

**THE  
NEVER ENDING  
Quest**

**Dr. Clare W. Graves  
Explores Human Nature**

# **The Never Ending Quest**

*A treatise on an emergent cyclical conception  
of adult behavioral systems and their development*

**edited and compiled by  
Christopher C. Cowan and Natasha Todorovic**

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**To the memory of Marian Graves,  
to Sue and to Bob,  
and to the extended family of students  
in the legacy of Dr. Clare W. Graves**

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## Editors' Foreword

How to do justice to a man whose work, insights, contributions and observations have changed lives and transformed the way we see the world? One way is by continuing his work so as to bring it forth more broadly into that world so others might know the mind behind the theory and be thus mentored. What better than to share with the world the work and words of a brilliant and good man whose life was devoted to teaching, research and unraveling the riddle of human nature?

It is our privilege to help Dr. Clare W. Graves's endeavors continue to bear fruit, and to bring more of his perspective into more hands and minds. The interest in his kind of bridge-building approach is growing, just as he expected, because it adds necessary understanding of human affairs and connects many ways of figuring out why we do what we do, as we do, and what we might do next. Clare often said he was addressing questions which were not yet being asked in psychology or the sciences, for that matter, but that they would be one day. Now they are, in fields ranging from systems and cognitive psychology, to evolutionary developmental biology, to consciousness studies. He was a pioneer living a bit before his time, blazing trail for others to follow toward a common destination: understanding who and why we are.

To have the opportunity to share the Gravesian point of view so it can be more clearly understood, further elaborated, wisely used, and more sharply appreciated is a gift. This book is our way to honor Clare Graves and his profound influence. In the process,

we fulfill a promise made to our friend and his life partner, Marian Graves, by ensuring that Clare's work might move forward through helping this volume and its companions come to be.

Thirty years have elapsed since Clare Graves began to put his ideas down in longhand on legal pads to be typed by his secretary in the old 'psych building' at Schenectady's Union College. Nearly twenty have passed since his death in 1986. Way back in 1951 he had set out on a quest for better understanding of human nature – who we are and who we are to become. It was an ambitious undertaking which culminated with the statement of a new theory and then a manuscript after nearly a quarter century of work. The original pages which remain are brittle, but the ideas are flexible and hold together better than ever. They have begun to be recognized for what they are: an elegant theory that pulls together a broad spectrum of approaches to human nature and helps bring them into focus. The beauty of Graves's work is its open-endedness, thus leaving room for all the discoveries made during those years between then and now in systems theory, the neurosciences, and even geopolitics. The concept – the bridge - is as fresh and vibrant today as it was in 1977, and provides a solid map to what lies ahead.

Graves did not set out to 'explain it all' or to provide all the answers to 'life's nagging questions.' He only sought to provide a framework with the explanatory power to pull our knowledge about ourselves and why we do as we do together with more elegance. He saw fragmentation and compartmentalization in psychology, in education, and politics. He also envisioned interconnected systems where others found compartments, and complementarity where others found competition. He sensed a deeper layer that could pull our understanding of the chunks closer together, a set of organizing principles that could draw the best from many viewpoints and resonate without eroding them. This theory was to be a statement for his peers and the world to consider – to accept, to build upon, or, perhaps, to shred and cast away. Today, many people, ranging from academics to successful bottom-line business executives, even New Age spiritual gurus, agree that he succeeded in opening a powerful new window



through which to see the world differently. Gravesian thinking is an additive force in many domains.

Yet most of those opinions are based largely on secondary and tertiary reports of the Gravesian legacy and not the work, itself. When Clare died in 1986, his major project was shelved. Until this publication, only smatterings of the theory and the thinking behind it have been generally available. Thus, a number of reinterpretations, postulations, and even fabrications of what Dr. Graves intended have been tossed about along with accurate reports. This book will clear up some confusion. In Graves's own words, it gives those already interested in the material a means to cross-check what they've read and been told. It gives a Gravesian starting point to those who have not been prejudiced by renditions which might be distorted or which might be merely flying a flag of convenience, sometimes spreading nonsense under the name of Graves. And for those with a clear view of Gravesian theory already, it offers both foundational details and a direction for further work.

One of the editors of this book, Christopher Cowan, knew Dr. Graves quite well during the last decade of his life and had the opportunity to work closely with him, helping him prepare his last two summary papers in 1981 and 1982. Some of the materials blended herein are from his collection of Gravesian papers, as well as recordings and notes from sessions conducted jointly with Dr. Graves. Other pieces are from the collection of Gravesian archivist William R. Lee.

