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Grave Errors in Values

Values

Like any open system, NLP is continuously taking in and utilizing new information from its environment. For example, the TOTE model for strategies was taken into NLP from the earlier work of mathematicians Miller, Galanter and Pribram (1960). This article focuses on a more recent candidate for acceptance into NLP: the Levels of Psychological Existence Theory, proposed by Clare W Graves.

Some prominent NLP trainers (e.g. Wyatt Woodsmall) suggest that the Graves model is or could be an integral part of NLP. Before accepting a model, it makes sense for us to check that it accords with the fundamental presuppositions of NLP, particularly the presupposition that “the map is not the territory”. I have grave concerns about the way we might use the Levels of Psychological Existence Theory (also called *Spiral Dynamics* in the book of that title by Beck and Cowan, 1996). At its worst, it could be used in a way that is unverifiable, misleading, and interpersonally destructive. This article will summarize the model, compare it with a couple of other value systems, and then present my concerns about its use.

Tad James and Wyatt Woodsmall advocate the Graves system as a model for understanding human values. In *Time Line Therapy and the Basis of Personality* they describe values as “those things (or notions) that we are willing to expend resources for, or to obtain resources to have. Values are largely unconscious, and at the deepest level they drive a person’s true purpose as a human being. Values govern ALL human behaviour. First they provide the push or the kinesthetic drive as prior motivation for our actions. Second they serve as after the fact evaluation criteria, or judgement about our actions. Values are the way we judge good and bad, right and wrong, appropriateness and inappropriateness” (p.155).

The Graves system

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