



Sidebar B: **The Many Names of the Levels of Consciousness**

Fuentes, in the midst of explaining Who Ate Captain Cook (a dangling signifier, apparently), gave a sidebar on the sidebar. It was about something.

“I will return to that integral model very shortly and make some concluding observations. Right now, a small but fascinating technical aside: ALL of the major developmental models have actually examined a particular *developmental line*. Piaget studied the cognitive line; Kohlberg, the moral line; Loevinger, the line of self-concept development; Graves, the developmental line of values; Maslow, the developmental line of needs; Gilligan, the moral line in females; and so on. Each of those developmental *lines* were shown to unfold in stages or *levels*. Sometimes these levels were given numbers or symbols, sometimes names, sometimes both. Thus, we can speak of moral level 1, moral level 2, and so on; and we can also call those levels ‘preconventional,’ ‘conventional,’ and whatnot. Likewise, we can speak of self level 1, self level 2, etc., and we can also name them ‘impulsive,’ ‘conformist,’ and the like.

“So each of those lines has levels. But what are the levels actually *levels of*? What are they ‘measuring?’ What is the vertical scale that they are actually referring to? Although nobody has spelled this out in great detail, we believe that the levels are simply *levels of consciousness*. There appears to be a great spectrum of consciousness, stretching from subconscious to self-conscious to superconscious, and the various developmental lines appear to be making their ways through the bands (or waves or stages) in this great

spectrum—and this great spectrum, to switch metaphors, is actually just that great River of Life that we were talking about earlier.

“In other words, the levels of consciousness are actually the levels of development in each of the lines of development—and what is being *developed* in each of the lines is the amount of consciousness in those lines. As consciousness (or awareness) increases in a developmental line, it progresses to a higher level/wave/stage in the overall spectrum. Of course, many factors enter into this development—and not just the amount of consciousness—but on balance what the developmental lines are progressing through are the great waves or levels of consciousness in this vast Spectrum or River.

“Now, it would probably be better if we referred to these levels using only numbers and not names, which usually carry a lot of baggage and never really capture the fullness of a phenomena anyway, and simply call them level 1, level 2, level 3, etc. Of course, the actual number of levels is in many ways arbitrary, just as you can divide the temperature scale according to Celsius or Fahrenheit; in the former there are 100 degrees or ‘levels’ between freezing and boiling, in the latter there are 180 ‘levels.’ It’s the same amount of heat in both cases, you can simply divide it however you like.

“So for this simple example, let’s just say that there are 10 levels of consciousness. We would then trace the development of each of the lines through those levels. Thus, a person could be at level 7 in the cognitive line, level 5 in the moral line, level 4 in the emotional, level 1 in the spiritual, and so on. This would probably be the ‘cleanest’ way to depict this level/line development.

“The problem with numbers is, they are fixed. Once you have chosen 10 levels, and everybody starts using 10, real problems emerge when it becomes obvious that there is an important stage between, say, 4 and 5. What do you call it? Stage 4½? What if yet another is discovered? Stage 4¼? Given this difficulty, most researchers opt for names, since you can add names without screwing up a numbering scheme. But names, alas, have many problems, too.

“Now what often ends up happening is that, because the levels of consciousness in general do not have any widely recognized names, researchers *use the names of the levels of one of the developmental lines in order to refer to the general levels themselves*. I and my colleagues have been forced to do this often, and it does cause some confusion. For example, because research consistently indicates that cognitive development is necessary but not sufficient for most other lines of development, we have often used some of the names of the cognitive levels in order to refer to the 10 basic levels of consciousness. Thus, we sometimes refer to the basic levels (waves, structures) of consciousness as sensorimotor, preop, conop, formop, vision logic, and so on. This had led some critics to imagine that we are presenting a predominantly cognitive, or even Piagetian, model—an assumption which, if understandable, is actually miles off the mark (the Piagetian line is one of several dozen that we include, but we can do so only by being very non-Piagetian; see a discussion of this in *Integral Psychology*, which points out that while we often use the cognitive line as an approximation of the levels of consciousness, we do not under any circumstances identify them). Besides, we also frequently refer to the 10 basic levels of consciousness using names taken from the moral line of development: we refer to the overall spectrum of consciousness as preconventional, conventional, postconventional, and post-postconventional, for example. Sometimes we use the Spiral Dynamics names—purple, red, blue, orange, etc.—to refer to these basic levels, even though those names actually refer to the specific developmental line of values. Sometimes we use Aurobindo’s terms (lower mind, higher mind, illumined mind, overmind, supermind, etc.), and sometimes those of Plotinus—well, you get the point.

“But, we maintain, the actual scale, the actual River, through which all those developmental streams are running is simply the river of consciousness, which we, for convenience sake, divide into 5 or 10 or 15 levels (etc.), depending upon circumstances. Although those divisions are arbitrary (e.g., Fahrenheit, Celsius), the real territory they refer to (such as heat... or consciousness) is not arbitrary, just as when we can say that a boat is 7

kilometers down the river, the distance covered is real, even if ‘kilometer’ is an arbitrary length.

“But because consciousness itself is ultimately unqualifiable, no names really work very well for the levels of consciousness. Moreover, you can’t simply measure a level of consciousness, because consciousness is not a line that can be measured, but is rather the scale that is used to measure all the lines. There is no such thing as a level of consciousness: a ‘level of consciousness’ does not exist by itself, because it is always a level *of some line* that is being measured: there is a level of moral development, a level of self development, and so on, but not a separate thing called a level of consciousness that you can see and measure. Consciousness always has some sort of content, and that content—moral, cognitive, spiritual, psychosexual, linguistic, artistic, etc.—is what you see and measure. It is the measuring scale itself that is consciousness, and not anything that is or can be measured.

“So, as I said, sometimes we use simply use arbitrary numbers for the levels of consciousness, and sometimes we use the names taken from one of the lines of development in order to refer to the general levels of development. None of those is satisfactory, and one of the first things we intend to do here at IC is hold a series of conferences that attempt to clear up these very difficult semantic issues. In the meantime, please use a little good will in trying to understand the issues we are trying to communicate here.”