In addition, Cowan is co-creator of what is arguably the most prominent commercial application of parts of the Gravesian point of view, Spiral Dynamics<sup>®</sup>, and co-author of the original book by that title, *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change*. With the compilation of this manuscript and the learning that came with the process, however, he has also become a critic of some aspects of his own work from nearly a decade ago, recognizing how easy it is both to glibly over-simplify and to inject elaborations which are not appropriate. Thus, the publication of this "Graves" book is an opportunity to set some of the record straight, to confess some misunderstandings, and to redirect some confusion by accurately citing the source. We hope it provides a

means for sincere students of the theory to lay down their own foundations on the bedrock of the Gravesian legacy – what it is and what it is not - and from there to raise their own challenges, find their own truths, and expand on a body of work better grounded on a more solid, accurate footing.

## History

Every book has its history. If this one could speak, it would tell an adventure story of excitement, catastrophe, and separation involving an international border and hundreds of miles, both sides of a continent and at least four states and two provinces. It could speak of a wild ride through Canada avoiding moose and staying just ahead of a November blizzard, and of a paragraph found on the last page of an article in box #7 of the huge Carl Rogers archive at UCSB. It would celebrate what it is and ask readers to help it grow into what Graves wanted it to become.

When he began this project, Clare Graves's plan was to put out a definitive work. He envisioned an opus that would stand among the classics, a statement on human nature nothing short of revolutionary that might be a key to open minds to new thinking about psychology. But there was a catch. Reportedly, he had seen Abraham Maslow "torn to pieces" by his colleagues at an APA seminar in the mid 1950's. Afterwards, Graves found Maslow hanging his head while slumped on a couch in the lobby of the hotel. Maslow was wondering why his friends and associates would treat him so shabbily and attack his point of view. He mourned: 'Why would they do that to me?'

That memory of an icon being lambasted and emotionally crushed by colleagues stuck with Clare Graves who seems to have vowed that he would never put himself in Maslow's position. Instead, he would conduct rigorous research and release his findings only when the theory was ripe and defensible in the face of the harshest criticism. It would be thorough and more. Thus, he published relatively little and held his work very closely while surrounded by the behaviorists and Freudians of his day.

His studies actually began in an effort to answer a student's semester-end question after a survey course in psychology: "OK,

so which one is right?" From there he went on to try and rationalize Maslow's views and to prove them valid. He quickly came to discover, however, that the Maslowian approach was insufficient to frame his mounting piles of data, and that even the great Maslow's perspective was only brushstrokes on a much larger canvas of human nature. That picture was what he intended to reveal with this book.

The process of disclosure began in the 1960's when Graves was beginning to discuss his work and its implications more openly. He crafted statements for conferences and presentations (many of which are available on the [www.clarewgraves.com](http://www.clarewgraves.com) website operated by the editors and William Lee). He had some success with an article in the *Harvard Business Review*<sup>1</sup> applying his viewpoint to managerial issues, and another in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*<sup>2</sup> laying out an initial statement of his theoretical perspective. A piece in Canada's *Macleans Magazine*<sup>3</sup> suggested that his might just be "a theory that explains everything," though Graves was well aware that his, too, was only a work in progress without finale, just as is nature of *Homo sapiens*. Still, interest was growing. His approach was striking chords. A lengthy exposition of his point of view appeared in *The Futurist*<sup>4</sup>, the publication of the World Future Society which has been active in support of this work for many years. (Graves's feelings about this piece were mixed since the text blends his own words with comments by the editor, some of which he liked and others which he found troubling.) There were study groups devoted to his point of view. He began sharing his ideas more broadly. And he commenced writing this, his major statement, as his star was beginning to rise.

Then, suddenly, a heart attack and problems in follow-on surgery halted that rise. Impaired eyesight and balance made

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<sup>1</sup> Graves, Clare W. (1966). Deterioration of Work Standards. *Harvard Business Review*, September/October 1966, Vol. 44, No. 5, p. 117-126.

<sup>2</sup> Graves, Clare W. (1970). Levels of Existence: An Open Sstem Theory of Values. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Fall, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 131-155.

