source of power. While the systems that have emerged based on this assumption have indeed established what Churchill called "the worst form of government – except for all the others that have been tried", granting relatively high degrees of freedom, legal protection, stability and economic welfare to its citizens, this form of government now appears as an increasingly outdated "operating system", due to its inbuilt limitations.

On the one hand, the assumption of the rational, "responsible citizen" proves to be inaccurate, considering both the degree of irrationality that is present in politics today, as well as research by Shawn Rosenberg (see box above) and Graves himself, showing that a relevant proportion of the electorate does not reach the rational ER level in their adult life. On the other hand, the limitations of this ER system become ever more obvious as we are faced with problems of a larger, global scale. These are actually the accumulated outcomes of the reductionist rationalistic and mechanistic ER worldview and behavior, which, over decades and even centuries, have promoted the exploitation of resources in the name of individual and collective self-interest, at the expense of the health and stability of the larger planetary whole.

We now increasingly see the **inadequacy of this worldview** that, as Graves pointed out, is good at splitting up wholes into parts, but feels uncomfortable sensing the whole as more than its parts, and that is all the more unable of putting the latter back together in any meaningful and beneficial way. This situation illustrates the famous Einstein quote according to which "we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them". It makes dramatically clear that an upgrade of our current socio-political operating system is crucial to allow us to adequately address the multiple global crises that our current systems have co-produced.

While this insight is more and more present in our public discourses, what we continue to see a lot in actual political practice is that our institutions seem to copy the reflexes of management in fear of losing control. They introduce more measurements and (over-)regulation instead of opening the doors to collective intelligence and co-creative problem-solving, for instance by increasing citizens participation and collaborative decision-making.

Some of these suggestions already point at the second-next level of existence, which can be framed as the integral one. However, what Graves' data describes as the naturally following transition that is available – and accessible – to people and cultures becoming uncomfortable within ER thinking, is the FS *relativistic* system.

He mentions two major reasons for ER to move on to FS: one is that "power alone does not please man" and that ultimately, a person also wants to be liked, feel accepted and belong to some kind of community that is larger than themselves. The other one is that when an ER person is too successful

in material regard, they increasingly need to explain inequality, i.e. why they have a better, more luxurious life than others. So the **new problems** that now appear as a result of being successful revolve around the **question** how life can be lived well in good agreement and harmony with others.

*The sixth level of existence: FS / relativistic (later: GREEN)*

*Sacrifice self now to get acceptance now/in order for all to get now*

What Graves calls the F problems of existence is indeed closely linked with the experience of being free from the more basic aspects of the struggle for life. Given that this structure is a product of living in a world of **(relative) material abundance**, it tends to emerge in particular where people are free from having to worry about staying alive and the details of managing their daily living (Graves, 2005: 347f.). Typical examples of this are children who have grown up in families of materially successful (ER) parents, for whom material scarcity is less of a felt experience and mere subsistence never was an issue, and who could thus afford to put their focus elsewhere, including on questioning the materialistic lifestyle of their parents.

Historically, this structure first appeared around the turn of the last century (1900), with a first visible peak in some of the post-WW2 generations in the western world (ibid.: 338). Graves' prognosis was for it to "be around for the shortest period of time of any of the ways of thinking that we have had previously" (ibid.: 347). This is presumably due to two factors: first, the general acceleration with which new levels of existence emerge, and second, the relatively limited capacity of the FS structure to solve complex problems beyond its own wellbeing on a global scale.

As indicated above, the main **goals and drivers** of this level of existence are the search for happiness, inner peace and good relationships with others, in order to overcome the feeling of being alone and isolated, as a consequence of individual material success. Its strategy for achieving this is to sacrifice (some of) its self (-interest) now in order to get along better with others and thereby be able to either simply continue the good life (ibid.: 344) or to take care of others, so they can have too.

Hence, the primary **need and concern** of this system is to belong, to be in harmony and to "break the bread together" (ibid.: 339) with the group of people they like and accept as their peers. Moreover, this group of peers turns into the relevant authority, which the FS person adjusts to in many ways. Graves therefore calls this personality a "sociocentric" or "sociocratic being" (ibid.: 339, 342). With its strong focus on people, friends and community, its value system radically shifts again from using other people to serve own goals towards subordinating one's self-interest to trying to fit into and being connected with the community of peers.

