2006 Dabrowski Congress Proceedings
Proceedings Assembled by Bill Tillier

The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development

Positive Maladjustment:
Theoretical, Educational and Therapeutic Perspectives.
August 3-5, 2006
Calgary, Alberta
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Dabrowski Proceedings 2006


Dabrowski used the concept of adjustment in at least three unique ways. First, he expanded the usage and definitions associated with the term adjustment to include four distinct types. These are positive and negative adjustment and positive and negative maladjustment. Second, he linked the definition of adjustment to our individual and group hierarchies of values and aims. Our unique value structures provide the criteria by which adjustment and maladjustment are to be judged. In Dabrowski's approach, this creates a developmental progression of adjustment; negative adjustment to what is, followed by positive maladjustment to what is, culminating in positive adjustment to what ought to be. In this sense, adjustment can be used to illustrate and indicate the relevant level of development, from the indiscriminate and unreflective (negative) adjustment to the patterns prevalent in the social environment, to (positive) adjustment to the consciously selected values of the personality ideal. Likewise, maladjustment also reflects a developmental progression, from the pathological and criminal violation of social standards seen in negative maladjustment, to the height of positive maladjustment seen in the early stages of positive disintegration. Third, Dabrowski perceives positive maladjustment as a uniquely developmental phenomena that is at the same time, a symptom of development, and a driving force of the conflict characterizing early development.

In defining positive maladjustment, Dabrowski described how an individual's embryonic sense of internal values and ideals will usually come into conflict with the external world as it is. As Marlene Rankel emphasized, "if you can watch the evening news and sleep at night, there is something wrong with you." Individuals with strong developmental potential will react to the evening news with internal conflict. As the conflicts with one's social environment become more focused, one begins to consciously examine and reject the attitudes and standards one finds incompatible. The individual’s growing sense of autonomous values and personality ideal becomes the basis for this judgment. These conflicts eventually also spill over into one's internal environment and positive maladjustment to one’s “old” values and habits is a common feature in ongoing development.

Dabrowski felt that positive maladjustment is a vital process in the development of individuals as well as in social and cultural development. He goes so far as to suggest that positive maladjustment characterizes all forms of creative and positive development and therefore is the most important criteria in the first stages of development.

Dabrowski explained that overexcitability creates positive maladjustment. One's “over reaction” to “normal, everyday stimuli” (the evening news) helps create the dynamic aspect of positive maladjustment that loosens and breaks apart one's initial integration. As the dynamism of positive maladjustment grows, so does the process of positive disintegration. As development continues, positive maladjustment becomes a drive to achieve authenticity, a striving for that which ought to be in oneself (personality ideal) as well as in one's social environment (what ought to be). As development advances, the conflicts of positive maladjustment eventually yield to a growing sense of harmony created by positive adjustment to what ought to be, both in the internal and external environments.
Please see PowerPoint file TillierIntroOverviewshort.ppt for the 12 slide version as it was shown at the congress.

Please also see PowerPoint file TillierIntroOverviewlong.ppt for a 33 slide expanded version of the introduction for the proceedings (presented below).

Welcome

The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development
August 3-5, 2006
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Positive Maladjustment:
Theoretical,
Educational and
Therapeutic Perspectives.

Positive Maladjustment

“If you want to be a different fish, you have to jump out of the school”

Captain Beefheart (Don Van Vliet).

Positive Maladjustment – Defined

-POSITIVE MALADJUSTMENT: A conflict with and rejection of those standards and attitudes of one’s social environment which are incompatible with one's growing awareness of a higher scale of values which is developing as an internal imperative. (Dab. 1972, p. 302)

A Conscious Process of Choice

-... – positive maladjustment – expresses a conscious and selective rejection, a lack of adjustment to certain external or internal dynamisms, and an adjustment to the accepted hierarchy of aims, to that which “ought to be” (Dab. 1973, p. 65).

A Vital Part of Positive Disintegration

-We seem to be unable to fully develop and achieve cultural growth without inner conflicts and maladjustment to ourselves and to our surroundings -- none of which are phenomena of an integrative nature. (Dab. 1973, p. 42)
Characterizes Development

- Positive maladjustment characterizes all forms of creative and positive development and characterizes also most of the psychoneurotic dynamisms which we consider to be positive and creative. (Dab. 1970, p. 39)

- If you want to develop yourself truly, you should be able to adjust and also maladjust, to different kind and levels of reality. (Existential Aphorisms, p. 17)

The Most Critical Indicator

- Of all the dynamisms of the first phase of positive disintegration, positive maladjustment is the most important indicator of a potential for accelerated development. (Dab. EDI #12A, p. 8)

The Source of Positive Maladjustment

- What is the source of the phenomenon of positive maladjustment? It arises from psychic hyperexcitability, particularly emotional,imaginational, and intellectual, from the nuclei of the inner psychic milieu, and from the instincts of creativity and self-perfection. (Dab. 1970, p. 39)

Basic for the Development of Mental Health

- In this process of development through multilevel positive disintegration, the human being develops positive maladjustment to “what is” and an adjustment to “what ought to be.” This positive maladjustment is basic for the development of mental health. (Dab. 1970, p. 60)

From “What is” to “What Ought to be”

- The very concept of mental development and of the transition to higher levels involves maladjustment to some elements of reality, of “what is,” and the disposition to adjust to the patterns implied by the new hierarchy of values, that is the adjustment to “what ought to be.” (Dab. 1970, p. 144)

- From this standpoint mental development requires positive maladjustment toward “what is” in the name of “what ought to be.” (Dab. 1973, pp. 14-15)
As a Vital Part of Value Development

- Inner anxiety, inner conflicts, maladjustments, sorrows, and disruptions -- everything that demeans our position in the scale of common values, work toward our passage to a world of higher values. (Existential Aphorisms, p. 7)

As a Dynamism of Development

- The dynamism of positive maladjustment acts through the loosening or breakdown of lower levels of homeostasis to allow its integration at a higher level. It effects a change of values. This change comes about through positive disintegration of values that have become too stiff and too narrow. Before this change, and on a lower level, automatic psychic adaptation of those values was a rule. Now it is not possible any more. (Dab. EDI #12A, p. 8)

As a Drive Toward Authenticity

- Positive maladjustment is the attitude of rejection of the primitive requirements of a social group. It expresses the need for adaption to a higher hierarchy of values, to the ideal, to that which “ought to be”; thus, it expresses the drive toward positive development, self-perfection, and realization of the attitudes of autonomy and authenticity. (Dab. 1973, pp. 66-67)

Positive Maladjustment and Homeostasis

- The conception of multilevelness of reality allows for the distinction of various forms of integration or homeostasis. It may be primitive, determined by biological and social forces or autonomous, achieved in the process of positive disintegration; that is to say, associated with and resulting from nervous and psychoneurotic tension, from inner conflicts and positive maladjustment through which the primitive homeostasis is destroyed. (Dab. 1973, p. 15)

Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration

- The phase of spontaneous multilevel disintegration . . . consists in the hierarchization of values and in the operation of such dynamisms as astonishment with oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself, disquietude with oneself, maladjustment to oneself and to the environment. At this stage of his development, the individual is under constant pressure to “transcend” the rigidity of a unilevel structure and to activate creative dynamisms. (Dab. 1973, p. 44)

Applications of Positive Maladjustment

- Positive maladjustment is one of the clearest and indispensable concepts in the realm of theoretical and practical sciences concerned with mental development -- in particular, developmental and educational psychology, psychopathology, psychology of creativity,
pedagogics, human relations, self-education and autopsychotherapy, and even ethics.  
(Dab. 1973, p. 67)

The Broader Context of Positive Maladjustment in Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration.

Adjustment

- The theory of positive disintegration introduces the concepts of negative adjustment and positive maladjustment next to the contemporary concepts and definitions of conformity, order, adjustment and maladjustment. (Dab. 1973, p. 65)

Dabrowski Defined Four Types of Adjustment.

- NEGATIVE MALADJUSTMENT: What we traditionally think of as anti-social or criminal behaviour
  
  - Rejection of social norms and accepted patterns of behavior because of the controlling power of primitive drives and nondevelopmental or pathologically deformed structures and functions. In the extreme case it takes the form of psychosis, psychopathy, or criminal activity. (Dab. 1972, p. 299)
    (Level I)

- NEGATIVE ADJUSTMENT. Nondevelopmental adjustment. Unqualified conformity to a hierarchy of values prevailing in a person’s social environment. (Dab. 1972, p. 299)
  
  - Nondevelopmental adjustment. Unqualified conformity to a hierarchy of values prevailing in a person’s social environment. The values are accepted without an independent critical evaluation. It is an acceptance of an external system of values without autonomous choice. An adjustment to “what is.” (Dab. 1972, p. 299)
    (Level I)

- POSITIVE MALADJUSTMENT. (Part of the process of positive disintegration)

- POSITIVE ADJUSTMENT, or developmental adjustment. Conformity to higher levels of a hierarchy of values, self-discovered and consciously followed. (Dab. 1972, p. 301)
  
  - It is an acceptance of values after critical examination and an autonomous choice. It is an adjustment to “what ought to be.” Such hierarchy of values is controlled by (or developed from) the personality ideal. (Dab. 1972, p. 301)
    (Level IV-V)
The Criteria of Adjustment

- . . . hierarchies of values constitute the foundations for creating the hierarchy of aims; that is to say, a hierarchy of standards of conduct for development in individuals and in groups. Consequently, they, at the same time, constitute the criteria of adjustment and maladjustment in the developmental sense of the term. (Dab. 1973, p. 66)

The “Crisis” of Adjustment

- Thus, we notice the growing developmental complexity and the “crisis” of the process and of the concept of adjustment. We deal with the differentiation of adjustment to “what is” and adjustment to “what ought to be” which implies maladjustment to “what is.” This is the concept of positive maladjustment. (Dab. 1973, p. xi)

Adjustment as a Multilevel Phenomenon

- We find various kinds and stages of development and adjustment, starting from total, indiscriminate adjustment to all, even the most primitive patterns prevalent in social environment, to a refined psychological need for adjustment to a higher hierarchy of values and one’s ideal of personality. The idea of adjustment has its various forms and content depending on the developmental level of the individual. (Dab. 1973, p. xi)

Maladjustment as a Multilevel Phenomenon

- Dabrowski continues:
  The same is true of maladjustment, starting from pathological, psychopathic, even criminal violation of social standards to those forms of maladjustment which are observable in all mentally developing individuals and imply rejection of and conflict with the primitive levels and increasing harmonization with the higher levels of reality. (Dab. 1973, p. xi)

Negative Adjustment

- . . . means the forms of adjustment (or conformity) which are nondevelopmental; which mainly rely on automatic adjustment; which are dictated by the most urgent, basic, normal or pathological needs without expressing reflexive attitudes and developmental selectiveness; and which are useless for positive development. (Dab. 1973, p. 65)

Negative Adjustment

- Adjustment, in the negative sense, is the nondevelopmental adjustment which is automatic, subservient to primitive drives and aiming at an adaptation to primitive requirements of a social group in order to protect one’s interests. (Dab. 1973, p. 66)
Positive versus Negative Adjustment

[Positive] Adjustment which is a symptom of mental health is, largely speaking, adjustment to what ought to be and not to what is. As no culture is perfect and incapable of further growth, and as development results from lack of adjustment rather than from an all-too-perfect adjustment, the idea of simple, unqualified social [Negative] adjustment as a symptom, or even criterion, of mental health is due to a fundamental error. (Dab. 1970, p. 11)

Summary of Terms:
Dabrowski defined
two types of maladjustment
and two types of adjustment.

Negative Maladjustment – Defined

NEGATIVE MALADJUSTMENT. Rejection of social norms and accepted patterns of behavior because of the controlling power of primitive drives and nondevelopmental or pathologically deformed structures and functions. In the extreme case it takes the form of psychosis, psychopathy, or criminal activity. (Dab. 1972, p. 299)

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Positive Adjustment – Defined

POSITIVE ADJUSTMENT, or developmental adjustment. Conformity to higher levels of a hierarchy of values self-discovered and consciously followed. It is an acceptance of values after critical examination and an autonomous choice. It is an adjustment to “what ought to be”. Such hierarchy of values is controlled by (or developed from) the personality ideal. (Dab. 1972, p. 301)

A Quote to Open the Congress

Adjustment to that which ought to be, and maladjustment to so-called everyday reality. How strongly and with what determination
one has to follow the path of positive maladjustment.

(Existential Thoughts, p. 27)
Marlene Rankel: Keynote Speaker

Biography of Dr. Marlene Rankel

Dr. Rankel is a recently retired psychologist, living in Beaumont, Alberta.

She first met and worked with Dr. Dabrowski at the University of Alberta initially in a research project funded by a three year Canada Council grant in 1968; she has appreciated and valued the authenticity of both the philosopher and his theory.

A participant in his research, a student, and a colleague, Marlene has also attended and presented papers at a number of conferences related to the Theory of Positive Disintegration, the first one in Laval, Quebec in 1970.

Dr. Rankel has, in the past, taught courses in developmental psychology at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton.

Her own work in this field has been primarily with troubled youth – runaway teens, sexual assault victims, and incarcerated adolescent offenders, a “throwaway” population in which positive maladjustment is often the main culprit.

She recently participated in a project entitled Exploring Mental Health Practitioners’ Experiences of Moral Distress, which took place in the John Dosseter Health Ethics Centre at the University of Alberta and was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. A paper referring to the experience of psychologists was published in the July 2005 issue of Ethics & Behavior. It was entitled “To Stay or To Go, To Speak or Stay Silent, To Act or Not to Act: Moral Distress as Experienced by Psychologists.”

Recently Dr. Rankel was invited to write the introduction to an as yet unpublished book by Dr. Dabrowski on Developmental Psychotherapy: Psychotherapy Based on the Theory of Positive Disintegration, a book which he had been reluctant to release and yet regarded as one of his most important contributions to the field of mental health. His reluctance came from his awareness that knowledge of the theory does not guarantee its’ proper application in practice. That ultimately depends on the developmental level of the therapist. Marlene looks forward to the day the book is published and thus available to those who are also interested in the application of Dr Dabrowski’s theory.
Paper 2). Marlene Rankel: Keynote Speaker

The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development 
August 3-5, 2006 
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Title:
We, Whose Task is Wakefulness Itself … Dr. K. Dabrowski – a most positively maladjusted psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and philosopher.

Abstract
“A philosopher – is a human being who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes, and dreams extraordinary things…” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 420).

In this presentation I have shared my perception that, in spite of the unlived years between their lives, the most enlightened psychotherapist Dr. Dabrowski, met the most enlightened philosopher, and they were one. Nietzsche planted the garden, Dr. Dabrowski prepared the menu and, with the assistance of his yet – to be published book On Developmental Psychotherapy, concerned psychotherapists will be able to nurture and help the misunderstood oppressed learn to survive in a world ruled by primitive egos; and, perhaps one day we will have a world in which all significant conflict is with the self.

“We, Whose Task is Wakefulness Itself..."

Marlene D. Rankel, Ph.D.
Dedication

I wish to dedicate this paper to my daughter, Allison Stewart.

The invitation to give this address in honor of Dr. Dabrowski and his Theory of Positive Disintegration came at the most difficult time in my life, as my daughter, after a six-year struggle, succumbed to an incurable lung disorder on April 10, 2005.

