

*Integral Meta-Theory and Spiral Dynamics: The Jeffrey Epstein Case as an Example of the Pathological Orange Meme*

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The descriptive and explanatory power of Spiral Dynamics as a stage-based theory of personal and moral development is evident in the array of circumstances, conditions, and events to which it has been successfully applied (Beck et al., 2018). As initially set forth by Graves and later expanded by Beck & Cowan (1996), Spiral Dynamics remains a valuable model for understanding the increasing complexities and awareness of both individuals and societies. This work involves the author's own interpretation of these memes, their toxic aspects, and their specific applicability to the current discussion, which may differ from other Integral scholars. It should also be noted this paper is based on the original memetic structures/colors and not the ones later revised by Wilber.

Cases such as the Epstein saga are complex. They strike deep chords of social repugnance at the seeming incomprehensible set of facts and circumstances associated both with his alleged crimes as well as his seeming invulnerability to arrest and prosecution, despite years' worth of ongoing accumulation of credible evidence against him (Brown, 2021). The Spiral Dynamics (SD) model and Wilber's adaptation of such for his Integral Meta-Theory (IMT) provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of this tragic narrative.

The case of Jeffrey Epstein, the potently influential accused human trafficker with a network of connections to political, corporate, and criminal justice powers, is an example of how the SD model accurately aligns with individual examples of criminality. The Epstein case involves a controversial non-prosecution agreement (Brown, 2021), the unspecified involvement of major political, business, and other high-profile individuals, and multiple pending charges at the time of his in-custody death (Department of Justice, 2019).

This case starkly illustrates Graves' conception of the orange "meme" (Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000) and an extreme manifestation of its toxic (or pathological) dimension (Beck, 2018; Beck et al., 2018; Wilber, 2001/2011). This work employs Graves' term *meme* interchangeably with *waves* or *stages*.

The orange wave is one of achievement, success, entrepreneurship, creative drive, and power. As such, it may cut against the law-and-order hierarchies of the blue meme in its meritocratic individualism (Wilber, 2001/2011, p. 24). It is the value sphere of high-level accomplishment in corporate, capitalistic, technical, and political sectors. People who operate from the orange meme are characterized by a drive for self-reliance, autonomy, and competition. It is a structure that seeks to create and share the good life and values individual ambition, empowerment, and material abundance (Beck & Cowan, 1996, pp. 244-247). It can potentially demonstrate the best of human achievement and is the value sphere most closely associated with benefits to humanity that include the Enlightenment, scientific and technical advancement, and expansion of a middle-class lifestyle for many (Wilber, 2001/2011, p. 10).

However, like all stages of the SD progression, each emerging value sphere has the potential for both beneficence and malignance, or "not only new capacities but the possibility of new disasters" (2001/2011, p. 21). Although memes themselves are neither inherently bad/toxic/unhealthy nor good/healthy, they may become oppressive and malignant (Beck & Cowan, 1996, p. 42). Wilber's discussion of the potential of any developmental meme to manifest as pathological or toxic provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding differing facets of criminality. In his description of "Boomeritis," Wilber (2001/2011, pp. 26-28) argued that the green meme values of egalitarianism, eco-sensitivity, communion, and relativism might present as a malign condition that perverts these values to the oppressive condemnation of other value systems (such as the blue meme conception of cohesion, conformity, rules, and social order, for example). The toxic green meme is one of (ironically) rigid relativism, narcissism (in the popular sense of the word, not the academic or clinical), and the oppression of lower memes (particularly blue and orange).

In the same way, pathological orange may be understood as a perversion of positive values of growth, success, and advancement that exhibit as unethical political affiliations that allow for monopolistic strangleholds (Beck et al., 2018, "Defining the Sustainable Corporation" section, para. 4). Expanding on the idea of pathological memes becoming such when they begin to be oppressive and malignant agents against other waves (as well as humankind in general), one might extrapolate the notions of toxic orange as broad manifestations of abusive power. That power derives from capitalistic, political, legal, academic, or some other form of high-altitude individualistic achievement. Toxic orange is most readily recognizable as corporate malfeasance, monopolistic business practices, and the wielding of undue political

influence (Beck et al., 2018). From a criminological standpoint, the toxic orange meme is aptly descriptive and explanatory for white-collar crimes (Champion, 2011), political mischief, or any interactions between high achieving, individualistic bad actors. The example of Epstein is a clear example of how malignant pathological orange can become. This case demonstrates the external validity of toxic memetics as a valuable tool for explaining and understanding divergent criminal acts beyond the boardroom or legislative halls.

Furthermore, it is a stark example of how pathological waves connect to other memes and result in malignant presentations of those as well. There are multiple examples from Epstein's case that directly align with the conception of a toxic orange, and these values intermingle with major blue institutions, including law enforcement, courts, and (if one considers them blue): major media. This case exemplifies the abusive power and dominance prominent in the red structures, and the fight to protect the "tribe" of co-conspirators as set forth in the purples wave. Thus, the malfeasance included the power/violence/sex and tribal protectionism associated with the red and purple memes and connected them to orange-level toxicity. According to reports, Epstein allegedly fomented and benefited from corruption at high levels of criminal justice system, corporations, financial systems, academics, and mass media (Brown, 2021).

Brown's (2021) reporting of the Epstein chronicle presented compelling evidence of multiple aspects of the indicted sex trafficker's personal and criminal history that exemplified the SD spiral's orange value systems of the SD spiral. Brown (2021) provided compelling support for the allegations against prominent orange figures. These reports implicated successful and powerful individuals in either directly participating in the sexual abuse of under-aged girls or willfully ignoring the activity about which they should have known. Furthermore, the reported general under-reaction of (blue) law enforcement and prosecution authorities (with some noted exceptions) in the interdiction of Epstein's alleged and indicted criminal activities starkly illustrate the great harm inflicted through the collusion of malign orange and blue actors. The Epstein case transcended political parties, professions, states, and nations in an operation that relied on a collaboration of systematic malignance among high-level achievers, from prosecutors to financiers to defense attorney tactics (Brown, 2021). The Epstein case is a real-life example of how the Spiral Dynamics model demonstrates the value of Graves' original work and its progeny as an expansive and useful tool for understanding unusual (and even shocking) acts of criminality and harm. The case also exemplifies the importance of noting the connective strands to lower memes when apprehending the significance of any sustained, organized, systemic evil.

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