And again, this shift comes with a corresponding activation of new, relevant systems in the brain, namely the right hemisphere, providing the "equipment for subjective, non-linear thinking" (Graves, 1978). Graves describes the **S neurological system** as allowing to "truly experiencing the inner, subjective feelings of humankind", i.e. of oneself, others and life as a whole in a more universal sense (Graves, 2005: 344). This includes, on the one hand, the **capacity to deeply empathize and feel with others**, thereby creating more intimacy, shared experiences and deeper relationships. Feelings are paramount here. They are at the basis of FS' choices, "not logic, information, knowledge or rule" (ibid.: 340).

On the other hand, the ability to sincerely see and appreciate whatever the other person's (inner and outer) situation is also implies a new capability for context-sensitive, **relativistic thinking** (ibid.: 348). Because you can fully understand and put yourself in another's shoes, you can let everyone have their way, without having to judge about them (ibid.: 349). Instead of wanting to be "right" or "the best",



let alone to take over control, FS ends judgement and competition. Graves therefore calls FS the “most egalitarian of all systems” (ibid.: 351).

While this does bring forward a whole new culture, it also brings about a number of problems and inner contradictions. As to the **new, positive qualities** that emerge with the FS system, its “people first” attitude leads to a warm, affective, and even tender social atmosphere, striving not to hurt anybody by words or actions (ibid.: 345, 348). Its sincere interest in and sensitivity for the needs of others (think of humanistic psychology, ibid.: 359) enables not only deep and “soft” interpersonal connections. Its ability to extend these to the whole of humanity (“we are all one”, ibid.: 343) also has it question whether there is any purpose in any of our usual fights at all for the first time. It is therefore also a very peaceful structure. Graves notes that he has found “no aggressiveness in FS personalities” – except, nota bene, crime against the self, in other words, suicide.

FS’ deep empathy for others and its egalitarianism also enhance a return to religiousness, which now takes the form of a spiritual attitude in favor of humanism, rather than, for the most part, any specific dogma or cult (ibid.: 339).

Obviously, this structure equally has substantial **socio-political implications**. FS brings about a new understanding of individual rights and freedoms, as for example in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It believes in the peaceful resolution of conflicts, majority rule and minority rights (ibid.: 340). It values open **deliberation, participation and deep democracy** in the public space, and team work and Human Relations based leadership in the workplace. In both areas, seeking a congenial atmosphere and a comfortable work pace (and place) are more important than power and efficiency (ibid.: 346).

So it not only holds views that are diametrically opposed to those of ER in many regards, but has no problem with openly seeking confrontation with the latter. For instance, it promotes welfare based on need instead of merit. “Worse yet to the ER parents”, the FS generation shows empathy or even “devotion to foreigners and minority groups” whose concerns it might defend by ways of civil disobedience or passive resistance (ibid.: 359). Its critique of ER’s use of “technology as a weapon of conquest” has it reject technology altogether and instead suggest an idealized “return to nature” (ibid.: 360).

These features already point at some of the **downsides, limitations and inner contradictions of this structure**. In all of these areas, FS displays big, yet “short-range vision”, viewing the “current goal as the ultimate goal of life”, while losing sight of the related practicalities and/or the larger society beyond its own bubble.

Even though it so strives for harmony and agreement, Graves notes a remarkable self-centeredness in this system. Its sole ambition of “just wandering around ‘being happy’” (ibid.: 349), indulging in meditation, yoga, situational biofeedback (ibid.: 352), practices of the inner self (ibid.: 342) and deep face-to-face human interaction (as practiced in protected spaces like Esalen and all sorts of encounter groups, ibid.: 359) incites a latent unworldliness: “What finally disturbs FS man seated in his yoga position (...) is the roof falling in on his head” (ibid.: 359). While calling for huge changes all around, based on high moral ambitions, FS people “show an amazing **inability to commit themselves** to doing for other people. They’re still very much interested in themselves...” (ibid.: 349)s

Due to their primary “goal to be liked, not to decide” (Graves, 2005: 357), they don’t tend to show individual initiative. For them, “things should be different, but I am not the one to start out these things. (...) It’s got to be the group (...), not me” (ibid.: 341). Furthermore, from their expectation of

“salvation in belonging and participating” (ibid.: 347), playing individuality for the chance of social acceptance and togetherness (ibid.: 360), follows the dogma of **consensus management**. This, in turn, implies that if everyone has a say, nothing happens until everyone involved has agreed, leading to interminable group processes and “committeeism”. Again, Graves sounds a bit cynical when commenting FS’ tendency to “never get anything done” (ibid.: 356) with the slogan: “keep the people happy and hope for production” (ibid.: 356).