In her six years of suffering, Allison’s lungs relentlessly filled with scar tissue, making it increasingly difficult for her to breathe. In spite of the “slow” decline, doctors said she would, “come to an abyss.” No further description was offered.

On March 15, 2005, in a sudden drastic change, she found herself standing at the edge of the abyss. Three weeks later, on April 10th, after an agonizing wait for a lung transplant which wasn’t to be, Allison died.

Ernest Hemingway was once asked to write a six-word story. It read:

“For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

He later said it was the best story he had even written.

“Funeral yesterday: Donor lung expected tomorrow.”

This is Allison's story, and it is the saddest story ever written.

On Allison’s behalf, and on behalf of all those in a similar predicament, I would ask you to sign your organ donor cards, and remind your friends and relatives to do the same. Thank you.

Marlene Rankel
“We, Whose Task is Wakefulness Itself...” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 193)

“The Seveth International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development
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―Dream no little dreams for they have no power to move the soul.‖

Tommy Douglas, the “father of Medicare” for Canadians, did for the physical well-being of the poor and the suffering what Dr. Dabrowski has done for the psychological well-being of the so-called mentally ill. As with Medicare, there has been considerable resistance to this, from both doctors and patients. When considering why, one could turn to Douglas’ famous “Mouseland” speech, a brilliant analogy in which mice, in their elections, alternately elect black cats, then white cats, instead of mice.

Both noble dreamers saw the issue as one of the misuse of power, a common theme in a world in which individuals are “more or less human.”

Douglas, a Depression era preacher, could no longer preach Christian values while the suffering poor were being beaten down by an unresponsive government with no apparent concern for those who could not afford medical care. Somewhat reluctantly, Douglas entered the political arena. During his time in office, he introduced Canada’s first bill of rights, its first government insurance plan, universal health care – as well as its first Medicare system.

Dabrowski, apolitical himself, in his theory of theories, assigned developmental levels to politics as well as to psychology, psychiatry, philosophy and education. As for politicians, he would have placed Tommy Douglas at the fourth level as follows: “In politics based on the differentiation of right from wrong and on the enactment of that which is right, one can detect the action of positive maladjustment, the third factor, subject-object in oneself, awareness, self-control, identification, and empathy.” (1996, p. 154)

What the two giants had in common was a dream, and a goal.

Douglas, in quoting George Bernard Shaw said, “Some look at things as they are and ask, ‘why?’ I look at things as they ought to be and ask ‘why not?’” (Johnson, 2006, p.76)

Dr. Dabrowski looked at human beings and asked the same question, and in turn, asks each of us to do that as well, and to begin by asking it of ourselves.

The rationale for the herd instinct, among animals, is survival, and it includes pushing the weak to the edge of the group, where they become victims to other predators, and, ultimately die.

This has been true for the creature we call humans as well, where herd or group “thinking” results in isolation and extinction of the weak or ill.

Currently, in Canada we are in danger of losing Medicare as we know it. Recently, an article in a Canadian magazine, Maclean’s (Kohler and Righton, 2006), outlined the plight of the physically ill in today’s health system. It is entitled “Overeaters, Smokers and Drinkers, The Doctor Won’t
See You Now.” Increasingly, doctors with a variety of excuses blame, lecture and discharge such individuals, thus denying treatment and disregarding the Hippocratic Oath – “First, do no harm.”

With the current shortage of doctors, and health care funding, it appears to be “each man for himself.”

Addictions such as those named in the title do indeed threaten and shorten life and may be suicidal. What then is the term for failure to treat – is it euthanasia or even worse?

Of great concern is the placement of such individuals on organ transplant lists, patients who can find themselves at the bottom of a list for an infraction of the rules, which are: no smoking or drinking. The violators are caught by random blood and urine tests.

This is nowhere near the anonymity of the herd tendency in animals, for when it comes to medical issues doctors are supposed to be in a category outside “the herd” – they are, in fact, supposed to be the “shepherds.”

What does this say about man’s inhumanity to man? It says, as Dr. Dabrowski would say, “We are all more or less human.”

And in the history of the treatment of man’s psyche, as opposed to his body, the picture is even grimmer. Those who were "mad" were seen as unable to reason as did ordinary man, and the madman’s truth (unreason) was reduced to silence by confinement. Those who did not share the group mentality were isolated, shunned, and locked away. Their “treatment” consisted of methods of torture aimed at cleansing the individual of his “illness.”

This gave way, in the late 18th century, to various categories of mental illness, each subject to its own specific care and treatment. By the 19th century we had Freud, who encouraged the troubled to talk. The 20th century saw the birth of numerous psychological theories, many, if not most, lacking an explicit philosophical basis regarding the author’s understanding of the nature of man.

And this is where Dr. Dabrowski came on the scene – a doctor from his heart and soul, Dr. Dabrowski saw the inhuman tendency to destroy the weak and oppressed in the interests of the herd, and wrote a theory of theories in which he in turn assigned a developmental level to each of the current approaches in psychotherapy. This elaboration revealed the complexity of therapy when, for instance, the patient is at a higher level of human development than is the therapist and his theory, and the unsatisfactory results thereof.

This was not well received by psychologists and psychiatrists with well-entrenched points of view. It was better accepted by the patients themselves and new, young, bright students at universities, who were burdened by “all that nothing” which has accumulated in this field.

One thing was certain – thinking which did not align itself with current notions of mental health was not acceptable, and those who could not, would not adapt to such a philosophy were regarded as sick, even as mentally ill.
And from my point of view, I believe that there are those who identify with Dr. Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration yet do not fully comprehend or realize the actual suffering of the developing individuals of which he speaks. In sharing with you excerpts from a book written by Dr. Dabrowski under a pseudonym, I hope to add to the current understanding. We who share Dr. Dabrowski’s dreams must try to remember that a strong mouse is still a mouse, and not a cat.

Positive maladjustment – negative adjustment – what is Dr. Dabrowski talking about?

Life is about adjustment, is it not? You find yourself in a situation in which you feel awkward, and you adjust, you get on with life. You see things you don’t like – in your community, in your workplace, but it would take so much effort to change the situation that you adjust. You tell yourself, “It’s not my problem”, “What can I do?” “Let someone else deal with it.” Your final solution, “Don’t rock the boat”, “Don’t make waves”, “Just fit in.”

Dr. Dabrowski claims such adjustments are non-developmental, that they reflect the most basic so-called normal human needs, that they are negative adjustments, herd-like in their nature.

On the other hand, adjustment which arises from a reflective and conscious rejection of that which is unpalatable, that which is externally demanded by unreasonable rules or rulers, such an adjustment is regarded as positive maladjustment. Here we find "individuals."

Negative adjustment is unconscious, and positive maladjustment is conscious, reflecting different values, and resulting in different actions. It is the distance between these two positions that Dr. Dabrowski refers to as more or less human.

There is still a third category – personified by Dr. Dabrowski himself – positive adjustment, which consists of the ability to comprehend, care for and even support individuals who are “different,” who, in their resistance offend but do not harm others, who may even be regarded by many as mentally ill. The sincere if socially inept positive maladjustment touches the heart of those in the third category, those who in their capacity to understand the source of the rebellion of these troubled individuals, may be compared to the shepherds who watch out for the black sheep living uneasily at the edge of the herd.

Dr. Dabrowski had this to say, “…there might be a very good reason for accepting the dangerous hypothesis that the world of so-called abnormals is indeed reasonable, and the world of normals is full of absurdity.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 7)

What his schizophrenic patients had to say, “There are those who have love and understanding for us and – to say commonly – tendencies toward identification with us. Those who do not harm and do not laugh at us in their minds; those who are subtle in their attitudes and acts; those who, not only do not kill, but also do not even abuse us. Those who are quiet. They do not emanate red; we do not feel in them blood and aggression. From others, from aggressive people, from normal people, we are separated by a thick wall of misunderstanding, tensions, by the wall of ‘their’ insensitivity and our rigid revolt.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 12-13)

What Dr. Dabrowski had to say:
“One thing is certain: this type of illness is not characterized by cruelty and aggression; one does not feel from these people, in or out of the hospital, any forbidding emanations, stinking of blood, of egoism or of tricks. Contrary to this, these are often presented by the ‘healthy’.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 12)

“The power of reason is often brutal for others; it is a harmful, refined power, a power of tricks. It is very often subordinated to the instinct of domination, the desire to control.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 12)

…and the patients say:

“I hope, I am almost sure that one day we – schizophrenics – will not be thrust away from human life, shoved over to the edge, and perhaps …perhaps we will have a vote in the government of human affairs. Would that be an improvement? Sometimes I think so.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 12)

“We shall be less strange and we shall know more and, perhaps, we shall even know better. We shall probably have very different aims in relation to people – to be good and not harm others. Besides that …we see few people among normals with whom we want to cooperate.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 12)

Dr. Dabrowski had this to say about his patients:

“All those who have a strong nuclei of increased emotional overexcitability, and imaginative excitability; those who have a too educated consciousness; those who have deep insight and are irritable – all those will be inclined to psychic wounds, to psychic fragility, that is to say, to schizophrenia.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 17)

“What could be their defensive forces against schizophrenia? Perhaps special talents, or love for others – love so strong and vital that it would conquer the gloom of imagination and emotionalism.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 17)

“If there is not great talent and love – despair, maladjustment, constant irritability and the temptation of the schizophrenic world are so strong that a ‘morbid’ process is the only help, the only salvation from a reality impossible to accept.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 17-18)

“…they fall into two lives; one madness and the second – a narrow, superficial contact with everyday reality.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 18)

“One cannot become mad if one has a little madness in oneself.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 19)

In the physical realm:

“Immunization consists in the introduction of a small and measured quantity of pathological elements in order to accustom the organism to this illness in a small dose, to protect against illness in ‘a large dose’, even mortal illness.’ (Cienin, 1972, p. 19)
And in the psychological realm:

“…immunology consists of almost ‘transcendental’, almost impossible to understand elements such as the weakening of pain through pain, sadness through sadness, suffering through suffering, pleasure through pleasure, illness through illness.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 19)

Dr. Dabrowski claims that life exposes us to something like “emotional hardening”, the “psychic injection” of unpleasant experiences which immunize one against more serious experiences.

“We can say that in the area of mental illness some ‘minor illnesses’ prevent serious ones, that is to say, immunize against them. It seems to me that neuroses and psychoneuroses are such pathological dynamisms and syndromes that protect against psychoses.” (Cienin, 1972, p. 19)

**Excerpts From: Fragments From the Diary of a Madman**

*Neurosis is increased psychic excitability in emotional, sensual, psychomotor, imaginative or intellectual form. The “injection” of such excitability widens and deepens the ability for a better understanding of reality, and also contains elements of the inner psychic milieu – that is to say – inner psychic transformation. These elements counteract psychic rigidity, allowing the development of the transformation of one’s psychological type and the transformation of man's biological life cycle.*

*The same applies to psychoneuroses. Through tendencies contained in psychoneuroses to anxiety and trembling, tendencies to sadness and depression, obsession and enthusiasm – psychoneurotic individuals are capable of developing empathy, identification, autonomy and authentism, and of reaching new, creative, hierarchical elements even the ideal of personality.*

*Psychoneurotics – through abilities contained in their personalities – understand the sadness of others; through depression they understand the depression and obsession of others; through feelings of inferiority and guilt, dissatisfaction with oneself, disquietude with oneself – they develop the habit of treating themselves as objects and others – as subjects. All of these dynamisms, all these complications allow the understanding of different “strange” realities and various perversions from the simple, “natural” way of life, allow the understanding of abilities and excessive subtleties, maladjustments and discomforts, the joy and failure of others.*

*Observation of many phenomena in oneself, transposition of the feelings of others onto oneself – through the possession of an inner psychic milieu – transposing the sensitivity of others onto oneself and the environment, penetration of oneself and the environment and, as already mentioned, creative talents and inner psychic transformation – create possible defensive forces in external and internal life conflicts in unexpected situations and life failure.*

*This protects against mental illness because certain self contained potentials for mental disturbance are consciously awakened, transformed and transferred. They grow into the psyche, and not only do they not injure it, but allow its creative growth and creative transformations. It is like a great possibility which does not eliminate the pathological dynamisms, but “de-
pathologies” their harmful aspects through positive development and makes them useful for the growth of personality.

So, in consequence, I can say that madness is impossible when one has already “tamed” and transformed certain forms of light madness. They become then, not enemies that we have to destroy, but slaves in the development of human being and perhaps better – friends in this development: they become necessary dynamisms in accelerated, creative development and in the true “humanization” of an individual. (p. 19-20)

**Psychoneurotic and schizophrenic obsessions and compulsions** (p. 23-24)

Authentism is not – necessarily – an expression of primitive sincerity or naturalness; it is not the charm of one’s own attitude, one’s own voice or one’s dancing. These additional qualities could be only marginal elements of authentism.

A true and human authentism exists, therefore, only when a breakdown of man’s structures and functions occurs, when one is upset or disrupted. This disruption is closely connected with the clear awareness of our similarities to the world of animal drives and with the added awareness of the need to become a true human being.

This disruption, this ‘inner crying’ and humiliation are the symptoms of authentism. We move away from rigidity, away from the feeling of dignity, pride and ambition. We begin to experience sadness in spite of and because of ourselves, humiliation in relation to ourselves, the feeling of inferiority toward ourselves: we begin to manifest disquietude within ourselves and the awareness that we are dying to ourselves.

Fear, depression and inner conflicts begin to occur. At the same time there develops irony and poking fun at oneself and the world, an appreciation of the complexity of oneself and others, a desire to eliminate rigidity and clowning, a desire to leave these states, these tensions, all these choking humiliations which are a result of one’s own primitiveness.

I think that the mentally disturbed, and above all psychoneurotics are more authentic than normal people. Because authentism expresses – in some regards – the need to break one’s pseudo-dignity, to break ‘the agreement of snobs’, to break strong adjustments.

One of the symptoms of accelerated development is a strong need to dissociate from one’s own structure, the desire to unite with one’s own higher “I”, a refusal to adjust to lower levels of inner and external reality.

This is attempt at schizophrenic as well as creative, reaching into the unknown, into the world of positive alienation.

**Danger to themselves and to the environment** (p. 26-27)
The content of this title is repeated hundreds of times around the world when psychiatrists issue certificates or in the admitting of a so-called mentally disturbed person to a hospital. It is a fundamental criteria for admittance – that is to say – for being locked in a psychiatric hospital.

In what sense can the mentally ill – let’s say a schizophrenic – be a danger to himself? Of course, ignoring one’s basic needs can cause a cold, pneumonia or pain. And in the same way some cases do commit suicide. Is the last a danger to himself? – it is hard to judge. There arises a question – to which self?

Perhaps it is a danger to the instinct of self-preservation which is weak in the mentally ill, especially in schizophrenics. I do not know if it is dangerous from the point of view of higher existential and possibly transcendental functions. Perhaps, there, they are not dangerous?

I would approach this matter differently. The mentally ill can be a danger to the sense of thrusting their illness to dissolution, to mental handicap, but even this would be only a group of external symptoms but we would not know what is inside, what is present in the inner milieu on the basis of the external symptoms of a sick man.

