

[1962]

## The Implications to Management of Systems - Ethical Theory

- Clare W. Graves -  
November 11, 1962

I am aware that some of you may have read an early version of the theory upon which my remarks will be based. That early version was not cast in the more precise form which I shall follow tonight, therefore let me outline for you how we shall proceed.

First, the theoretical model for research into ethical behavior will be presented. Then, I will speculate as to the nature of ethical behavior with the speculations based on the model. And, finally I will speak of the implications of this theory to the managerial profession. But, before I proceed to the body of the paper let me explain a little of the background of this work.

I do not know, at this time, to what degree there is substance in the theory.  
What I do know is this:

1. I know that one can read all that has been written about ethical behavior and end up unable to understand it.
2. I know that if reasonably sound scientific knowledge of ethical behavior is to be sought, no existing research model is producing this knowledge.
3. I know that unless we gain more insight into ethical behavior, we won't have to worry about man's ethics, because we won't have any men left to worry about.
4. I know that this state of affairs came to haunt me when I set out a few

years ago to learn what I could of ethical behavior.

5. I know that the following are my assumptions, generalizations, and hypotheses to date. I am not sure what my assumptions, generalizations and hypotheses will be tomorrow. But where I stand today is this.

From my studies I have assumed that ethical behavior is a growth phenomenon. Therefore, as such it develops through definable but overlapping stages by an orderly progression from a less complex to a more complex stage. I have assumed, also, that like any other growth phenomenon there is no assurance, once growth starts, that subsequent stages will emerge. Ethical behavior may be, therefore, like a seed. It could develop through its whole life cycle passing through each describable stage, or like the seed, ethical growth could become stunted, could regress, and could even reorganize and take on a form not usually of its nature.

Another assumption is that just as the seed must have certain living circumstances to fully flower so to is man's ethical behavior determined to a considerable extent by the life circumstances in which the human develops.

Finally, I have assumed that there is something of an ethical nature inherent in man, which is triggered into operation as one or another ethical system in one or another form, by certain life circumstances. These assumptions led to the following hypotheses about ethical behavior.

1. That the ethical system of a man or a group of men, living in certain definable life circumstances is a function of the dynamic systems operant in that man or that group of men.
2. That the system of ethical behavior by which a man or a group of men lives changes in an orderly determined manner consonant with changes in dynamics triggered by changes in life circumstances.
3. That there emerges an ethical theme of what is right and wrong in behavior appropriate to each level of dynamic system.
4. That within each theme certain specific values of right and wrong will be expressed, with one man or one group of men emphasizing one or some of the values within a theme while another man or group of men may accentuate some other value within the theme.
5. That there is a natural drivenness in man to proceed from a lower to a higher level dynamic system and thus a concomitant natural drivenness to move from a lower, more humanly restricting, conception of right and wrong to a higher, more humanly freeing conception of right and wrong.
6. That as man moves from a lower to a higher level of ethical behavior, some values by which man judges right and wrong are discarded as no longer appropriate to his changed status in life. Also, as a part of this point, that some of the values of previous ethical systems are retained intact, that some values are modified and that some new, not previously existing conceptions of right and wrong emerge at each subsequent dynamic system emerges.
7. That the ethical systems by which men live may progress, fixate at an over or underdeveloped condition, or

may, if dynamic conditions are proper, regress.

8. That lower level dynamic systems produce a more rigid ethical system and thereby make it impossible for those living by lower level ethics to comprehend the meaning of living by the principles of ethical systems higher in the hierarchy.
9. That the normal picture of ethical development is to proceed from a narrow restricting theme of right and wrong related to a narrow dynamic system to a broader conception of right and wrong which emerges concomitantly with an enlarged dynamic system.
10. That the particular character of the general level of cognitive awareness within a dynamic system (diminished or accepted awareness of a particular percept) may be such as to produce an ethical monstrosity in defect or an ethical monstrosity in excess. That is, if man's living circumstances are of a certain character, and his cognitive awareness at a particular dynamic level, distorted so as to under or over accentuate some aspect of that awareness, then the appropriate ethical system may fail to develop adequately or the ethical system may become a monstrous over development of the theme and of some values which concomitantly vary with that particular psychological dynamic system.

### The Model

Thus systems ethical theory hypothesizes that ethical behavior develops with time and conditions through a definable series of stages. The stages are seen as pre-programmed in a somewhat MacDougalian instinctive sense. Each stage is dependent for its emergence, upon certain dynamical states in the brain that are released by certain life circumstances. It represents that when certain phenomenological conditions arise in the life of a person, a clan, a society or possibly a nation that a certain form of ethical behavior.