Finally, what might turn out to be the most relevant limitation of the FS structure in view of facilitating larger global change processes is its **failure to see the larger whole**. “Thinking shows an almost radical, almost compulsive emphasis on seeing everything from a relativistic, subjective frame of reference” (ibid.: 346). As a result, it is “rigidly against rigidity, judgmental about judgmentalism” (ibid.: 347), thereby producing **inner incoherence and performative contradictions**. Graves reports the FS person to be a comparatively “open and honest human being”, but “if you don’t meet that person at that level, you are dead” (ibid.: 358). In other words, their empathy and tolerance only goes as far as you fit in or subscribe to their preconceptions and frames of reference. Beyond that, they can turn quite intolerant, dogmatic, exclusive and sometimes even violent in the name of higher morality.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? If yes, it might be because FS thinking is gaining increasing influence in all western societies today, especially in what is seen – or sees itself as the societal (and moral) leading edge in culture, education, civil society and politics. So what does this imply for integral politics? Again, a more detailed discussion goes far beyond the limits of this chapter and would call for an entirely new, developmentally informed integral political science. I have analyzed one appearance of FS in German politics (Fein, forthcoming). Ken Wilber has studied what he called the “pathological” qualities of the “mean green meme” at various occasions, for example in his “Boomeritis” (Wilber, 2000) and in his more recent piece about “Trump and the post-truth world” (Wilber, 2017, see chapter 4 below).

One recurring issue in this context are the many faces and practices of **political correctness** that take different forms and shapes in different countries, both in the US, Europe and beyond. Viewed through an integral lens, much of the **polarization** that has arisen between the “progressive elites” and what they perceive – and construct – as backward, nationalist, reactionary or outright fascist movements or phenomena has likely been **co-produced** by their own exclusive, moralistic narrative, discourse and identity. Evaluating everyone by their own idealistic (i.e. not necessarily realistic) standards, the respective FS leadership proved unable to see and meet non-FS people (whether on higher or lower levels of existence than themselves) where they are. For the challenge of truly empathizing with the deeper needs and drivers of the supporters of Trump and Brexit, parts of the yellow vests in France and various rightwing parties across Europe, for example, would have required to let go of some of FS’ dear principles, beliefs and projections.

These examples show that the more developed a structure and the higher its ambitions for society, the bigger – and more subtle – is also its potential shadow, i.e. the consequences of inner contradictions remaining unconscious. With the FS/relativistic system focusing on the inner self to the exclusion of the external world” (Graves, 2005: 361), this is where the need for further development becomes obvious. The example of FS is also a good illustration of Graves’ core finding that “changes are more on the order of how the person thinks than what the person thinks” (ibid.: 319). While FS has many wonderful visions and ideals, its limited, still rather self-centered view prevents it from actualizing these in a more effective and sustainable way.

Hence, this is where the next, **A'N' structure** comes in, a core feature of which is a more conscious attention for the *how*, bringing behavior into a better coherence with vision, i.e. walking its talk. Graves identifies the A'N' structure as the first one of a whole new cycle of being levels (as opposed to the subsistence levels AN-FS), characterized by “turning outward to life” again while seeing and acknowledging the **totality of the universe** as a whole.

Since according to Graves, development through the levels only ever occurs in one direction (apart from regressions due to trauma or severe life conditions), it happens in a gradual, non-arbitrary way, i.e. through FS to A'N'. So how is the FS structure also a good, and even necessary preparation for the following A'N' level?

First, as we have seen, the FS person is a good observer, due to the high value they give to their peer's opinions. Hence, they learn through observation, by watching what others do. Yet, unlike DQ, they do not simply adapt to the ways of authority, but think on their own, based on their skill of sensing and apprehending (if not comprehending) others' inner condition (ibid.: 350). Second, FS is driven from within (ibid.: 352), has high ideals and sincerely wants to solve problems (ibid.: 351), even though it might not be very effective at doing so. These deficits are now compensated by the emerging A'N' structure.