So, it is hard to talk about the danger of a sick man to the environment. It seems that one psychopath or paranoiac in a top political or military position can destroy, murder, torture and put in concentration camps millions of people. It was so with Hitler and Stalin, it was so – though to a lesser degree – with other dictators, it was so and it is so with leaders of gangs. It is even present in people who have higher social and professional positions and who have gained world-wide renown; but who destroy many people, who lead them to blind alleys, who torture them morally through envy, ambition, discrimination, and bring them to mental illness or suicide.

Psychoneurotics are never a danger to the environment. Schizophrenics are very seldom dangerous and only when special constellations appear. Only psychopaths, paranoics or paranoid-like individuals can be a danger to the environment.

And why is this term ‘danger to the environment’ assigned to so many of the mentally ill, why is this quality assigned to them though they are – in the majority of cases – an example of a lack of danger to others.

Two kinds of mental illness (p. 29-31)

In discussion, in outward attitudes, in movement, in the light and expression of the eyes, in movements of jaws, I see two kinds of healthy and ill people. One kind represents the individuals who are sure of themselves, aggressive, identifying with nobody and with nothing, accepting only their ideas. They are primitive, they do not have inner conflicts and they easily create external conflicts. The second kind represents those individuals who are subtle, sensitive, who do not laugh but rather smile, who do not cry loudly, who are more often sad that cheerful, who mostly give way to others, who are amazed at themselves and at others, who are gentle, sensitive and receptive to wounds.
We, schizophrenics, except for the so-called paranoid schizophrenics, are not aggressive; we retreat, run away and stand off from people and external things. We often ‘petrify’ ourselves, ‘freeze’ to frighten others away from ourselves, to discourage any interest and any tendency to communicate with us.

We are introvertive types, we want to live in the world of phantoms, of hallucinations and of that which only appears to be. We prefer to live in the circle of our schizophrenic worlds rather than in so-called reality. We would rather avoid the external world except for some chosen fragments of it. Simply, we are afraid of it. The worlds of morbid imagination are warmer for us; for we see more coldness in the faces and in the feelings of so-called normal people.

This ‘illness’ develops through nervousness, neurosis and psychoneurosis. In conditions of external and inner conflicts, arise the schizophrenic psychosis about which I am talking.

There is – besides that – a second morbid line, a second type of illness which displays itself by egoism and aggression, which manifests insensitivity, emotional coldness, egocentrism and suspiciousness. It refers to the type of persons mentioned in the first sentences of this chapter.

Where there are no conditions of psychic breakdown and disintegration of the structure – we find such people, this is to say, psychopaths. Such people do not suffer, they are sure of themselves, they do not have any doubts and inner conflicts. They see clearly their aims and interests but they do not see the problems and interests of other people unless they are fully subordinated to them.

Paranoid schizophrenics make a close, though slightly more broken group. They are, in some regards, psychically broken, full of suspicion, aggression, egoism and delusions. These delusions determine their involutive or dissolutive tendencies, the tendencies to psychic loss, the tendency to become a captive of their own suspicions and elusions.

The last, that is to say, the third group is seldom met in psychiatric hospital. This group is as described above. It is not generally recognized by the environment though it is the most dangerous. The basis for improper diagnosis by physicians is the fact that the people are apparently less disintegrated or they are apparently integrated. Both suppositions are wrong.

The forms we meet in hospitals are the least dangerous. People who present these structures have a weak capacity for disguising their behaviors. Their feelings are not as aggressive as their ‘relatives’ – structurally speaking – who are not locked in hospitals and who exert a great influence on social groups, in the destruction and degradations of whole societies, causing crimes and trickery, even moral and physical extermination of whole nations.

How much better it would be to be able to recognize such individuals and to protect society from them than locking in hospitals those who are not dangerous, those who are more useful than the mentioned individuals, and often more useful than many so-called normal people.

Antinomies limiting the schizophrenic (p. 34-35)
Antinomies exist in everyday life, in political contradictions, as well as, in schizophrenic enclosure. Unfortunately, they are limited.

And perhaps the first are bigger limitations, incapacitations; because the second, the schizophrenic antinomies, express clear and very human reaction to inhuman matters; whereas, the limitations or antinomies in everyday life indicate the more shallow reaction of persons experiencing them. They indicate a lack of sufficient human reaction to inhuman matters.

A person close to us is murdered and we forget about it after a few years; even after a few months our regret is less. His wife or her husband, his or her children lessen, after some time, their sensitivity to this inhuman act. Normal, everyday needs and adjustments destroy – it seems – great sensitivity and great injury. The husband prepares to ‘jump’ into a new marriage; the wife thinks about getting married; the children about new, interesting, less obsessive, more varying experiences.

They murdered Kennedy, they murdered Martin Luther King. It does not matter that the first was a great president, and the second – Christian champion of freedom for Negroes. One has to forget, one has to adjust. There will be before-funeral, funeral and after-funeral speeches. There will be talks and calls to resistance, and in the end... in the end, once a year the recollection in the daily newspaper and a few publications – read by a very few people.

Dr. Dabrowski’s lament: (p. 41-42)

“Why are psychopaths not overpowered? Why are they not locked in hospitals?”

“Why from one epoch to another does one put faith in strong, well organized but insensitive people? Why does one believe those who are narrow minded and decisive? And why does one not believe love, tenderness and delicacy? Why do we not enjoy the symptoms of inhibition, uncertainty and retreat?”

“We lean closer to the psychopath than to the psychoneurotics or schizophrenics.”

Psychiatrists conquer psychoneurotics (p. 61-77)

There is undoubtedly progress in the treatment of the mentally ill and psychoneurotics. But this progress is minimal because there are many psychoneurotics and many subtle, creative and highly idealistic persons with mental disturbances who are treated by society – and all the more by psychiatrists – ‘from above’, with a constant feeling of superiority, with constant readiness to treat them as abnormal, as lower, as worse, and less valuable.

This problem is my obsession, so deep that it is at the borderline of psychoneurosis and schizophrenia. This obsession is increased by the fact that we still observe, in relation to psychoneurotics, schizophrenics and other persons with mental disturbances – both progress and setbacks in their understanding, respect and cultural treatment.
Lately in many countries the psychiatric rules have been interesting: re-elaborated, “deepened”, revised and we observe here a very interesting symptom. We find not only political aims, but simple individual aggression, aggression of a psychopathic character – as they are looking for their victims.

Otherwise how can we understand the fact that the powers of psychiatrists are growing and that they can incapacitate psychoneurotics and lock them away only on the basis of a psychiatric certificate?

And once more in this field, there comes a gloomy night of aggression, license, stupidity and the triumph of ignorance toward this area of great creative importance.

The physician of little subtlety, of little knowledge of the human psyche – and such physicians are many – can qualify various states of depression, existential anxieties, increased emotional and imaginative excitability, and creative strangeness as morbid symptoms, dangerous to the individual and the environment. And further more... imprisonment, hospitalization and incapacity.

And further, behavior is categorized according to the all-powerful criteria: “He was treated, he was in the hospital.”

For ages, for thousands of years, the stigma of being dangerous, a source of shame, defective – was attached to psychoneurotics. How could these people, who were full of complexes, inhibitions, maladjustments to reality; full of existential and unexistential anxieties; full of hindrances and shame, and inferiority feeling, stand the pressure of an organized opinion which treated them as lesser, handicapped, as being on the fringe of life?

The facts which gradually penetrated the social consciousness, but which did not capture his consciousness, the facts that among psychoneurotics, and even psychotics were very clever people – increased the dislike and apprehension of them and the actions of self-defense on the part of the so called statistically normal.

The latter lessened, in the only way they could, the value of psychoneurotics in order to elevate their own instincts of self-preservation, to underline their own great value. This attitude lasted for ages, and has not changed much lately. On one hand we have primitive strength and self-certainty, and on the other hand – the softness, indecision, inhibition, anxiety, oversensitivity and suggestibility of psychoneurotics.

And perhaps in these two groups, in these opposite attitudes, there is something of evil and goodness, even metaphysical. But at the present time it is more difficult than in the Middle Ages to identify the first group with goodness, and the second with evil.

Should we not reverse this scheme?
Life begins only with a hierarchy. Only then, when we have developmental nuclei to “rise above”, when slowly we grasp the hierarchy – does humanization begin.

If we “touch” the longing for a hierarchy, we begin to experience inner conflicts, drama, and even, sometimes, tragedy. Only such experiences make from the species man – individual man.

The grasping of these hierarchical values, the grasping of “the spaces above” gives us new forces, new dynamics of experience – the dynamics of astonishment with oneself, disquietude with oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself, the feeling of guilt. Only such conditions allow us the possibility of “rising” and grasping the new reality.

If I am an individual, if I have needs for identification, development and empathy, if I want to be unique, unrepeatable, if I want the same for others – that is to say, I want to see him as separate and unrepeatable – my essence must be emotional.

I desire lasting friendship and unrepeatable, unique feelings; I want to have deep interests. The same talents I now have, in my more or less infantile longing, I want to keep in transcendental life.

Essence is a value which I would not renounce because it determines the meaning of my life. Should I have to choose between existence without it and non-existence, I would choose the second. It is emotional essence which gives the meaning to existence.

So the human being is not a homo sapiens, but homo emotionalis, in, of course, the sense of higher emotions, feelings.

A true smile, friendliness, “truth” is a very rare phenomenon, because the actual attitude displayed by “humans” consists of “sticky smiles” in the service of self-interest. The unexperienced smile of a child or saint is very rare; however, a fake smile, which is visible for one who can read an expression and external attitudes, is an everyday phenomenon. True friendliness is a very rare phenomenon. In human relationships there is something of hate.

There is something in human nature which causes fascination with apparent dangers, which must have an ally, which must attack, which is – as a matter of fact – ruthless and cruel.

In man there is the need to fight, trap, hunt, and roam, and above all – power over others. And one more thing... the need for disapproval, negation and weakening of all true thoughts and custom. It is something of a “democratic” lie to destroy others and something of disloyalty toward that which is true and pure in the filth of this world.

That is why I like psychoneurotics, schizophrenics and pathological worlds. Because, here, there are no lies, no “as if” attitudes. Sadness and tragedy are distinct, joy and friendliness are expressed, revolt is decided; immobility and indifference or dislike – clear; despair – tangible. The morality of the psychiatric hospital – immorality of the sick – is much higher than that of the so-called normal.
I think that we should go into dynamisms of this difference, into the dynamisms and reasons for psychic clearness in the “morbid” worlds in order to transfer some of them into the everyday, supposedly “healthy world.”

**The existentialism of a madman** (p. 77-79)

The impossibility of reaching for a solution or understanding of fundamental matters of the sense of life forces a change in the level of emotional attitude, the levels of reasoning, or wants, of the hierarchy of values and of the hierarchy of reality.

We become satiated, we become so saturated with the reality of one level that we fall into discouragement, into the experience of barrenness, into feeling that the experience on the present level can give us nothing. We force ourselves to a higher level which is perhaps not approachable to all, but which is often as concrete as is everyday reality for some individuals, for some groups of people.

The world of intuitive recognition, the mystical world, the world of dreams – in the systematization and description – becomes “different”, becomes a higher level of reality into which we slowly enter. In this way grows our different perception of external and internal worlds.

And one more point: our recognition stops being perceptive recognition in the previous sense. It also stops being the perception connected with analytic and discursive reasoning. It becomes the recognition through emotional-instinctive-rational connections with some subordination of the last one to the first two. The rational elements which are contained in this recognition becomes – through these connections – less rational and more intuitive.

So, we enter into a different reality which is higher in respect to level; we enter into it during the gradual changing of cognitive or discovery methods.

This entrance into a new reality causes change, some devastating in our attitude toward our former external and internal reality. There appears astonishment and disquietude with the previous reality. We feel humiliated that we were a main part of the reality. We begin to have inferiority feelings with ourselves because of the recognition of multi-level reality and our primitive place in it.

We begin to experience shame and guilt that we were in that reality – toward ourselves and towards others. We begin to feel ashamed of ourselves and of others; we begin to be dissatisfied with ourselves and others, but above all – with ourselves.

We begin to see clearly that which is “lower” and “higher” in us. We begin to see that which “is” and that which “ought to be”. We see analogous things in our inner milieu. We want to separate ourselves from the previous “I” – in the sense of “our true”, more autonomous and authentic “I”.

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We want to handle the influence of the environment on us in the same way. We wish to choose an independent, authentic, closer-to-the-ideal self and turn away from the dependent, primitive and adjusted self.

So, we begin the work of negation in our inner and external environment. We begin to be objective toward ourselves and more subjective toward others; we begin to treat them as subjects with regard for their unrepeatable, developmental and individual selves.

Such an attitude draws us to others, we grasp them in their own variety, in their better or worse aspects; we feel sympathy toward them; we express our help and understanding though we may not agree with some forms of their behavior.

Thus come about certain fundamental changes in our disposing and directing center. We are not directed by different motivations, whims, and caprices or other stimuli deriving from our primitive instincts.

Our numerous disposing and directing centres organize themselves into one, which is closer to the personality, a unity of fundamental psychic, self-conscious, self-chosen and self-education experience. It is like a second psychic birth, a second unity in which we take our development in “our hands”.

We feel that some structures, some qualities, some interests, some emotional relations become matters of indifference to us while others, unique, unrepeatable and exclusive, we could not lose in fear of losing autonomy, authentism, empathy and the meaning of life.

These qualities, these concerns become like essence to us, an essence without which we could not live and the loss of which would destroy the meaning of our existence. Simply our life would have no value for us.

In this way we become determined, independent from our external environment and from our lower inner milieu. We identify with our higher subjective, and perhaps objective, reality. At the same time we feel clearly the rights of others to the same existence and essence, the rights of others to a chosen union with us on the basis of the right of absolute independence, unrepeatability and uniqueness of human beings.

**Our existential anxiety** (p. 84-86)

I am not talking here about existential fear but about existential anxiety. Why?

Anxiety has – among other things – three important differential qualities: 1) it is a less primitive phenomena and is higher in the scale of development; 2) in content it is less concrete, that is to say, more global; 3) and inner elements are dominate over external.

All this indicates that existential anxiety has complicated philosophical colouring and that it expresses the connections between analytic and intuitive thinking and experiencing elements.
What main intellectual-experiencing contents can we find in existential anxiety? The name itself tells us that this anxiety has strict connection and existence. This anxiety is far away from the fear of financial difficulties, of misery, or one’s own death. So, it is not a primitive anxiety. It is also not the anxiety of some types of existence, of normal, or “statistical” life, for example, in the sense of financial difficulties. Anxiety is rather an expression of the protest against this everyday, apparent, non-essential existence. It is an expression of a protest against “apparent” essences.

It is a protest of tragedy. It is a huge and deep self-consciousness of the possibility of autonomy and authentism based on a disposition of man, on “a shout of will” and one’s own destiny and not on sufficient experience and verification. This self-consciousness leads to the highest tensions and inner conflicts, leads to tragedy.

This split between the unconsciousness and needs and longings; this tragedy of uncertainty, this fight between a slave and a man dependent on the unknown – is the content of existential anxiety.

**Nietzsche – The Ultimate “Madman”**

F. Nietzsche was born in 1849, in Germany. At 24 years of age he was described by F. Ritschl, a professor at Leipzig, as a “phenomenon” who was, in spite of his superior talents, pleasant and modest.

Nietzsche’s writings could indeed be classified as phenomenal, as was his life, which consisted of his pouring himself into the future through his writings. He was creative in spite of, and he himself would say, because of his poor health. Fiercely truthful in his writings, he was, in person a gentle man.