<sup>3</sup> Steed, Nicholas (1967). A Theory that Explains Everything. *Macleans Magazine*. October, 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Graves, Clare W. (1974). Human Nature Prepares for a Momentous Leap. *The Futurist*. April, p. 72-87.

reading and writing difficult. Graves was never able to resume his pace, though he did work on polishing parts of this manuscript for a time and also participated in a limited number of seminars, as well as consulting on several projects. The book project eventually went to sleep, a beginning and an end without a middle. It has waited a quarter century to awaken.

Drafts of large parts of sections I and III of this manuscript were ready in 1977, while other planned chapters remained unwritten. The project was shelved, due largely to frustrations created by impacts of his illness and in part to difficulties he never fully explained regarding his 'Canadian publisher.' He didn't even have copies of some of the pages he'd approved, only early pencil drafts. In truth, during the last years, it was unclear whether Clare was sad about the aborted attempt to complete this manuscript or if he was actually somewhat relieved that he was not required to bring the mammoth undertaking to fruition. (The latter was the opinion of his widow. It was also her opinion that what he had done needed to get out, despite his drive for completeness.)

So, the history of the book could have ended with Clare's passing in 1986. Co-editor Cowan helped Marian Graves to assemble his remaining papers which they donated to Union College's Library archives. Two years before, as his health was again deteriorating after several small strokes, Clare had decided to clean up the "mud room" one day and discarded his raw data and other writings to make room for harnesses from the barn. (In addition to being Union's golf coach, Clare and Marian loved Morgan trotters which gave the entire family such joy.) Thus, what remained in other filing cabinets were personal papers, articles, and rough copies of a few chapters of this book. There were pages scribbled in long hand on pads of legal paper; other sections were typed with scratch-outs; some were crinkled carbon paper copies. Conflicting versions and numbering made it nearly impossible to know what was to go where. It seemed the papers were merely of historical value as nuggets and small gems, nothing more.

Then, in 1999 the editors were fortunate in retrieving copies of additional chunks from a box stored away at the Quetico Centre in Canada, the organization which had been participating in the project earlier. In 2001 we found the table of contents

which provided the intended order, along with some cassette audio tapes from the mid-1970's in which Clare discussed his book-in-progress. Those remarks provided sufficient direction to begin working on the puzzle. We have not given up on locating more pieces and, like Clare Graves's theory, this book is open-ended. But the picture is clear enough to move forward and live with a few missing pieces and unanswered questions.

## **Approaching the book**

In reading Graves, remember that the Emergent-Cyclical (E-C) Levels of Existence theory (which he referred to as "the Emergent Cyclical, Phenomenological, Existential Double-Helix Levels of Existence Conception of Adult Human Behavior" in 1978 and "the Emergent, Cyclical, Double-Helix Model of Adult Human Biopsychosocial Systems" in 1981 – the reason E-C is used herein) is the child of a multidisciplinary approach to human nature and behavior. Because it spans many fields, the theory cannot be collapsed into any one of them. Although not essential, the reader will benefit from familiarity with psychology, sociology, biology, education, systems theory, anthropology, history, and brain sciences. At the same time, study of any of these fields, including leadership, management, policy, politics, philosophy, or anything requiring understanding of human nature can benefit from exposure to this theory. Graves urges his readers to rise above established disciplinary boundaries, limits which often confounded his own studies, and to examine culture, adult behavior, thinking, motivation, management and learning from many points of view, each of which can hold elements of truth. He sees these not as different entities, but as multiple facets of the same diamond. This work pushes for broad rather than narrow views, and insists upon the recognition of interdependent relationships among ideas, fields, models, perspectives and concepts – a bridge.

The book is in three sections.<sup>5</sup> In Section I Graves asks the eternal question that leads to both war and peace while doggedly avoiding a single answer: 'What is human life about and what is it meant to be?' This question frames the entire work as he picks up human nature, holds it to the light, turns it, then examines it both under a microscope of individual development and from afar as an emergent process of our species.