*The seventh level of existence: A'N' / systemic/cognitive (later: YELLOW)*

*Express self for what self desires, but never at the expense of others and in a manner that all life, not just my life, will profit*

With the move from subsistence and deficit motivation to being and abundance motivation, (Graves, 2005: 362), the A'N' structure opens up a totally new foundation of human life. With **the basic human subsistence needs and fears resolved** that all the former levels were driven by in one way or another, enormous capacities to do and to know are freeing up, thereby expanding an almost “open-ended, cognitive realm” (ibid.: 366).

The **biochemical changes** connected to this transition activate a huge set of previously used cells and thereby make available additional human brain potential to the A'N' person. What does this imply, and what does A'N' do with these capacities?

The A'N' brain is capable of **systemic and conceptual thinking**, taking up a global, systems perspective as its default mode. These allow it to step back and take a meta-*perspective* on what previous levels have seen, done and known and to focus on the purpose of doing and knowing. On this basis, it can now see and fully comprehend the damage that 3-6<sup>th</sup> levels have produced. Seeing that the very existence of life on earth is threatened by man, its prime need and value is for assuring the continuation of life, in all dimensions (ibid.: 368, 380). At the same time, with its cognition and perception wide open and its focus upon its own self and the world simultaneously, this structure closes the gap between knowing and doing. Hence, its primary concern is to **take action to heal that damage** by putting this world back into order again (ibid.: 379).

More precisely, Graves presents the A'N' human being as valuing a “way of life which will enable (them) to be more than a parasite” on this planet (ibid.: 366). Based on a sense of systemic interdependence, their self-respect depends on this **coherence between insight and actions**. In fact, he quotes an A'N' individual saying he had no specific goals in life other than “just basically staying alive as a human being

and not contributing to the mess the human beings are in”, in other words, limiting his negative footprint on planet earth (ibid.: 372). From this immediately follows a focus on the health of the systemic whole, and a necessity to behave so that all can be and continue to be.

Another feature of A’N’s systemic thinking, helping it to effectively address this need for sustained existence is its much more differentiated, “**kaleidoscopic**” **perspective** (ibid.: 370): It can see different systems as wholes with their own inherent logics. This allows it to adopt its focus and actions in an adaptive, flex-flow way, asking which responses are the best fits to specific extant conditions, in view of its overall goal to serve the survival of life (ibid.: 367, 369).

A’N’ is aware that with knowledge existing in specific settings, there can be several legitimate interpretations. Different knowers each contribute an important element of truth to the larger whole. It therefore knows that not only do we have to live with difference, but that different views demand different kinds and degrees of attention and response at different times. A’N’ is also conscious of the interdependence of subjective and objective dimensions of knowing and able to distinguish between the two.

From this follows a pragmatic worldview, epistemology and ethics, consisting of a number of simple, yet complexity-aware principles. Its **worldview** is summarized by Graves as life being “a bunch of problems” (ibid.: 380) that humanity has (co-)produced and now, consequently, needs to solve. Its **epistemology** aims to make use of “today’s best possible evidence” as to what will benefit all and the larger whole. Its **ethics** for decision-making and behavior is based on the first two, i.e. a pragmatic approach, acknowledging that many means can lead to a desired end, and that therefore it is wise to readily change means if new evidence appears (ibid.: 368). This less rigid and undogmatic approach is able to change its point of reference rapidly whenever necessary and is convinced that those with the best knowledge and expertise in the relevant area should lead the process.

These features are backed up by Graves’ **experiments** with his students, in the course of which he found that student groups consisting of A’N’ individuals not only found “unbelievably more solutions than all the others put together (...). The quality of their solutions...were amazingly better”, showing a much greater repertoire of solutions than the other, lower level groups (ibid.: 375).

These findings first incited Graves to question his own method altogether, assuming that he had simply found a new, higher quality of intelligence. He then went ahead and tested his A’N’ participants, using “every known way of assessing intelligence”, only to find out that there was no significant correlation with intelligence whatsoever, and that his A’N’ students were “no brighter” than all the others. They just used an entirely “**different way of thinking**” (ibid.: 371). In other words, their A’N’ thinking enabled them to “solve problems better without being more intelligent” (ibid.: 372).