His courageous thinking frightened and alienated the academic guardians of the status quo, and he felt and was shunned by his peers. The worst betrayal came from his sister, who distorted his writings in an effort to associate Nietzsche’s super-man with Hitler and the Nazis, a cause he consistently denounced. Nietzsche was in fact, describing the individual who has conquered himself, whose life energy has been spent in the conscious overcoming of the lesser, unconscious self.

Nietzsche’s outpourings of creativity began in 1872, with the Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music, his last in 1889, and ended when he was irreversibly traumatized by the following incident:

Early in January 1889, Nietzsche, when he saw a coachman flog a horse, rushed toward the horse, and collapsed with his arms around it. In the last ten years of his life, he spent a brief period in an asylum, then lived with his mother and sister, during which time he was presumed to be insane.

In his lifetime he embraced the truth of his extremes, and paid the ultimate price.

In support of Nietzsche, and the degree to which he was misunderstood, and derided, his editor and translator, Dr. W. Kaufmann had this to say:
“To write about Nietzsche ‘scholars’ with the lack of inhibition with which they have written about Nietzsche, mixing moralistic denunciations with attempts at psychiatric explanation would be utterly unthinkable. Why? The answer is clearly not that Nietzsche really was an inferior scholar and did eventually become insane. Most Nietzsche ‘scholars’ cannot hold a candle to his learning or originality, and the closer they are to meriting psychological explanations, the worse it would be to offer any.” (2000, p. 445)

Nietzsche himself said, “Madness is rare in individuals – but in groups, parties, nations, and ages it is the rule.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 282)

Nietzsche, with his remarkable mental and emotional intelligence, his “tragic gift”, was recognized early in his life, as a philosopher of the future.

He saw the need for separating philosophical laborers, especially scientific ones, from genuine philosophers. In all fairness, he understood that perhaps the genuine philosopher had himself stood in all the steps – critics, skeptic, poet, and moralist and “free spirit” – on which others had to, perhaps, remain standing. He considered the possibility one had to pass through the entire range of human values and feelings to be able to gain an accurate perspective, and having gained it, discover that wasn’t enough, that he must also create values.

From lived experience, the knowing itself is creating. The will to truth is the will to power. The power is internally, not externally motivated, and it is power over the self.

As such, Nietzsche felt a genuine philosopher, being a man of the future, would find himself the enemy of today, in that he serves as a conscience his fellow man would like to destroy.

So-called philosophers who “think about” experiences without having had the experience do not know, Nietzsche says, how to take a matter seriously, or even understand the difference between a light and a serious issue until they are faced with the latter.

Walter Kaufmann, translator and editor of many of Nietzsche’s works, who devoted his life to a fair hearing for Nietzsche, one still in process today, spoke as follows:

“Without acquiring a bad conscience, without learning to be profoundly dissatisfied with ourselves, we cannot envisage higher norms, a new state of being, self-perfection. Without ascetic ideals, without self-control and cruel self-discipline, we cannot attain the self-mastery which Nietzsche ever praises and admires.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 448)

He cites Nietzsche, thus:

“In a nutshell: when Nietzsche has shown us the dark side of the bad conscience, he says, ‘The bad conscience is an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness as pregnancy is an illness’.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 447)

“The lovely beast, man, seems to lose its good spirits every time it thinks well it becomes
serious.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 176)

“In the great majority, the intellect is a clumsy, gloomy, creaking machine that is difficult to start. They call it ‘taking the matter seriously’ when they work with the machine and want to think well: how onerous they must find ‘thinking well’.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 176)

Nietzsche's view is that those who are “more similar, more ordinary, have had, and always have, an advantage… those more select, subtle, strange and difficult to understand easily remain alone, succumb to accidents, being isolated, and rarely propagate.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 176)

He adds, “One must invoke tremendous counter-forces in order to cross the natural all too natural ‘progressus in simile’ the continual development of man toward the similar, ordinary, average, herd like – common.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 407)

Nietzsche observed, “The more a psychologist – a born and inevitable psychologist and unriddler of souls – applies himself to the more exquisite cases and human beings, the greater becomes the danger that he might suffocate from pity. He needs hardness and cheerfulness more than anyone else. For the corruption, the ruination of the higher men, of the souls of a stranger type, is the rule: it is terrible to have such a rule always before one’s eyes. The manifold torture of the psychologist who has discovered this ruination, who discovers the whole inner hopelessness of the higher man, this eternal ‘too late’ in every sense, first in one case and then almost always through the whole of history – may perhaps lead him one day to turn against his own lot – embittered, and to make an attempt at self-destruction – may lead to his own ‘corruption’.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 407-408)

“In all kinds of injury and loss the lower and coarser soul is better off than the nobler one: the dangers for the latter must be greater; the probability that it will come to grief and perish is actually, in view of the multiplicity of the conditions of its life, tremendous. In a lizard a lost finger is replaced again; not so in a man.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 413)

Nietzsche discusses his ideas re: the origins of our moral prejudices, and how and under what conditions the value judgments of “good” and “evil” were devised. He pursued this question relentlessly and came to the conclusion that what was needed was not an answer, but a new question; what was needed was a critique of moral values, in which the value of these values themselves would first be called into question.

This would require a knowledge of the situations in which the values grew, evolved and changed – a knowledge which he claimed had not existed before, had not even been desired.

Nietzsche felt what was needed was an actual history of morality, which would be in fact, the record of the moral past of mankind.

This project was presented by Nietzsche as deserving the attention of philologists, historians, professional philosophers.

“What light does linguistics, and especially the study of etymology, throw on the history of the
evolution of moral concepts?” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 491)

He felt this task should engage the interests of physiologists and doctors, as well as the three academic professions listed above, the reason being that Nietzsche believed that every “thou shalt” required first a physiological investigation and interpretation as opposed to a psychological one.

His position was, “what is the value of this or that table of values and ‘morals’, when examined by divers perspectives; for the problem ‘value for what?’ cannot be examined too subtly.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 491)

Questions such as the longest possible survival of a race, or a particular climate preservation would “by no means possess the same value if it were a question of producing a stronger type.” He adds, “The well being of the majority and the well-being of the few are opposite view points of value.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 492)

… “All the sciences have from now on to prepare the way for the future task of the philosophers: this task understood as the solution of the problem of value, the determination of the order of rank among values.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 492)

“Nietzsche, in looking at the history of morals, saw a need for someone to collect material, to conceptualize and arrange a vast realm of subtle feelings of value and differences of value which are alive, grow, beget and perish – and perhaps attempt to present vividly some of the more frequent and recurring forms of such living crystallizations – all to prepare a typology of morals.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 287-88)

He viewed all philosophers as working to supply a rational foundation for morality, each believing he had done so. Morality itself was accepted as a given, but what was required was the task of a description of the values and differences of values, what he referred to as a “vast realm of subtle feelings.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 287) A comparison of the differences, he said, required the capacity to discern the many moralities. What, he added, was missing in relation to “morality”, was the suspicion that there was a problem here.

It seems obvious to me that Dr. Dabrowski took up this task in his creation of the Theory of Positive Disintegration. In fact, he devoted his life to it and made it his gift to the future of human kind.

Both Nietzsche and Dr. Dabrowski placed great emphasis on the will. “The will is a creator: All ‘it was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident – until the creative will say to it, ‘But thus I willed it’. Until the creative will says to it, ‘But thus I will it; thus shall I will it’.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 253)

And for Dabrowski, the will is the destroyer of “what is” and the creator of “what ought to be.”

And so this awareness of the will – this tragic gift – destroys the illusions of the possibility of blaming others for one’s situations, the illusion of success as an external measure, the illusion of
lack of choice in any situation, i.e. even the illusion of choosing not to choose is destroyed – the illusion of acts with no consequences – the world “out there” falls away – and one is left with the company of one’s higher self – a most demanding and difficult lodger.

All efforts to gain power over others, and therefore the world, whether through force or manipulative so-called understanding, are fruitless endeavours. One is left standing in front of the mirror of the self, dressed in the most unusual costumes to deceive others – costumes ranging from that of a sheep to a wolf.

The reflection in the mirror says simply – this is my fate, I willed it thus.

What then can be done – is there time to strip off all of the costume, and how does one do it? How does one re-direct the power of the will from the external to the internal world? How does the self examine the self – who am I? Who was I, and who am I meant to be?

That, in the Theory of Positive Disintegration is the question – a question both Nietzsche and Dr. Dabrowski raised and refused to answer. For each of us, the answer lies within, and the theory but a map with seemingly vague destinations – i.e., the inner psychic milieu, the disposing and directing centre, personality ideal – each of which must be attained by one’s own effort. Nietzsche had this to say through his autobiographical Thus Spake Zarathustra, “This is my way; where is yours?” – thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way’ for the way – that does not exist.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 307)

Reflections

Philosophers and religious leaders have, for centuries, raised the question of what it means to be human.

Psychologists and psychiatrists have taken it upon themselves to address this question. Emerging from years of study at various universities, manual in hand, they seldom realize that the framework with which they will now view the world is their unexamined statement regarding what they believe to be the nature of man. Believing they have the answer, they become part of the problem.

Countless hours were spent arguing the “truth” of, i.e. behavioralism versus Freud’s psychoanalyses, and what about the Existentialism, while confused and suffering patients continued to suffer at the hands of their well-meaning “caretakers.”

And then along came Dr. Dabrowski with his theory of Positive Disintegration, and he was not welcome. In his theory of theories, Dr. Dabrowski examined the well being of his fellow therapists. Just as they helped clients through stages of growth, they were themselves, said Dr. Dabrowski, in their choice of psychotherapeutic methods, revealing their own levels of awareness regarding the problem. And what’s more, they defended their positions rather than attempting to think about their thinking, the framework in which they operated.
Like great thinkers before him, Dr. Dabrowski’s ideas have more often than not been rejected. Eventually, they will go without saying, as do all ideas of pure genius.

Like all paradigm shifts, our awareness of our previous perception vanishes, as it does for Piaget’s child who, when he realizes a nickel is worth less than a dime, even though it is bigger, forgets he ever thought otherwise.

Such is the fate of bearers of “bad news” – the recipients still want to slay the messenger.

Dr. Dabrowski, in the books produced in his lifetime, elaborated his main ideas, which were:

1. A need for a revised definition of mental health and mental illness;
2. Changes to the education system so that “difficult” children with “creative” abilities are not viewed as mentally ill;
3. A re-evaluation of the current approaches to developmental psychology;
4. A review of ethics in the study of philosophy such that an awareness exists, e.g. of the “standards” set by individuals at different developmental stages;
5. A re-evaluation of what psychotherapy is and what it ought to be.

To consider the possibility that what Dr. Dabrowski is saying has some merit in it one might first look at psychotherapy and its effect on both therapists and clients. Research has indicated that when it comes to therapy, one-third of the patients get better, one third get worse, and one third show no change. In the end, it appears that the outcome depends on the degree of individuality of the therapist, no matter what theory is used.

What if both client and therapist could be “evaluated” by the same scale, one that determines developmental level? Kohlberg suggests humans are influenced by others one stage above them in terms of understanding and values. Is it not possible that many clients are more developmentally advanced than their therapists, and that this is the problem? It would seem more than fair that a major psychological treatment center assess (with the same measure) the “level” of their therapists as well as their clients. Then, decisions could be made regarding suitability for treatment based on the above measures. Clients could progress and move on to other therapists. The repulsion one may feel when considering this indicates just how valuable this method might be. The threat here is to the therapist, not the client, which is a clear reversal of roles in the helping profession.

And what about the philosophy of ethics? In order to settle disputes arising in current conflict situations, ethicists are invited to participate in and help resolve the disputes. There is a general feeling in this field that ethicists, in many situations, have little effect on the outcome. Is it not quite clear that “ethicists” themselves are reasoning with individualized developmental frameworks which may, or may not, ameliorate the problems?

If the history of our capacity to think, to imagine, and to feel is a retrospective view of mankind’s development to date, then we can and do find, in individual philosophers, the very differences Dr. Dabrowski is talking about.
However, reason, the capacity to reason, if it excludes emotion, leaves mankind with a broken compass. For examples of balanced human development Dr. Dabrowski looks at any and all individuals. Emotional overexcitability, an enhanced capacity for empathy, marks where we, as humans are going, or should be going, if we want a future at all. This capacity supports “fitting the most possible to survive” rather than the unconscious, readily accepted “survival of the fittest” attitude which engenders war and mass destruction world wide, worse in this last century than could even have been imagined.

As difficult as this paper was to begin, and to write, it is even more difficult to end because the ideas of Nietzsche and Dabrowski designate them as philosopher and psychiatrist of tomorrow, each of whom will speak in the future to those who will listen.

All ideas of genius, arising from multi-level and multi-dimensional creativity are, initially, a threat to the status quo, whatever the domain. Such dangerous thinkers, those who are calling for a new question rather than another pointless answer, are generally labeled as very odd, even “insane.”

This is so in all areas, whether it be science, arts or the humanities, and the individuals so labeled are shunned, dismissed, even destroyed in that they do not survive to observe the changes they have brought about with their incredible insights.

What tends to happen is that little by little, the ideas re-appear in semi-concealed milder forms, which are more palatable to academia and therefore the public in general.

Once woven into a new generation, sometimes by choice (bright, new young dangerous thinkers) but most often by mindless absorption of the new but repetitive presentations, these ideas of genius now “go without saying.” What was unthinkable in its initial appearance is adopted as “what is.”

So to use Dr. Dabrowski’s language while the developing individual moves from “what is” to “what ought to be,” society moves from “what ought to be” (which was rejected initially) to “what is,” which is absorbed as – “of course, doesn’t everybody know that?”

What was unthinkable and unspeakable now “goes without saying.” This is not unlike Piaget’s seven year old child who cannot remember when he cried at a birthday party because he thought a tall thin glass of lemonade held more than the short, squat glass that was his.

In Dr. Dabrowski’s delineation of a genealogy of morals, he has responded to Nietzsche’s expressing a need for the explication of not what is moral, but levels of perception of what is moral. Dr. Dabrowski made his contribution with:

1. The elaboration of the multilevelness of emotional and instinctive functions, and
2. The five over excitabilities and their developmental manifestation (or lack of) in the dynamisms.

Dr. Dabrowski, in his theory of theories, sought to bring relief to suffering individuals who are
oppressed psychologically, as well as physically by more primitive types.

He found the latter included in the first or lowest level of his theory – primitive, power hungry, intelligent, but an intelligence serving their own egos – he found such persons not only in prisons, but in business, education, and government – world wide. They violate others with impunity.

At the upper end of the continuum are the individuals at the highest levels of development – self-educated, self-directed, authentic, and responsible. Their conflicts are with themselves.

In between these extremes are the individuals who experience the disintegration of their flat earth worlds and the reintegration of ever more global worlds. The disintegrative periods can be terrifying, feel life threatening but are in fact life-saving. Not all survive, because the primitive majority define the status of the oppressed, especially their own oppressed, and silence them one way or another – i.e. mental hospitals if need be.

This is what Dr. Dabrowski objected to, and why he devoted his life energy to the mid-group, the psychoneurotics who were struggling to free themselves from their oppressors.