In Chapter 1 he reviews various psychological approaches: behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and humanistic psychology, then proposes the Emergent Cyclical Levels of Existence Conception as a way to get beyond the confusion and contradiction in the field of psychology and culture with a new map. In Chapter 2 he explains how this conception emerged while glancing at other conceptualizers and what they seem to have overlooked. He outlines his basic research, then moves on to discuss his study of what adults had to say about the mature personality in Chapter 3. He weaves an intriguing story that would, were it not factual and a report of his activities, research and methodology, make for a good detective novel. As it is, he gives life to research and the suspense provides spice for the reader.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explore the building of a theory from a set of raw data. In Chapter 4 the evidence in the 'protocols' – statements about what the mature adult personality is like – provides clues to adult psychosocial development. The confusion in these data led Graves to search through other theorists' (and philosophers') work for explanations for what he had discovered and a way to frame it. Chapter 5 grapples with the idea that perhaps there is no such singular thing as psychological maturity, but that it is an emergent, open-ended process. That leads to Chapter 6 wherein he lays out the Emergent, Cyclical, Double-Helix Model of Adult BioPsychoSocial Systems Development – the Levels of Existence theory (E-C) – and briefly compares it to other perspectives in personality, culture, change and maturity.

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<sup>5</sup> Chapters 1-6 in Part I, as well as 14 and 15 in Part III, are from a near-final draft approved by Dr. Graves with only light editing and adjustment for this publication.

The graphics appearing herein are either direct reproductions of drawings Dr. Graves used or reconstructions from rough copies in his other papers and notes.

(This summation chapter is required reading before getting to Section II lest the coping systems describe there become a simple typology rather than a series of emergent relationships among existential factors from 'outside' and neurobiological equipment 'inside,' a trap some newcomers to Gravesian thinking fall right into.)

Each chapter of Section II is devoted to describing one of the Gravesian Levels of Psychological Existence and some of its characteristics. This middle section - Chapters 7-14 - was not written by Dr. Graves as it appears here. According to Marian Graves, he never completed these chapters, planning to leave them to the end of his project since they are artifacts of the theory, not the theory, itself. (Perhaps this was one of the issues between him and his publisher.)

Instead, Section II as presented here is mostly a compilation by the editors (Chris Cowan and Natasha Todorovic) of Dr. Graves's own words drawn from a number of original sources - both written papers and audio recordings. We have tried to concentrate on the phrasings and views presented in his later years when there was a choice or confusion as to his intentions. Since this theory was always a work in progress, Dr. Graves did change some aspects of it significantly over the years, while other pieces remained remarkably consistent down to the specific words. One idea that came in later, for example, is that there might be only six basic themes which then repeat in elaborated forms, producing the subsistence levels, the being levels, and, perhaps, compassionate levels (to borrow a term and idea from Anne Roe, John Calhoun, Maslow, and others).

We have included sections of the protocols and criteria Dr. Graves used to differentiate the levels and, where possible, sections on origins, management of the system, educational needs, reactions to stress, readiness for change and transitions to illustrate his thinking. One part - the recovered DQ/ER pages in Chapter 9 - demonstrate how rich this book would have been could he have completed it himself. There are examples of conceptions of the mature personality used to build the levels which Dr. Graves often cited, but no sample conceptions of the mature personality representing A'N' (Chapter 12) or B'O'

(Chapter 13) because none remained among his papers, and he did not read them on tape or in seminars.

We decided to include practically everything Graves wrote and said about the B'O' level since it is one of the most controversial and curiosity-producing systems. He made it clear that his understanding of the eighth level was scant and speculative, and we insert this material only as historical notes, not a theoretical statement or description we can support today or with which he would necessarily agree. Readers can evaluate the evidence or lack thereof for the appearance of this level of psychological existence (and others) since 1977 for themselves. The open-ended nature of the theory certainly leaves room for the emergence of systems beyond B'O'. We leave this discussion for elsewhere and online since this book is a compendium of Dr. Grave's words then, and not our projections or opinions now. In any case, the core is the E-C theory and its derivation, not the levels.

Section III begins with a comparative analysis looking at other models of development, emergent systems, and evolutionary tracks. Chapter 14 includes discussion of similarities and differences with other theorists' work as verification or challenge to the E-C point of view. Comparison of Emergent Cyclical Theory to Maslow; Harvey, Hunt and Schroder; Loevinger; Schroder, Driver, and Streufert; Kohlberg; Perry; Isaacs; Calhoun; Drews; Aronof and more are all included within a table sampling and contrasting the models of twenty-five conceptualizers. The implications of this perspective to psychology, management, politics, social policy, education, foreign policy and various social transformations complete the book at Chapter 15.