While adjusting the world to themselves *realistically*, not egocentrically, A’N’ thinking also provided them with “more degrees of freedom (...) to behave in accordance with own desires” (ibid.: 374). Interestingly, while being oriented very much towards the benefit of the larger community (not just that of a selected few, such as their tribe/BO, family/DQ or peer group/FS), Graves’ A’N’ people also displayed a very healthy sense of self, valuing their own “enjoyment of life” over the prescriptions of any authority (ibid.: 368). He observed them “enjoy the best of life” without being dependent on profane pleasures or fulfilling selfish desires (ibid.: 380). Rather, they could get a lot of pleasure out of simple things.

Unable to fool themselves, what he found to be most important to them after all is the rightness of their own existence, in other words, what they think of themselves (ibid.: 377ff.). Besides being able

to solve existing problems, i.e. to do what must be done, self-esteem for them is a function of **continuing to develop**, rather than striving to achieve or to become this or that (ibid.: 381).

Again, what is most relevant for our purpose here are the **social and political implications** of the A'N' way of thinking and being in the world. As we have seen, some of the most striking features in this regard at first sight appear to be contradictory. A'N' goes about its goals and concerns with great sincerity and ambition, but shows no ambitiousness. It values the good life, but in an egoless way. It is deeply concerned about the fate of humans and the planet, but shows an almost complete absence of fear. As Graves highlights, to his own surprise, none of the common fears displayed by the other levels seems to exist here: "A'N' man does not fear death, nor God, nor his fellow man. Magic and superstition hold no sway over him. (...) The person is without compulsion. (...) Fear is gone. There is no fear" (Graves, 2005: 392, 372).

These features allow the A'N' personality to act confidently and fairly unconcerned with social disapproval (ibid.: 369), unafraid of making mistakes (ibid.: 372) and without wasting time.

As with the previous levels of existence, Graves primarily describes A'N's behavior based on his observations in **work and management settings**. However, the characteristics listed below are all the more relevant when it comes to **politics and democratic government**:

- A'N' people are focused and ends-oriented, flexibly trying out the best means to reach their ends (ibid.: 382), demonstrating creative excellence when it comes to organizing work (ibid.: 385).
- They don't want to waste their competency (and time) to conventions that make no sense to them.
- They require the "freedom to do what needs to be done" in the most effective way, considering the specifics of the given situation.
- They are truly cooperative, value honesty, openness and transparency and seek (or create) work contexts where they find these.

While Frederic Laloux (2014) has later described this mindset as the "TEAL operating system" (see chapter 6 below), Graves simply speaks of the A'N' people as "the very best people in an organization (that) you cannot afford to lose" (Graves, 2005: 388). At the same time, he shares his experience that they are "unemployable", because they prefer to self-manage their own work and affairs (ibid.: 384). "Threat and coercion do not work with them" (ibid.: 382), and they won't live by rules (ibid.) if the latter make them less "autonomous in the exercise of their competence" (ibid.: 382).

Given this strong focus on **self-management**, it becomes clear that the A'N' structure is predestined for bottom-up organization of responsibility as required in the context of democratic government. Indeed, Graves notes that it "**values democracy** in the very deepest sense" (ibid.: 381). So its urge to self-organize does not equal anarchy, but simply pays tribute to the need to work with existing reality, recognizing the many faces of life's challenges and the many possible ways of responding to these.

In a more long-term political view, Graves is very clear in his assessment of A'N' being the structure that is best prepared "to develop the coming mode of life", i.e. to find novel solutions to today's big challenges, some of which he spells out in more detail (see box below). For instance, he predicts a more egalitarian society, which has solved the problem of poverty and does not tolerate particular wealth either – a vision that is meanwhile promoted by multiple pioneers of alternative politics such

as the Swiss and Danish parties “Integral Politics (IP)” and “The Alternative” respectively, the international movement “Building a New Culture (BNC)” and others.