Nietzsche himself was regarded as insane when he collapsed after years of writing about just this problem, and urging the reader to understand that conflict with the self is the only acceptable conflict in a world striving for global development.

In one sense, Dr. Dabrowski was the ultimate therapist, and Nietzsche the ultimate “madman.” Both knew that psychopaths are the oppressors and the psychoneurotics the oppressed, and they knew this from lived experience.

Neither Dr. Dabrowski nor Nietzsche wanted disciples, knowing there is no “way” other than one’s own unique, self-disciplined way.

Nietzsche died in 1900; Dabrowski was born in 1902. There is no doubt in my mind that Dr. Dabrowski was influenced by Nietzsche, but given that Dr. Dabrowski had experienced first hand the atrocities of World War II, it would have been unwise of him to speak of this influence. In order to preserve his theory it was necessary to avoid the misunderstanding that had plagued Nietzsche's writings for so many years.

However, papers such as that of Dr. J. G. McGraw's presented at the 100th Dabrowski Anniversary Conference held in Florida in 2002, brought the issue back into the light of day, thus honoring both prodigies for their contribution to the understanding of human nature.

Included in the many excellent presentations in the proceedings from the 100th Anniversary Dabrowski Conference were the following authors, whose works I have quoted because they speak to some of the issues in this paper.

Dr. Joshi Purushottom in his presentation “A Rendezvous with Destiny” says in that brief title what Dr. Dabrowski meant to him in their close companionship. His overall impression was
succinctly stated:

“And here came professor Dabrowski, a personified wisdom…” (p. 14)
“…he was a man with a lamp…” (p. 20)
“(his) insistence on the positive role of pathological symptoms, in an accelerated development of personality, rang like bells in the ears.” (p. 14)

Dr. Purushbottam presentation was an authentic tribute to the effect Dr. Dabrowski had on him. In the years they shared, Dr. Purushbottam saw in Dr. Dabrowski wisdom, courage, originality and perseverance, – for he worked with him at a time when Dr. Dabrowski’s ideas were not yet well-received, as they were a threat to the status quo.

Dr. McGraw, in his conceptual comparison of “Personality in Nietzsche and Dabrowski” captures the universe in twenty-three pages and opens a path whereby the too easily satisfied North American mind can experience, if only vicariously, the incredible journey of Nietzsche, this so often misunderstood developmentally accelerated individual, as he struggles to keep from being buried alive.

Dr. McGraw notes that Nietzsche refers to “those who seek to actualize the personal paradigm which constitutes the ideal of personality as ‘argonauts of the ideal’.” (p. 202)

He goes on to say that these, “adventurers pursue their visions of the ideal self and ideal world, not only despite having ‘suffered shipwreck and damage often enough,’ but precisely because they did undergo such setbacks…” (p. 202)

And

“according to Nietzsche, these visionaries – because they recovered from their reversals – are ‘healthier’ than they have ever been before. Indeed, they are now, Nietzsche says ‘dangerously healthy’.” (p. 202)

“And

“Nietzsche transmutes his lifelong illness into a new kind of existence, one which is both older and wiser, and yet younger and more innocent than his previous state of being.” (p. 203)

Also, I was amazed at the paper submitted by Filip Maj, from Poland (who was unable to attend) entitled: The Creative Instinct of Kazimierz Dabrowski in Relation to the Creative Evolution of Henri Bergson. In his paper Filip Maj reflects on the connections between psychology and philosophy concerning the question of creativity raised by these “two thinkers.”

I am not going to comment further on the paper itself, which in my opinion is a “must read” and full of creative genius.

If you read Filip’s biography, you will see that he was born in 1979, in Poland, and that he was 23 years old when he wrote this paper.

Apart from that, and his scholarly studies, he has interests in the arts, painting, film, music and
dance, has published articles such as “The Poetics of Tears” (1995) is interested in cultural issues, and … I could go on.

For those of you who haven’t yet read Filip’s presentation, I urge you to do so. He is obviously an excellent example of what Dr. Dabrowski describes as accelerated development.

And finally, I want to speak of the presentation of Dr. Tadeus Kobierzycki, on Creativity and Mental Health in the Process of Positive Disintegration.

Dr. Kobierzycki looked at the phenomena of creative depression, inspired as he was by his years of academic and personal interaction with Dr. Dabrowski.

In so doing he makes the distinction between depression as the term is commonly viewed, and creative depression as a lived experience beside which the everyday notion of depression pales.

Creative depression, as experienced by psychoneurotics, is a process by which one lives and dies, not once but many times over. “It is a lasting constellation and unless one immerses oneself in it, no drugs or psychoanalysis or psychotherapy will help. Only a deep, truly depressive decline will permit the artist to see himself anew, without the masks, which are his works.” (p. 402)

Dr. Kobierzycki sums this up with the statement that, “what used to be ‘superior’ is now ‘inferior’.” This “tragic gift” as per Dr. Dabrowski, bends some artists, and breaks others.

At times those who appear broken can be, and are judged as mentally ill, but paradoxically, those who bend and carry on do not break. The depression itself, which threatens to destroy, immunizes against mental illness.

Dr. Kobierzycki says, “Depression assimilates and assembles the tendencies to distort perception. Exceptional gifts do not protect from depression. Their presence transforms depression into a ‘creative humility’” (p. 403).

In his final comments, Dr. Kobierzycki challenges neo-Dabrowskians by questioning the value of American research in which the educational aspects of studies of gifted children are emphasized, as opposed to the clinical. He regards the “portrayal of the personality of gifted children and youth (as) too positive, too reliable on compulsory ‘American optimism’” (p. 404).

With the self-deprecating humor and creative humility available to an individual of his emotional stature, he adds, “maybe ‘Polish pessimism’ is talking through me” (p. 404).

He goes on to say, “Some American authors, although they appreciate these perceptions, do not know what to do with them. The idea of connecting the theory of positive disintegration with A. Maslow’s theory of self-realization seems interesting to me, and useful, but it disguises the dramatic character of creative development” (underlining added). The American reception of the theory of positive disintegration is according to me and the Polish perspective too mitigated” (p. 404).
He concludes with the following, “I believe that what I have presented can be impetus for a debate and new studies concerning the personality of gifted humans, who link their passion to evolve with the passion to create” (p. 405).

What I like most in his presentation is Dr. Kobierzycki’s focus on creative depression as a dynamism misunderstood by many in North America, whom I also believe, tend to over-dramatize the value of artistic creativity in particular, in its positive manifestations, as something delightfully euphoric, lending itself to gifted individuals to add credence to the “superiority” of the intellect.

Parents of North American children, raised as they are in our competitive society, like to hear “numbers,” especially I.Q. numbers, to know for certain where their children stand, and to how many they are “superior.” The only developmental outcome for creative depression is creative humility, and its lack, I believe, is what concerns Dr. Kobierzycki about Americans.

Conclusion

For centuries now, all great thinkers with any emotional depth have observed that we so-called humans are somnambulists – that we are robots or machines who are programmed externally, and unaware that this is so.

Along with others, Nietzsche addressed the sleepwalkers with the reminder that, while mobile, we do not yet know where we are going or what we are doing.

“We, whose task is wakefulness itself” he said, and it rings in the ears of those ready to hear.

Nietzsche has this to say, “We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge – and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves – how could it happen that we should ever find ourselves?” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 451) It has rightly been said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (p. 451)

“Present experience has, I am afraid, always found us ‘absent-minded’: we cannot give our hearts to it – not even our ears. Rather, as one divinely preoccupied and immersed in himself into whose ear the bell has just boomed with all its strength the twelve beats of noon suddenly starts up and asks himself: ‘What really was that that just struck?’ So we sometimes rub our ears afterward and ask, utterly surprised and disconcerted, ‘What really was that which we have just experienced?’ and moreover: ‘Who are we really?’ and afterward as aforesaid, count the twelve trembling bell strokes of our experience, our life, our being – and alas! miscount them. – So we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not comprehend ourselves, we have to misunderstand ourselves, for us the law ‘Each is furthest from himself’ applied to all eternity – we are not ‘men of knowledge’ with respect to ourselves.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 451)

We cannot give our hearts to it – not even our ears.” Nietzsche laments, yet the bell he rang, rang in Dr. Dabrowski’s ears, and the bell Dr. Dabrowski rang, rang in Dr. Joshi Purushbottam’s ears, for he said, “His (Dr. Dabrowski’s) insistence on the positive role of pathological symptoms, in
an accelerated development of personality, rang like bells in the ears.” (p. 14)

And Dr. McGraw, in his conceptual comparison of “Personality in Nietzsche and Dabrowski” rang bells in his orchestral arrangement of the harmony in the minds and hearts of these two great men, in turn awakening others.

And finally, Nietzsche could have been describing Dr. Dabrowski when he made the following statement:

“The genius of the heart… as the born pied-piper of consciences, whose voice knows how to descend into the netherworld of every soul; …the genius of the heart, who silences all that is loved and self-satisfied, teaching it to listen; …the genius of the heart, who teaches the doltish and rash hand to hesitate and reach out more delicately; …the genius of the heart from whose touch everyone walks away richer, not having received grace and surprised, not as blessed and oppressed by alien gods, but richer in himself, newer to himself than before, broken open, blown at and sounded out by a thawing wind, perhaps more unsure, tenderer, more fragile, more broken, but full of hopes that as yet have no name, full of new will and currents, full of new dissatisfaction and undertows…” (Kaufmann, p. 423-23)

John Donne says it most succinctly with his: “Ask not for whom the bell tolls – it tolls for thee.”

Human beings, says Dr. Dabrowski, are more or less human. At this point in time, our intelligence has provided us with numerous distractions, the kind that keep us moving, but not necessarily going anywhere. When life crises – illness, failure, loss – threaten to awaken us, drugs, both legal and illegal, rock us back to sleep. Life as an unlived dream leaves us keeping company with the predators and robots. The struggle to become more human is one in which we fight with ourself, the self we can no longer abide.
An Example of Similarities in the Writings of Nietzsche and Dr. Dabrowski

Nietzsche on Laughter:

“When man neighs with laughter, he surpasses all animals by his vulgarity.” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 442)

“Laughing and smiling – The more joyous and certain his spirit becomes, the more man unlearns loud laughter; instead a more spiritual smile constantly wells up in him…” (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 442)

Dr. Dabrowski on Laughter:

Level 1: “Laughter is primitive, loud, brutal, physiological. It is frequently evoked by watching someone’s misfortune or humiliation.” (1996, p. 55)

Level 4: “Collective laughter disappears; it is replaced by subtle individual laughter and most often by an individual smile which is moral, esthetic, a smile toward the ideal, a smile of mutual understanding in the most subtle things.” (1996, p. 58)
Nietzsche on Philosophy

"Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir: also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant has grown." (Kaufmann, 2000, p. 203)

"In the philosopher ... there is nothing whatever that is impersonal; and above all, his morality bears decided and decisive witness to who he is – that is, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other." (Kauffman, 2000, p. 204)

Dr. Dabrowski on Counselling and Psychotherapy

“At present, our actual level of counselling and psychotherapy is very low. The author feels it is essential that the therapist should have, himself, passed through specific individual experiences to qualify him to assist others.” (1978, p. 183)

“Ideally, the therapist should be at least the same level as the client – though perhaps with complementary strengths.” (1978, p. 183)

“A psychotherapist must always be prepared to temporarily give up his own privileged system in psychotherapy, and his own theories and attitudes, in order to be able to approach his patient according to his particular needs. In this way, the psychotherapist acts according to the maxim: ‘The doctor exists for the patient and not the patient for the doctor.’” (1978, p. 111)
Bibliography


Paper 3). Cecile de Vries and Dawn Johnston, Students, University of Calgary

The Seventh International Congress of the
Institute for Positive Disintegration in
Human Development
August 3-5, 2006
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Title:
Spiritual Development: Spiritual Crisis as Positive Maladjustment

Abstract
Spiritual crises are often confused with other presenting mental health concerns, such as depression and anxiety. In the following presentation, however, the authors will explore how a spiritual crisis can be viewed as a form of positive maladjustment on the journey of spiritual development. This will be discussed in terms of K. Dabrowski's (1964) Theory of Positive Disintegration and St. John of the Cross' (1542-1591) concept of the Dark Night of the Soul. Viewing spiritual crisis and development in light of positive maladjustment will also be compared with other theories of faith development, such as J. Fowler's (1981) Stages of Faith Development, and traditional theories of psychological identity development, such as C. Jung’s (1961) Process of Individuation. Various forms of spiritual giftedness that clients may present will be linked to spiritual crisis and development in terms of positive maladjustment. From a therapeutic perspective, the authors will discuss ideas for recognizing clients who may be presenting with some type of spiritual giftedness and who may find themselves in spiritual crises. The authors will also discuss the counselling implications for both clients and therapists when spiritual crisis and development are viewed in light of positive maladjustment.

Please also see the PowerPoint file for the original presentation.
Running head: SPIRITUAL CRISIS AND DABROWSKI

Spiritual Development:

Spiritual Crisis as Positive Maladjustment

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Spiritual Development: Spiritual Crisis as Positive Maladjustment

Historically, psychology has been largely separated from religion or spirituality in literature, even though the word psychology, when translated from its Greek roots of psyche and logos, literally means “study of the soul” (Elkins, 1995). More recently, however, research has found spirituality and religious practice to be quite impacting on the experience of mental health, in both a protective and contributory way (Armentrout, 2004). In light of this influence on mental health, it would seem then, that a field such as psychology, concerned with issues of mental health, can not ethically disregard spirituality and religion.

Answering this call, some theorists have been concerned with the interaction between spirituality/religion and mental health. It is recognized that there is a growing need for meaning and truth in our lives as society becomes more fragmented and as such there is a renewed interest in spiritual concerns (Bean, 2000). Central to one’s view of the world, religion provides a way in which to practice one’s faith. Religion presents beliefs about the nature of God, life’s purpose, and the possibility of life after death. Such existential issues, as explained by religion, can have a profound impact on psychological health. Exline, Yali and Sanderson (2000) explained that while this impact can be one of a positive connotation, providing a sense of belonging, community, and purpose, the effects can also be devastating if a religion does not allow for the expression of the identity a person feels. For example, they found that depression in students was associated with a religious rift, disagreement with institutionalized religions, and conflicts with family and friends over religious issues.
There has been much discussion and confusion about the differences between religion and spirituality. Zinn (1997) mentioned, "Our appreciation for the breadth and depth of the human spirit is diminished if we think of spirituality only in a religious context. And if we think that the tasks of 'nurturing the spirit' are best left to religious institutions" (p. 27). While we recognize and much appreciate this, for purposes of this paper, the terms spirituality and religion are used interchangeably as the focus is more on the purpose and meaning that each provides, rather than on the ways in which each individually does so. In general, we are referring to Teasdale’s (2001) understanding of spirituality when referring to either spirituality or religion:

“Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality. Spirituality is a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. It is at once a contemplative attitude, a disposition to a life of depth, and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging. The spiritual person is committed to growth as an essential, ongoing life goal. Spirituality draws us in to the depth of our being, where we come face to face with ourselves, our weaknesses, and with ultimate mystery.” (p. 17-18).