The original bibliography and source list was lost. We have attempted to rebuild it as thoroughly as possible from citations in the manuscript (and other writings) which sometimes consisted of little more than a last name and, in a few cases, a last name with a page number. Very few titles of books or publications were included. With only a few exceptions – noted - we have located the books and scholars cited and tracked down quotations to source them. Our objective was to locate the writers and even editions which would have been available to Dr. Graves prior to 1977. In the process, we were exposed to some of the forgotten



geniuses of his day, and to many ideas raised then which are being re-raised today as innovations. Many of the authors he refers to have published considerably more; some have modified their positions; others stand by earlier works. A great deal has been learned in the neurosciences and cognitive systems post-Graves, for example. Yet even some of his ideas in this area which sound quaint on the surface stand up pretty well if one merely swaps the language for contemporary terms. Rather than include updates in this publication, though, we will rely on the technologies of today – online notes and discussion – to flesh it out and make corrections.

Dr. Graves obviously planned to include extensive explanatory footnotes. Some were intact in sections of the manuscript and notes. Those are marked “CWG:” in the text to indicate they are his own words, as found. The rest of the footnotes are our bibliographic references and, in a few cases, notes to explain events that would have been “current” in 1977 in America, but historic and mostly unfamiliar in 2005 and elsewhere around the globe.

Reprints of many of his papers and biographical materials are available on our [www.clarewgraves.com](http://www.clarewgraves.com) website. Fortunately, though, most of the material used in this book stands quite as well today as it did then. Even political examples are as apt now as three decades ago – change Presidents' names and things sound very much alike. That is one of the beauties of his point of view, of course, and why we are convinced that the theoretical work of Clare W. Graves stands even taller today than ever, and is even more useful now than then.

## **Acknowledgements, 2005**

If this book could tell its story of excitement, frustration, abandonment, and renewal, it would speak of the many people involved in keeping it alive, for were it not for the pages stored, the papers filed, the tapes preserved, and the notes transcribed about the research conducted by Clare W. Graves, this could not be.

Thanks go to Linda Wiens, who worked with Clare at Quetico Centre and helped him in crafting these thoughts, along with others recognized later in the Preface. She kept the manuscript pages safe, waiting for the time to make them available as chapters. Dedicated archivist and Gravesian enthusiast William R. Lee had the interest, wisdom and foresight to collect and preserve every word, lecture and paper by Dr. Graves that he could as part of a Graves interest group in Washington, D.C., and then as teacher of the Gravesian legacy for 30 years to his own students at Arlington (VA) high school. In addition to his support of the ClareWGraves.com website, he has also assisted with checking this book and ensuring that it accurately reflects the authentic Gravesian perspective as well as possible. Ziza Todorovic waded through the noise of decaying cassette tapes to transcribe and check hours of recordings of Graves seminars, parts of which fill in large chunks of the missing chapters. We are indebted to her for weeks of effort, her reviews, and ongoing encouragement and enthusiasm.

Gratitude and respect to the many brilliant minds who laid down the ideas Graves built on and adapted, some of whose names appear herein, and to the creative legacy of many others unlisted. Our appreciation goes to Dr. O.J. Harvey for helping us to understand his work better and providing us with keys to Dr. Graves's inspiration. We are appreciative of Morris Stein, Robert Hawkins, and David Elkind who knew where their quotes came from, and from Mrs. William Gray who aided with her late husband's papers. All graciously took the time to respond to our queries. And special thanks go to Dr. Kenneth Isaacs who joined with us to explore where his work and Dr. Graves's coincide and differ.

In large measure, this book owes its existence to the support, friendship, advice and confidence of futurist Ed Edwards who has believed in the value of the Gravesian point of view for many, many years. While the editors fought with the pieces, dug through libraries, and doubted that it would ever come together, Ed always saw it as an important thing to make available to a wider public and generously facilitated that process. And, of course, this book is due to the friendship and blessings of the late Marian Graves

and to the Graves's children, Sue and Bob, for their encouragement and endorsement.

But this book could not tell its story of human nature and our emergence were it not for the lifetime of work, research, dedication and persistence of the man who said and wrote it, Clare W. Graves, even though he is not physically present for the publication. This book is a sampling of his genius, passion and insight. We hope we have done justice to the work and to the man. We wish he could have been here through the process to clear his throat and say in his deep, resonant, professorial voice a protracted, "Welllll..." and then gently nudge for improvements and continue to turn on those light bulbs of revelation. We particularly wish he were here to discuss the innumerable questions that arose in its compiling and all the new ones an understanding of this point of view will surely pose. But those questions are now in your hands, gentle reader, and the answers forthcoming as you join with us move this work on.