Furthermore, already in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Graves developed his theory, he urged that “seventh-level actions must reduce the population of mankind as on the Earth at 2020 A.D. by one half in order to effectively address “man’s failure (...) and his misuse of his world” which have ultimately produced current energy problems, the food and environmental crises and other problems (ibid.: 388). Most interestingly, Graves also points out a number of changes that are to be expected based on A’N’s commitment to the “authority of knowledge and necessity” when it comes to government and public decision-making, as well as an A’N’ society’s overall socio-economic priorities:

*A few things we might expect when man’s life is ordered by A’N’ thinking are:*

1. Quality – not quantity – will become the measure of worth.
2. Reduction of use will be valued; growth will be devalued.
3. Freedom to operate in one’s own self-interest will be replicated by the responsibility to operate in the interest of others.
4. The measure of educational success will not be quantity of learning, but whether the education leads to movement up the existential staircase. Business and other organizations will be judged in the same way.
5. The boss will be the expeditor of subordinates’ desires rather than the director of their activities.
6. The political systems, which let anyone run for office will be replaced by systems that require candidates to meet certain requirements for office.
7. A leisure ethic will replace the work ethic as the primary means of valuing a person. A man will be revered more for his ability to contribute in his non-earning time than in his earning time.
- (...)
10. Unity with nature will replace unity with God.

*(Graves, 2005: 391)*

While these ideas do read like an early **manifesto of integral politics** (even though there is no mention of “integral” in Graves’ work), he is fully aware that “the future can never be completely predicted, because (his theory) allows only for the prediction of the general and not the particular” (ibid.: 389). At the same time, ECLET theory does show that whenever “radical change of thinking was needed, it has always taken place” (ibid.: 389). Or, as Aurobindo had put it, it will happen with the **necessity of nature** (see chapter 1).

Not only does Graves outline the main implications of the A’N’ existential (integral) way of thinking and being in the world much more precisely than he did for the previous levels. He is also very optimistic about what is to come. Due to A’N’s intuitive wisdom and ease with solving complex problems and its “deep readiness for change”, he speaks of the current situation as the “**greatest psychological revolution**” and “the most exciting transition the human race has faced to date” (ibid.: 389). And he seems to be more than confident that his seventh level of existence is able to navigate the given challenges: “there is no need to worry if yellow takes over” (Graves, 1978). “You can depend on them in a crisis”, as much as they will do what they want otherwise (ibid.: 388).

Indeed, four decades later, many of the above ideas have been or are increasingly being promoted, practiced and implemented by pioneers of a new paradigm politics in many parts of the world. **Examples** are the Sociocracy movement (in particular the sociocratic neighborhood parliaments in India and



elsewhere), the Economy of the Common Good, sharing economy initiatives, IP's vision and project and others pioneers presented on our [LiFT Pioneers of Politics Youtube channel](#).

For the moment, many (yet not all) of the pioneers we have studied in the context the *Leadership for Transition (LiFT) Politics* project **work at the edges of the current political system**. This is in line with Graves' observation that A'N' individuals are most likely to be found at "the most remote places", either geographically or psychologically (ibid.: 386), because they like to be left alone by the establishment in order to be able to try out new things. In fact, the question whether new politics should or needs to be developed inside or outside the existing system is an ongoing debate among pioneers. After all, as Graves puts it, "their procedures must be their own, not those that tradition or group decision-making have established" (ibid.: 384).

While by far not all of the current pioneers are inspired by, let alone explicitly subscribe to the integral vision as yet, many of them **share at least some of the principles** of integral politics as laid out in this book. However, what we at the *LiFT Politics* project and others are working to make more visible and ultimately, more powerful, is (as of 2022) still an emerging phenomenon. And Graves states that the seventh level only "started to appear in significant amount in my data around 1952-53" at all (ibid.: 378).

So now, the challenge is to **mainstream A'N' thinking**, especially on the level of leadership, in order to "bring the earth back to equilibrium, learning to act within the limits inherent in the balance of life" (ibid.: 389). For if we acknowledge that the more limited, short-term perspectives and behaviors of the previous structures lead us nowhere near where we need to go (having produced the current state of affairs in the first place), there is virtually no alternative to a qualitatively new approach to leadership. Bluntly speaking, humanity can simply no longer afford less than A'N' integral level solutions if it wants to survive.

If we look at the world today, the combination of, on the one hand, the either plain stupid or fear-based self-protective short-sighted egocentrism of leaders like Trump, Bolsonaro, Putin and others, producing incredible collateral damages to humanity and the planet, and, on the other hand, a liberal-"progressive" or relativistic leadership (ER-FS), lacking the means and vision to fence in the first, are a recipe for disaster. It is only within an A'N' political universe that we can expect the necessary **insight, wisdom and egolessness** to constructively deal with the often destructive and polarizing dynamics of the former levels' (covering the whole spectrum from CP to FS) interactions with each other.