In this paper, the authors are also concerned with the interaction between spirituality and mental health by exploring how spiritual crisis can be viewed as a form of positive maladjustment on the journey of spiritual development. First, the authors are discussing how mental health concerns are related to the phenomenon of spiritual crisis and how theorists have been conceiving spiritual crisis, such as St. John of the Cross's (1584/1990) concept of the Dark Night of the Soul. Secondly, in terms of theoretical considerations, the authors are exploring how Dabrowski's (1964) Theory of Positive Disintegration, compared to other models (e.g., Fowler's
(1981) Stages of Faith Development, Jung’s (1961) Process of Individuation, etc.), can be applied to spiritual crisis and development. This spiritual developmental approach is then discussed in terms positive maladjustment. Lastly, in terms of therapeutic considerations, various forms of spiritual giftedness that clients may present on their journeys of spiritual development and counselling implications are viewed in light of positive maladjustment.

**Spiritual Crisis and Development**

**Defining Spiritual Crisis**

The definitions of spiritual crisis are as numerous as the people who have tried to define it. Even though some theorists (e.g., Armentrout, 2004; Miller, 1990; Moore, 2004; etc.) observed that spiritual crises frequently present with symptoms similar to psychological concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety, etc.), Grof and Grof (1986) determined characteristics to distinguish between spiritual crisis and other mental health conditions. One such feature is that the individual has the ability to see the experience as an inner psychological process (i.e., a desire to explore an urge felt from within, the soul feeling the need to respond to an inner calling). Despite the varying components that are thought to be a part of the experience, the authors of the current paper are of the opinion that a commonality is that the individual experiencing the spiritual crisis be the one to define it as such. We agree with Oats (1978) that someone in a spiritual crisis is often trying to make sense of old ways of living that are no longer working for the person.

**Relation to Mental Health**

Over the years, theorists have tried to tease apart that which typically occurs during the course of mental illness, and that which is more specific to spiritual crisis. Jung (as cited in Miller, 1990) suggested that spiritual phenomena, typically classified as pathological, may in fact
be a reflection of the collective unconscious, which throughout history and across cultures has been accepted as both acceptable and normal because it is seen as illustrative of creative forces, and shared by all of humanity. Maslow (as cited in Miller) suggested that the mystical experiences in the process of transcendence, or self-actualization, should not be misinterpreted as mental illness. Both of these writers, along with others, are suggesting that though the symptoms of spiritual crisis might look the same or similar to those of mental illness, the experience and underlying causes are not the same.

Theorists have been trying to understand what happens to/with a person during times of spiritual crises. Ken Wilber (1980) understands spiritual crises in terms of mystical aspects that represent a connection with realities beyond the ordinary senses, and as conditions that can include symptoms of mental illness (as cited in Miller, 2002). He explained that when unconscious forces attack the ego, stress, biochemical factors, or spiritual striving break its usual barriers, and the ego is then invaded by mystical ideas (from the collective unconscious) and regressive impulses (from the personal unconscious). We believe that spiritual strivings (consciously and/or unconsciously) are frequently present, though not a necessity, in what may be referred to as spiritual crises.

*The Dark Night of the Soul*

We however, are of the opinion that the importance of a spiritual crisis is not in finding out what has been happening to/with a client according to various theorists; instead, spiritual crises have significance when clients focus on how they will derive/construct meanings from such experiences as experienced, understood, and interpreted by themselves. One example that we draw from in conceptualizing a spiritual crisis and constructing meaning from it, is demonstrated by St. John of the Cross’ (1584/1990) model of spiritual development. This model
postulates that an experience often perceived much like a depression may be a means of drawing
the believer closer to their spiritual beliefs. This experience often brings the individual to a closer
relationship with their spirituality by initially making him/her feel distant. This then creates the
need for the individual to work toward a more meaningful and personalized spirituality (Coe,
2000). This transitionary period between the initial and then deeper spirituality can feel like a
desiccation of the spirit, and is referred to as the Dark Night of the Soul. The purpose of this may
be to remove the immediately gratifying pleasures of spirituality as it was, and create the need or
desire for a deeper, more meaningful one. This may force the individual to try more actively to
regain the relationship they once had, but they will find this impossible to do as the purpose of
the dark night is to teach them that, “apart from God (read: a sense of spirituality), they can do
nothing” (Coe, p. 301).

Moore (2004) noted that although a dark night is often confused or compared with mental
health concerns, such as depression, such a term is too clinical for an experience that if properly
dealt with, makes one question the very meaning and purpose of life. He further distinguished by
stating that “depression is a psychological sickness, a dark night is a spiritual trial” (p. XIV) and
that, “depression is a mood you end and try to get through, while a dark night is a process in
which your coarse soul is refined and your intelligence deepened” (p. 29). He explained that,
“your dark night is preparing you to be yourself… offering you an alternative to absorption in
your manipulative culture” (p. 20). Therefore, the dark of the soul offers clients with a way of
making sense, conceptualizing, or at the very least providing language for their experiences that
are not mental illnesses, but indeed spiritual crises.

Theoretical Considerations

Fowler’s Ideas on Faith Development
Some theorists have written specifically on faith/spiritual development. For example, Ken Wilber has been constructing a psychological and spiritual growth model, known as the Spectral Model of Consciousness (Tillier, 1998). Another theorist, James Fowler (1981), developed the *Stages of Faith Development*, and defined faith as a basic broad set of assumptions or understandings about the nature of connection with the self and the world in which the self lives. According to this model, faith development is a sequential and linear process whereby progression from stage to stage is roughly equated with a particular time period in life. The resulting faith at each stage is then consistent with the demands of life at each age, up until the sixth and final stage, which is on that not everyone reaches (Bee & Bjorklund, 2004). We, however, have concerns with a progressive model for processes of such an individual nature as that of faith development. It seems somewhat too definitive, as if to be able to take an expert stance and say that one person can accurately judge another’s person’s faith and his/her development of it.

*Jung’s Ideas on Identity Development*

Carl Jung (1961) has been acknowledged as a theorist who has embraced the connection between mental health and spirituality. Jung was of the opinion that the object of psychology is the soul/spirit (Goldbrunner, 1966) and it is the soul/spirit that is responsible for becoming psychological healthy individuals. Jung’s archetypal framework provides theoretical concepts and terms to describe inner processes that are related to human spirituality, as he was of the opinion that, “archetypes mediate all relationships with the depth of the soul” (Goldbrunner, p. 125). Jung explained his understanding of the conscious and unconscious by saying that, “Ideas, purposes, feelings, and aims are only the superficial, visible froth above the autonomous surge and sweep of life” (p. 30). To take a look behind the scenes of the mind and spirit in this way is
brave, even though it may be terrifying; “it is an encounter with the innermost human being, with his (her) ‘shadow,’ as Jung says, from which there is no escape” (p. 30). Thus, according to Jung, such encounters with soul/spirit are necessary for spiritual development.

Goldbrunner (1966) explained that Jung understood the “spiritual process by which personality is built up” as the process of individuation; it is a way of “moving toward one’s totality” (p. 119). The process of individuation includes becoming more conscious of the unconscious, to make the unconscious more visible, to expand, not to eradicate, the ego to the potential that is within. Jung argued that this “way to the centre” is a path that is embarked upon because of (a) spiritual necessity in analysis as occasioned by a neurosis, (b) external events that force humans to the centres of their beings, or (c) the “inner urge to find and obtain the truth” (p.119). According to Jung, individuation is accomplished by discovering, not creating, the Self (referring to the spiritual and psychological self) through a mostly paradoxical process (e.g., to be both active and surrendering) in exploring the darkness the Self is experiencing in order to find the light.

Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not permit for an in depth discussion of theories, such as those of Fowler and Jung above, yet they are important in mentioning as we want to highlight why Dabrowski is our preference. Even though Jung (1961) embraced the interrelatedness between mental health and spirituality, the application of an existing, universal archetypal framework emphasizes the details of the inner workings (i.e., the what) of spiritual crisis and development, instead of focussing on the how through which individual clients can derive meaning. Therefore, Dabrowski’s approach is applied to the conceptualization of a spiritual crisis, or a dark night, since it provides an overall framework for addressing the
phomena of “breaking down” in order to “build up” the emerging spiritual self. Thereby, clients may choose to find the purpose and potential in the pain.

*Dabrowski’s Ideas on Personality Development*

Kazimierz Dabrowski (1964) explained that growth and development are instinctual and that mentally healthy individuals are those who are actively engaged in their personal development. Moore (2004), who embraced St. John’s *Dark Night of the Soul*, also understood development to be a natural process of moving through a dark night and explained, “to keep the unfolding self alive, you have to open yourself to change, every step of the way... Dark nights of the soul seem to seek out this unfolding self and create a mood in which the necessary developments can take place” (p. 35). Dabrowski explained that symptoms of anxiety, psychoneurosis, and some symptoms of psychosis, in fact, may be signs of disintegration, and, therefore, personality development. His *Theory of Positive Disintegration* is unique in its emphasis on the purpose of disintegration, psychoneurosis, and inner conflict in development (Tillier, 1998). Both Moore and Dabrowski embraced such views of development, and saw a period of disintegration or a dark night not only to be present during, but also to be necessary for personality development, which, we argue, includes spiritual development.

*The Theory of Positive Disintegration.* Dabrowski’s (1964) approach to development is explained through his *Theory of Positive Disintegration*, which postulates a tendency for humans to move from lower to higher levels of personal development. This process consists of a period of primary integration, followed by a time of disintegration (i.e., a fragmentation of or dissatisfaction with the existing psychic structures), then, a period of secondary integration at a higher level follows. Dabrowski further explained that disintegration is a “disharmony within the individual and in his (her) adaptation of the external environment ...involution,
psychopathology, and retrogression to a lower level of psychic functioning” (p. xiv). On the other hand, he understood integration to be the evolutionary, improved psychic health, and suitable adaptation, not only within the self, but also within the environment. Thus, when Dabrowski’s theory is applied to spiritual crisis and development, one needs to go through a period of disintegration, which can be a spiritual crisis, followed by the integration of the preferred, renegotiated parts of the spiritual self that is emerging as a way of developing spiritually.

*Link to spiritual crisis and development.* Positive disintegration happens during the course of one’s life by the partial or sometimes global dismantling and loosening of the initial character structure and replacing it by the consciously created personality (Mika, 2002). It is neither a biological maturation process, nor does it follow a time schedule; instead, it is a developmental process along a consistent sequence in a movement from primary to secondary integration as experienced by the individual. Rigid, instinctual egocentrism constitutes the level of primary integration, whereas secondary integration, at the highest level of development, is characterized by conscious altruism based on compassion, empathy, and self-awareness. In particular, Dabrowski et al. (1970) stated that autonomously developed higher emotions appear at transitions from unilevel to multilevel disintegration. Individuals are typically critical about the patterns and standards in their families, social groups, which includes religious organizations or spiritual traditions, and society at large. Consequently, during multilevel disintegration, the attitude of adjustment to standards established in the external environment transforms into adjustment to the needs of the ideal, emerging personality. The developing inner psychic environment works towards a growing authentic and autonomous hierarchy of values that are independent, and usually directly opposite to the values that the social environment respects.
Thereby, the attitudes of adjustment to “what is” transform into those “what ought to be” as chosen by the individual. As a result, new, authentic emotions appear (e.g., altrocentric attitudes, faithfulness and emotional stability, feelings of intimate friendship, courage, responsibility for family and society, and empathy, etc.) and this leads to autonomous actions.

We are of the opinion that movement from lower to higher level emotions and attitudes are often present in a journey of spiritual development as encouraged by many eastern and western faith traditions (e.g., feelings of hate that has been transcended to be feelings of love and compassion). Therefore, we believe that Dabrowski’s (1964) Theory of Positive Disintegration can be applied to clients’ individual paths of spiritual development characterized by a spiritual crisis, or a dark night, as a period of disintegration.

What determines development. According to Dabrowski’s (1964) theory, the development on each level is determined by the predominance of either integration or disintegration that characterizes a hierarchy of levels (Mika, 2002). Dabrowski explained that an individual’s developmental potential determines the level that an individual can reach developmentally and how the individual goes through the process of disintegration and integration. It is often seen during heightened responses to life’s stimuli, or “overexcitability,” and it is typically expressed through developmental dynamisms, such as a genetic predisposition/biological cycle, dissatisfaction with social conformity, or “an active conscience” (Mika). The latter is often displayed through authentic and autonomous processes, such as consciousness, inner conflict, free will, and an individual’s conscious choice to be involved in his or her own development. Dabrowski explained that the presence of this factor is often what makes self-determination, creativity, and advanced development of the personality ideal possible.
In terms of spiritual development, however, we believe that the type or degree of developmental potential will not necessarily determine the process of spiritual development in and of itself. Tolle (2006) explained that an individual may experience an inner urge, knowing, or readiness, that compels the individual to pursue a quest, whether external processes have catalyzed the spiritual crisis or not. Tolle said: “Whenever there is inspiration, which translates as ‘in spirit,’ and enthusiasm, which means ‘in God,’ there is a creative empowerment that goes far beyond what a mere person is capable of” (p. 278). Therefore, the process of spiritual development may be encouraged by a hunger, openness, and readiness to such development, as well as a supernatural force/power that beckons the soul to move on the path of spiritual development.

*Spiritual Crisis and Development as Positive Maladjustment*

Times of crises have the potential to awaken the self to the soul’s purpose and result in meaningful inner growth and development. As mentioned before, some theorists (e.g., Dabrowski, 1964; Moore, 2003; Tolle, 2006; etc.) are of the opinion that crises are vital for any development to occur. Crises are often times in which people become aware of changes that need or are about to occur – changes of letting old mental, emotional, and spiritual structures go, while accepting and constructing new ones.

Individuals may choose to adjust to their emerging inner worlds in ways that are positive and constructive, embracing and instigating development in ways that are more suited to the developing spirit than prior structures that may have been good, but that are not serving their purpose anymore. Tolle (2006) explained:

> When faced with radical crisis, when the old way of being in the world, of interacting with each other and with the realm of nature doesn’t work anymore, when survival is
threatened by seemingly insurmountable problems, an individual life-form or a species-will either die or become extinct or rise above the limitations of its condition through an evolutionary leap. (p. 20)

We concur with Tolle (2006) that during crises individuals may choose how to respond to processes of development. We believe that these may be ways that are positive (i.e., accepting the developing spirit/soul and adjusting to the new inner world) or negative (i.e., not embracing the emerging inner world as to stay in an old skin that does not fit anymore).

The people whom Dabrowski (1964) referred to as following a different life course or individualized developmental pathway, are those who break away from automatic lifestyles as dictated by external social norms (including religious or spiritual traditions). Dabrowski (1972) called this phenomenon developmental or positive adjustment; hence, this is when individuals have discovered for themselves, and are consciously following higher levels of a hierarchy of values. He explained that positively adjusting to crises are times during which dismantling of psychic structures take place, since there is a continual discovery, acceptance, and construction of new patterns that fit emerging structures of the developing spirit. Therefore, this is often occurring during directed multilevel disintegration and secondary integration. Conversely, non-developmental or negative adjustment is observed when individuals do not break away from, and hence conform to externally prescribed paths, such as those dictated by religious or spiritual traditions.

Positive maladjustment, then, occurs during the overall process of positive disintegration. This is when crises challenge individuals’ adjustments to their current internal and external environments and individuals choose to reject (i.e., to maladjust to) attitudes and standards of the external environment that does not fit with their developing higher scale values (Dabrowski,
1972). Consequently, maladjustments may be positive when individuals allow their developmental potential to interact with their crises and presenting psychoneuroses to result in positive, autonomous emotions, attitudes, and lifestyles as internally directed.

Dabrowski et al. (1970) explained that there are turning points that are experienced as both subjective and observably objective when individuals move into a new phase of development. In particular, turning points are mostly seen during transitional times from unilevel to multilevel disintegration (i.e., from previously well-integrated character structures that loosen as a result of usually external circumstances, to a growing sense of “what ought to be” and growing maladjustment to “what is”). It is less often seen from multilevel disintegration to secondary integration. Consequently, Dabrowski et al. explained that turning points lead to changes in attitudes toward the environment and the self, and that positive alienation and a feeling of otherness distinguishing the old from the new selves often result from this. This is often observed in individuals who are actively embracing and are committed to their spirituality. Thus, positive maladjustment takes place that signifies and is necessary for growth and development of the emerging spirit.

Therapeutic Considerations

Forms of Spiritual Giftedness

Piechowski was a student of Dabrowksi’s who through his work with Dabrowski, Anna Marie Roeper (who studied emotional giftedness) and his own studies of transpersonal psychology came to study spiritual giftedness. (Metagifted, 2003). Looking at William James’s, The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902/1936), Piechowski (1986, 1995) noted that James found commonalities in the belief systems of individuals who were spiritually gifted. Such
individuals felt that the visible world is a part of a more spiritual one, from which it draws its significance. There was also a common perception of a harmonious relation with the universe as our truer end, prayer as a means of feeling spiritual energy and connectedness, new zest for life and a peaceful temperament.

Edward Hoffman also did work on spiritual giftedness and in his book, "Visions of Innocence," he asked people to recall spiritual experiences from their childhood (Metagifted, 2003). He noticed categories of experiences that included (a) feelings of oneness with nature, (b) feeling God/eternal Presence in everything, (c) recognizing a pulsating life force, (d) a sense of inner conviction, and (e) a sense of a new self.

Counselling Implications

When the soul is not being heard, the individual is off their life course, and not following the path that the soul intends. The soul longs to be nurtured and loved, and longs for the meaning that life on the soul path offers. For fear of drying up, the soul cries for attention, which results in the exhibition of symptoms that are similar to those of psychopathology (Armentrout, 2004; Coe, 2000; Davis, 2000; Elkins, 1995; Karasu, 1999; Miller, 1990). St. John of the Cross (as cited in Armentrout, 2004) explained,

These souls turn back at such a time if there is no one who understands them; they abandon the road or lose courage; or at least, they are hindered from going further by the great trouble which they take in advancing along the road of meditation and reasoning. Thus they fatigue and overwork their nature, imagining that they are failing through negligence or sin…. (p.306)

Perry (as cited in Miller, 1990) underscored the significance of the word spirit in spiritual crises by noting that spirit, in ancient Hebrew times meant, “air in motion.” He suggested that
people in spiritual crisis might feel the crisis as a strong energy moving through them. If this is the case, Perry postulated that the role of the therapist is then to help the client free this pent up energy as a means to release them from the structures, unhealthy relationships, symptoms, etc. that have held them hostage.

Counsellors joining clients that present with spiritual crises can draw from a few considerations that may assist them with therapy. Firstly, theorists that discuss a division between religion/spirituality and psychology explain that counsellors must appreciate how an awareness of such a perceived division may make clients reluctant to discuss religious/spiritual issues. Therefore, it may be necessary for counsellors to make clients aware of their openness to talk about such issues and ask their clients if religion is an important aspect of their lives. Appropriate referrals may need to be made if the spiritual concerns are beyond the realm of the therapist’s training (Favier, O’Brien, & Ingersoll, 2000).

Secondly, when counselling a client with a wounded soul it is important to assist them in finding ways they can nurture their souls. The process might start by working with the client to recall situations where they were deeply moved or touched and felt soul-full. Helping clients to re-connect with those experiences and plan future ones will encourage them to feed their soul with those events that have proved nourishing in the past (Elkins, 1995).

Thirdly, as unique as each soul is, so too are the ways in which they each experience it and connect with the spirit. Jung identified four personality functions and how each of these has different implications for the devotional life. People who learn by sensation, for example, may enjoy the physical sense of experiencing prayer through what is called “vocal prayer” by Catholics, and appreciate visual symbols, such as crucifixes. This is in contrast to someone who
experiences by thinking. Such a person would have a greater appreciation for logically structured statements of faith (Bunker, 1992).

Fourthly, an understanding of different personality functions is essential in trying to help the client find the soul food that nourishes him or her that further exemplifies the need for the therapy to be client-led. What works for one client, or for the therapists themselves, may not necessarily encompass the same meaning for another. Allowing the client to discuss their interpretations and meanings of their experiences as opposed to supporting them down the path of the school of training to which the counsellor belongs, will end in a far more productive and significant counselling relationship and process for both the client and the counsellor.

How can counsellors support clients in knowing the crisis to be spiritual? Being aware of the different philosophies on the underlying causes of spiritual crises will help the counsellor to support the client in finding spiritual/religious meanings in their experiences. Familiarity with mythological and symbolic themes may also help distinguish between mental illness and spiritual crises. Normalizing the client’s experience and providing examples from the literature will help the client to better cope, and come to terms with what is going on around, and inside of them (Miller, 1990).

One such example of the significance in the application of religious meaning to an experience is seen in guilt. Counsellors are likely to see clients who are suffering from guilt and are either accepting of this guilt, or suppressing it. With no concern for antisocial personality disorder, a client suppressing guilt may be best treated with cognitive behavioural therapy (Miller, 1990). However, a client accepting of guilt implies a different approach entirely. It needs to be determined as to whether the guilt is appropriate or not. Appropriate guilt can be examined within the context of the client’s religious themes and moral code(s) in question, assuming that
these can be discerned and are of relevance to the client. In this case the therapist might work to help the client come to terms with, derive meaning from, and make amends for the breach of their moral code that may have resulted in guilt.

Inappropriate/unhealthy guilt is not as easy to approach. However, if it encompasses religious themes, then it would be useful for the therapist to help the client identify maladaptive schemas and how they may be potentially different than the actual teachings of that client’s religion. Armentrout (1995) suggests that it is the counsellor’s goal to assist the client in the development of an appropriately healthy system of cognition that is accurately reflective of the biblical truth about their world, and their relation in it. Of course the therapist being best able to dispute maladaptive schemas entails being familiar with the client’s religion and teachings (Favier, O’Brien, & Ingersoll, 2000).

The therapist must be open to several therapy techniques that are characteristic of spiritual sensitivity. Moore (2003) argued that intellectual brilliance and technical expertise do not ultimately speak to the soul. Therefore, he suggests that the therapist may tell a story or be dramatic or theatrical, because the soul responds to the poetic (whether language, visual or aural images). Moreover, to be aware of the soul’s images (that of the therapist, as well as the client) will guide the therapy process. Jung (1961) suggested that counsellors need to be aware of basic archetypal concepts, such as mythological and underlying symbols, and employ methods such as symbolic talk. Moore (2003) said images that play a role in a person's conscious and unconscious life may appear in dreams, art, architecture, décor, story, or sound. Therapists must encourage clients and create a receptive atmosphere or employ techniques to allow for such expressions.

Miller (2004) argued that counselors should consider the possibility of the spiritual and paranormal dimensions of life that clients may, since such dimensions are legitimate concerns of
psychosocial rehabilitation. Armentrout (2004) argued that the role of spiritualism is imperative for deciding the course of treatment and etiology of depression. He explained that sensitivity to external and internal situations may produce the motivating heart cry. Therefore, he provided six implications for treatment of depression at its various phases of a client’s journey: (a) Help clients to seek deliverance from the destructive spiral and return to God's (or a spiritual) restorative path, (b) use psycho-educational strategies to understand their condition, (c) develop spiritual activities that increases abilities to relate to God, (d) increase basic sustaining and engagement behaviors, and (e) identify and remediate the causes of depression that resulted in the heart cry.

Conclusion

We discussed how spiritual crisis can be viewed as a form of positive maladjustment on the journey of spiritual development. First, we explored how the concept of spiritual crisis has been conceived, how mental health concerns are related to the phenomenon of spiritual crisis and how St. John of the Cross's (1584/1990) concept of the Dark Night of the Soul is suitable for a spiritual developmental approach. Secondly, in terms of theoretical considerations, we argued that Dabrowski's (1964) Theory of Positive Disintegration, compared to other models (e.g., Fowler's (1981) Stages of Faith Development, Jung's (1961) Process of Individuation, etc.), can be applied to spiritual crisis and development. We argued that this spiritual developmental approach can be conceptualized in terms of positive maladjustment. Lastly, in terms of therapeutic considerations, we have suggested various forms of spiritual giftedness that clients may present on their journeys of spiritual development and provided counselling implications in light of positive maladjustment.
References


Title:
Positive Maladjustment
As a Transition from Chaos to Order

Abstract
First, we use the Chaos Theory to describe the process of Positive Disintegration. The Chaos Theory studies open, complex, and dynamic systems, those that constantly interact with and adjust to their environment, changing, growing, learning and evolving. One of the main concepts of the Chaos theory is attractor, which is the state to which system is drawn by its own nature. The positive disintegration is the process of transition from point attractor (primitive integration) to cycle attractor (unilevel transformation) and then to chaotic attractor (spontaneous transformation) and to order with increasing complexity. A driving force for this development is the movement from simplicity toward complexity. Mental structure is maximizing its complexity and therefore its stability by pushing forward to higher levels.

Next, we will concentrate on the spontaneous multilevel disintegration described by the chaotic attractor. The spontaneous multilevel disintegration corresponds to adolescence. As an individual makes transition from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independence, the changes in behavior are dramatic. As soon as person feels that some modes of thinking, feeling and acting are higher, conflicts of a vertical nature arise. Emotional, unconscious and slightly conscious forces dominate the spontaneous multilevel disintegration. We analyse in details positive maladjustment as a conscious and selective process of rejection and lack of adjustment to lower levels of reality and the need to adaptation to higher hierarchy of values.

We show that the process of spontaneous multilevel disintegration corresponds to dramatic changes in brain of adolescent. During adolescence, brain organization and function enter a unique period of change. The emotional behavior of adolescent is due to increased reliance on the instinctual part of brain (amygdala) while the area for rational thought, the frontal lobes develops. We postulate the positive maladjustment appears when the brain activity of teenagers seems to shift from amygdala to frontal lobes and emotions become more conscious and selective.

Please also see the PowerPoint presentation included here as a pdf file.
Positive Maladjustment as a Transition from Chaos to Order

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Part I
1. Introduction to Chaos Theory
   - Negative and Positive Feedback
   - Bifurcation
   - Attractors
2. Theory of Positive Disintegration
3. Positive Disintegration as a Transition from Simplicity to Complexity.

Part II
1. Emotions / Dynamisms
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5. Developmental Dynamism of Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration
   - Creation of the Self
   - The Self - conscious Emotions
   - Positive Maladjustment

Part I

1. Introduction to Chaos Theory (Gleick, 1988, Briggs & Peat, 1989)

Chaos Theory studies open, complex, and dynamic systems, those that constantly interact with and adjust to their environment, changing, growing, learning, and evolving. They exhibit an extreme sensitivity to their initial conditions. The very slight difference in their starting points made a very large difference in their fates. Such systems are highly sensitive because they are always on the move, always changing, never precisely recycling to their initial states. One reason that the elements in chaotic dynamical systems are so sensitive to their initial conditions is that these complex systems are subject to feedback. Systems that change radically through their feedback are said by scientists to be nonlinear. In some conditions nonlinear systems behave in a regular, cyclical way until something sets them off - a critical point is passed, and suddenly they go chaotic. This critical point where system changes character of the motion is called the bifurcation point. The complex structures of chaotic motion are attractors. Attractor is a state to which system is drawn by its own nature. Examples of such systems are everywhere around and inside of us. They are our bodies, our brains, our consciousness, our psyche, our creativity, our lives, our organizations, our schools, our families, nature, weather, and many more.

Negative and Positive Feedback
In chaotic system, everything is connected, through **negative** and **positive feedback**, to everything else. 

*Negative feedback* is the type that keeps things in check and responsible for stability of system. Processes characterized by *positive feedback*, where more leads to more and less to less, are important in accounting for escalating patterns of system change. Sometimes positive feedback pushes system to explode or spiral out of control. 

These feedback mechanisms can explain why systems gain or preserve a given form and how this form can be transformed over time. 

Feedback is the instrument of new life. One of the most important discoveries of chaos theory has been that positive feedback can cause complex, even chaotic behavior concealed inside orderly systems to unfold, and that negative feedback can grow inside an otherwise chaotic system, suddenly organizing it and making it stable. The theory of chaos and complexity encourage us to understand how change unfolds through circular patterns of interactions.

**Bifurcation**

A bifurcation is a place or point of branching or forking into qualitatively new types of behavior. It is usually a sudden change, rather than a slow and gradual evolution. In other way bifurcations are the sensitive decision points. Far away from bifurcation a system can be well behaved, but as a bifurcation is approached, the system’s trajectory becomes random and unpredictable ( system presents large fluctuations). Such system "hesitates" among various possible direction of evolution. Even little fluctuation in subsystems combine through positive feedback loops, becoming strong enough to shatter any pre-existing organization. At this point, the disorganized system either disintegrates into chaos, or leaps to a new higher level of order of organization. Through this means, order arise spontaneously from disorder through self-organization.

When we consider ourselves as complex systems, bifurcation can be viewed as special events along the flow of our life during which choices can be made to influence future possibilities.

![Bifurcation Diagram](image-url)
The psychological bifurcations are the rapid transformations of sensory, perceptual, cognitive, and affective experiences that may radically alter our lifestyle. They appear in process of learning, motivational states, in brain activity, in developmental stages and their associated increasing complexity, in personality and family organization. There are many examples:

1. "Aha" or insight experiences when rapid perceptual or cognitive restructuring takes place in the context of working on a difficult problem.
2. Moments when we experience overwhelming emotional transformations (we fall in love).
3. Times when "of body" information rises to attention (we feel hungry).

**Attractors**

Attractors are useful for characterizing the behavior of a system; the same system can be characterized with different types of attractors at different times in its development. There are several kinds of attractors.

Assume that a pendulum is the simple system. When pushed, the pendulum swings back and forth until friction on the system brings it to stop. When plotted on the phase space, the trajectory of the pendulum looks like a spiral. The point at the center of the spiral locates the trajectory of the system at zero displacement and zero velocity. State of this system is characterized by point attractor. The point attractor is the most predictable, the simplest way to bring order out of chaos.

We can compare it to a fixation on one desire. Point attractor is single-minded attractor, black-white, good-bad, and hate-love.

For human life dynamics - the attractor of death is a point attractor. As far as life dynamics of each individual are dissipative, they "shrink" with time, gradually (or suddenly) stop to be connected with any other attractors of life activity and fall into the fixed - point attractor (Dimitrov, 2004)

Taking our simple pendulum and giving it a timed electrical kick would cancel out the dissipative effects of friction on the system. For this reason, the trajectory in phase space would not longer be spiral, but rather, it would be a circle. The pendulum’s trajectory is described as a cycle attractor.

Characteristic of the cycle attractor is the ability to resist change. Both the point and the cycle attractors describe systems that are highly regular, and thus, predictable.