As we begin to see with climate change's increasing urgency, the great transition to what appears necessary from an existential (seventh) level, global perspective is not necessarily always a simple and **peaceful endeavor**. Therefore, it needs leaders and managers who, like A'N', won't engage in destructive competition, yet are nevertheless "capable of cold ruthlessness if the situation requires as long as it doesn't harm others" (ibid.: 382). While the A'N' person does prefer to be in balance and alignment with all there is, different from FS, s/he also knows how to **consciously use power**. And different from FS again, if they have to exercise control and hurt some people's feelings, "they will regret having to do it, but do it anyway", as decently as possible, but they do it (Graves, 1978).

In some sense, it reminds the story of Jesus' **holy wrath** when Graves describes A'N's being able to "explode at what (they) do not like" or recognize as harmful for the wellbeing of the larger whole. Moreover, he emphasizes that their own "aggressiveness is not gone, (but merely) subordinated" to serving that wellbeing. "No matter how difficult things become", his A'N' subjects showed "no tendency to immolate themselves in any form or to unduly harm their own bodies or others", in other words, they would neither let themselves go out of control nor run away from the given challenge (ibid.: 378).

So how can this “**drastic change**” in the organization of politics and the world possibly come about? Interestingly, Graves suggests that to respond to the horrendous problems that humanity’s accelerated development has produced thus far, “things are going to have to **slow down tremendously** in order to deal with them (ibid.: 379). Hence, in line with the priorities listed in the box above, decelerating and unlearning our “old normal” is part of the shift that we have to facilitate on our way to an A’N’ society. Its fruits are an “equal access to a high-quality life” that allows anybody individually the “delight of tasting emergent self” (Graves, 2005: 393), while collectively paving the way for “a new movement in the symphony of human history” (ibid.: 389).

Given that from the perspective of most of the previous levels, the A’N’ existential structure is “far too unconventional” to be easily grasped, let alone embraced, it is **often misunderstood**. Ken Wilber has later coined the term “pre/trans fallacy” for Graves’ observation that “people who operate at lower levels see the values and beliefs of people at levels higher than theirs (two systems above and beyond) as immoral”. For instance, “if a person is operating at a DQ or an ER level and runs into someone who thinks in an A’N’ fashion, they’ll end up calling him a CP – take him right down. They have that kind of difficulty. You simply cannot get away from it” (Graves, 2005: 385).

Therefore, we will close our presentation of Graves’ work here, even though he has described another, **subsequent emerging level** of existence beyond A’N’, namely an eighth level called **B’O’ (holistic)**. This most recent of Graves’ levels is based on a small number of just “six people who changed in the midst of my studies from thinking in (...) the seventh-level way” with “a lot of evidence of that [new level, E.F.] in these six people, but”, he admits, “I’ve never had enough people to do any systematic studies of them” (ibid.: 397). So for the time being, much would be gained by expanding the outreach of A’N’, with the never-ending quest into further emergence to be continued.

Note that today, Graves’ work is mostly perceived through the lens of Don Beck and Christopher Cowan who have integrated it into their leadership and organizational development approach called “**Spiral Dynamics**”. Yet, the latter contains no major research of their own, but essentially builds up on Graves’ levels of existence, which they re-labelled by attributing colors to each level:

Clare Graves: Level of existence	Beck/Cowan: Spiral Dynamics
(C’P’)	Coral
B’O’	Turquoise
A’N’	Yellow
FS	Green
ER	Orange
DQ	Blue
CP	Red
BO	Purple
AN	Beige

It is Clare Graves who deserves all the credit for laying the theoretical and empirical groundwork for Beck/Cowan’s *Spiral Dynamics* which today appears as one of the most well-known elements of “integral theory” – and one of the most widely quoted integral models of cultural development besides that of Jean Gebser.

While coming from very different starting points, using very different approaches, both Gebser and Graves came to rather similar descriptions of what cultural evolution is all about. And their description of the now emerging integral structure of consciousness also largely match each other. Hence, they both must be acknowledged as major inspirators of most later developmentally informed work on integral or metamodern politics, which tends to build up on either of their foundations.

Let us now turn to the most popular voice in this choir, Ken Wilber and his integral theory.

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