Routine is a good example for the cycle attractor, when we attract to two activities, and we oscillate between them (work and family).

Three - dimensional attractor is torus attractor. It is complex cycling which moves forward and so is different while it repeats itself. The torus attractor is a higher degree of regularity and complexity than the cycle attractor, but pattern is fixed and finite.

An example of torus attractor at work be more complex set of attracting events which occur to a person on many levels over a course of a year, and repeat again, year in and year out.

**The strange or chaotic attractor** describes systems that are in a state of turbulence, such as a violent river or brain activity. The chaotic attractors can take an infinite number of different forms. Their patterns are fantastic, complex maps that capture the interplay between stability and change in system. Essentially, a chaotic attractor is a process that unfolds through the complex interactions between elements in a system. It is through a pattern of folding and stretching that the structure of the chaotic attractor emerges.
Chotic attractors are the foundation for hidden order in natural systems.

![Attractors](image)

**Fig. 2. Attractors: Point attractor, Cycle attractor, Torus attractor, and Chaotic attractor.**

### 2. Theory of Positive Disintegration

"positive disintegration is the basis for development thrust upward, the creation of new evolutionary dynamics, and the movement of the personality to a higher level..."
(K. Dabrowski, 1973)

Human existence is possible only through intensive and accelerated mental development. This development must be multidimensional and multilevel. Multidimensional development includes all basic of mental life, especially innate drives, emotions, intellect, imagination, aesthetic, etc. Multilevel development consists not only in quantitative growth and replacement of some elements with others, but acquires new insights and new qualities, which progress human to a self-controlled, creative and authentic structure.

The theory of positive disintegration is the mental development, which is described by the process of transition from lower to higher levels of mental life with a great deal of tension, inner conflict and struggle, anxiety and despair. The process of positive disintegration includes five clearly distinguishable levels:

1. Primary integration
2. Unilevel Disintegration
3. Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration
4. Organized Multilevel Disintegration
5. Secondary Integration

**Primary integration** is characterized by mental structures and functions of a low level. They are automatic and impulsive, determined by primitive, innate drives. Intelligence neither controls nor transforms basic drives. Individuals on this level are not capable of having internal conflicts, although they often have conflicts with their external environment. They are not able to understand the meaning of time. They cannot postpone immediate gratification, and follow long-range plans but are limited to the reality of immediate, passing feelings. Disintegration of this
primitive structure is possible only if there are nuclei of psychoneurotic traits, or sensitivity, which are acted upon by very strong positive influence of highly developed environment. **Unilevel disintegration** begins with loosening of the rigid structure of primary integration. Among the first symptoms of disintegration are increased sensitivity to internal stimuli, vague feelings of disquietude, ambivalences, and disharmony. There is a continuous fluctuation of "pros" and "cons", no clear direction "up" and "down."

Next developmental stage is **spontaneous multilevel disintegration**. This is time of the appearance of such developmental dynamisms as

- astonishment with oneself,
- disquietude with oneself,
- dissatisfaction with oneself,
- feeling of inferiority toward oneself,
- feeling of shame and guilt,
- positive maladjustment.

The individual searches not only for novelty, but for something higher. He/she searches for examples and models in his external environment and himself/herself. He starts to feel the difference between a higher and a lower level. We can notice the formation of the critical awareness of oneself and other people, awareness of one's "essence" as it arises from one's existence.

These dynamisms are acting as positive feedback that cause the system to change, to be more complex, more open and more sensitive to internal and external stimuli.

**Organized multilevel disintegration** which is the next stage, exhibits more tranquility, systematization and conscious transformation of oneself.

The developmental dynamisms that distinctly appear at this stage are: "subject-object" in oneself, the third factor, self-awareness and self-control, identification and empathy, education of oneself and autopsychotherapy. The ideal of personality takes more distinct contours.

These dynamisms are negative feedback that grows inside of chaotic system - mental structure, organizing it and making more stable.

The last stage called **secondary integration** consists in a new organization and harmonization of personality. The main dynamisms active at this stage are: responsibility for oneself, responsibility for others, autonomy, and authenticity.

**4. Positive Disintegration as a Transition from Simplicity to Complexity**

Mental structure is a complex, nonlinear, dynamic, open system, constantly interacting with internal and external environment. It goes through bifurcation points of instabilities and fluctuations (emotions) transforming into new stages of increased complexity. They act as attractors, characterized by a different steady-state behavior.

The lower levels of mental structure are organized more rigidly and operate more automatically than the higher levels.

First stage of positive disintegration - **primitive integration** can be described by point attractor, which is characterized by rigid, automatic and impulsive behavior.

Next stage - **unilevel disintegration** is a limit cycle attractor, characterized by continuous fluctuations of "pros" and "cons." Third stage - **spontaneous multilevel disintegration** can be described by chaotic attractor. Through this stage mental structure started to be more "open" to
inner and external environment. Fluctuations of functions and mental tension associated with the search for a new hierarchy of values cause an acceleration of the process of shaping personality. Next stage - the organized disintegration is characterized by openness to external experiences, sensitivity and identification with others. Mental structure transforms itself into a new structure of increased complexity. Personality grows toward integration of its ideal. We can say that new order started to emerge with higher complexity. Last stage - secondary integration is a new organization and harmonization of personality, characterized by autonomy and authenticity. The process of Positive Disintegration can be expressed as a transformation from point attractor to cycle attractor, and then to strange attractor and to emerging order and order with increasing complexity. A driving force for this development is the movement from simplicity toward complexity. Mental structure is maximizing its complexity and therefore its stability by pushing forward to higher levels. Attractors of mental structure emerge in interaction with the internal and external environment.

Part II

1. Emotions / Dynamisms

There is a wide range of ideas about how to define emotional processes. In developmental psychology, emotions both are regulated and perform regulatory functions. We can say that emotions are everywhere in the process of mind. Kenneth Dodge state that "all information processing is emotional, in that emotion is the energy that drives, organize, amplifies, attenuates cognitive activity and in turn is the experiences and expression of this activity."

Daniel Siegel sees emotions as the flow of energy, or states of arousal and activation, through the brain and other parts of body. This process emerges from and directly affects the further processing of information within the mind of the appraisal meaning. Emotions can be thought as processes that integrates distinct entities into a functional whole (Siegel, D. 2004).

Emotions are dynamic processes of change. This why Dabrowski called these processes developmental dynamisms. Developmental dynamisms are instinctual-emotional-cognitive forces fuelling and shaping emotional developmental. They can interact either synergistically or antagonistically.

Dynamisms fall into two categories:
1. Dynamisms which are characterized by spontaneity and lack of definite organization (positive feedback).
2. Dynamisms which reshape, assimilate and organize the process of positive disintegration (negative feedback).

2. Adolescence Brain Development

The process of spontaneous multilevel disintegration corresponds to dramatic changes in brain of adolescent.

Our analysis is based on the latest discovery of neuroscience. Neuroscience - the study of brain development has made great progress due to the sophistication of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) that safely provides detailed pictures of the living, and growing brain.
Adolescence (10-20 years of age) is the transition from childhood, a period during which an individual acquires the skills necessary to survive on his/her own away from their parents. MRI studies show that during adolescence, the brain is in dynamic state. It has the enormous plasticity, or capacity for change. On MRI scans, these changes can be seen as a thickness of the gray matter - cell bodies and dendrites - in the cortex. The level of gray matter in the frontal lobes does not stabilize until well into the third decade of life. The frontal lobe thickness peaks around age 12. This is purely quantitative value and does not reflect efficiency of information flow between neurons (Fig. 3). J. Giedd - neuroscientist from the National Institute of Mental Health thinks that the exuberant growth during the pre-puberty years gives brain enormous potential.

Next stage of brain development, even more interesting, is the process of "pruning" - a cutting back of inefficient or ineffective connections to achieve maximal efficiency of function. Certain connections are strengthened and others eliminated - in essence, brain functions are sculpted to reveal and allow increasing maturity in thought and action. Giedd said that in this critical period of brain development the rule for brain structures appears to be "use it or lose it." Those cells and connections that are used will survive and flourish. Those cells and connections that are not used will wither and die. The teenage years are a kind of critical time to optimize the brain. Parallel to the process of pruning, MRI studies show a steady increase in white matter - myelination in the frontal and parietal cortices. As a result, the transmission speed of neural information in the frontal cortex steadily increases throughout adolescence.

Using fMRI, investigators at Harvard University showed teens and adults pictures of faces expressing different emotions (Baird et al. 1999). When trying to identify the emotions expressed by the faces, the teens activated their amygdala - part of limbic system (Fig. 4). By contrast, adults activated the frontal lobes when performing the same task. This investigation suggests that the adults and teens processed the same information using different parts of their brains (Fig. 5).
Fig. 4 Location of amygdala in brain
(The amygdala is a brain structure that is essential for decoding emotions, and in particular stimuli that are threatening to the organism.)

Fig. 5. Activation of frontal lobes by adult, Activation of amygdala by adolescent

The increased activity of the amygdala in teens may be because the frontal lobes have not matured. As teens grow older, their brain activity tends to shift to the frontal lobe, leading to more reasoned perceptions and improve performance.

3. The Low and High Roads to Amygdala

The cognitive processes that underline the ability to inhibit inappropriate behavior are evolving and are not fully mature in early adolescence. Behavior of young teens can be described by low-road (short route) processing (Fig. 6).

The external stimuli reaches the amygdala by way of direct pathways from thalamus. This path is short and fast transmission but unfiltered and biased toward evoking responses. This processing leaves the individual in a state of intense emotions, impulse reactions, rigid and repetitive responses, and lacking in self-reflection.
If neural connection to cortex responsible for the complex cognitive processing are not physiologically mature, the young teen brain may struggle when it is necessary to control impulsive behavior or inhibit inappropriate behavior.

During adolescence neural connections to cortex started to build up and during adulthood more often the information about external stimuli goes from thalamus to the cortex and to the amygdala. This is the high (long) road processing, which allows for mindfulness, flexibility in our responses, and an integrating sense of self-awareness. This form of processing involves the higher, rational, and reflective thoughts. This supports our ability to reflect on possibilities and consider our choices and its consequences. (Siegel, D. 2004), (Le Doux, 1996).

4. Prefrontal Cortex

The prefrontal cortex is the anterior part of the frontal lobes of brain, lying in front of the motor and premotor areas (Fig. 7). It undergoes far more changes during adolescence that any other stage of life and is also the last part of the brain to develop. The prefrontal cortex contains the lateral, orbitofrontal and medial prefrontal areas which create complex interconnected network. This brain region has been implicated in planning complex cognitive behaviors, personality expressions and moderating correct social behavior. The medial cortex serves as an interface between cognitive and emotional systems. The orbitofrontal cortex is associated with emotional and social processing. The lateral prefrontal cortex is involved in the executive aspects of working memory.
5. Developmental Dynamisms of Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration

I come back to spontaneous multilevel disintegration and its developmental dynamisms. I divided them into three groups: 
I. dynamisms responsible for creation of the Self,  
II. Self-conscious emotions and  
III. Positive Maladjustment.

Creation of the Self

I. Dynamisms responsible for creation of the Self  
- astonishment with oneself - the authentic observation of oneself, and the beginning of the desire to change (an intellectual dynamism)  
- disquietude with oneself - growing attitude of self-criticism with emotional tension and "readiness" toward inner psychic transformation (emotional-cognitive dynamism)  
- dissatisfaction with oneself - an active, critical, condemning attitude toward oneself by states of anxiety and depression  
- feeling of inferiority toward oneself - the awareness of the possibility of development

These dynamisms act as a positive feedback to change and self-organize the state of mental structure to the new state of the Self of higher complexity. This is the result of new neural interconnections and the information encoded by these connections. Functional - imaging studies suggest the medial prefrontal cortex and its connection to amygdala is integral to coordinating cognitive representation of state of the Self (Fig. 8) (Decety & Sommerville, 2003).
As the medial prefrontal cortex matures, a stimulus that might earlier have initiated an automatic behavioral routine (circular attractor) comes to be treated with more reasoned and deliberated response.

![Connections of amygdala with the medial prefrontal cortex - Creation of the Self](image)

Fig. 8 Connections of amygdala with the medial prefrontal cortex - Creation of the Self

Fragment of diary written by sixteen years old girl:

"I just finish reading "Contemporary Youth" by Jaworczkowa. Great book. But it makes me depressed I learnt from this book about my peers, that they are so intelligent, so open minded, so full of energy and ideas. I don't know if she exaggerated, idealized these young people, or I am so stupid. I don't know how to formulate clearly my thoughts or may be I don't have my own thoughts. My great desire is to able to express myself and deepen my knowledge. I don't know what is going with me, I know that it is not good. I am afraid even to ask librarian for book. I think that I start to stutter..."

(Troszkiewicz, 1966)

She is in state of observation of herself - astonishment with herself, growing attitude of self-criticism with emotional tension - disquietude with oneself, desire to change, and sensitivity to the reaction of the external world.

**Self-conscious emotions**

Self-conscious emotions include embarrassment, shame, guilt, and pride (Beer et al. 2003) They require sophisticated level of intellectual development: self-reflection, self-evaluation, and a sense of self as well as a set of standards.
Self-conscious emotions are important for helping individuals recognize and correct their social mistakes, strengthen social bonds, renew commitment to relationship, and motivate positive behavior.

Social-conscious emotions provide internal feedback about a specific goal, expectation, or standard that has been violated.

Violations of social conventions may result in embarrassment. Violations of character ideals are associated with shame. Violations of rules, related to harm, justice, and rights are related to guilt (Keltner & Buswell, 1997).

Based on imaging techniques, it was found that the orbitofrontal region of the frontal lobes, located behind and above the eye orbits is involved in the regulation of social behavior, in critical human functions, such as social adjustment and control mood, drive and responsibility. The orbitofrontal cortex is richly connected to areas associated with emotional and social processing, including amygdala (Fig.9) (Adolphs, R. 2003).

![Image](image.png)

**Fig.9.** Connections of amygdala with the orbitofrontal cortex and medial cortex - Creation of Self-conscious emotions

Fragment from diary of seventeen years old girl

"Tears are expression of variety of feelings; enjoyment, sadness, anger, delight, nervousness, doubt in ourselves and fight with ourselves.

From yesterday, I experience the fight with myself. I can't get along with my brother. I know that he is not bad, but he is stubborn like me, and very hot tempered... Above all I think about my mom, who knows how much bitterness and nervousness is creating by one stupid quarrel. After each fight I find out how it is low and inhuman. I don't wish anybody to experience these horrible moments."

(Troszkiewicz, 1966)
She expresses the critical and condemning attitude toward oneself - dissatisfaction with oneself and feeling of shame and guilt in relation to her mom and herself.

**Positive Maladjustment**

Positive maladjustment is a conscious and selective rejection, a need for adaptation to higher hierarchy of value, and a lack of adjustment to certain external or internal dynamisms. It expresses the drive toward accelerated development, self-perfection, and realization of the attitude of autonomy and authenticity.

The dynamism of positive maladjustment is connected with the understanding of others and their needs (Dabrowski, 1973).

I speculate that positive maladjustment appears when the lateral prefrontal cortex (the last part to mature) matures and connects with the medial and orbital prefrontal cortex and through them with amygdala.

Positive maladjustment requires a strong knowledge of the Self, developed social emotions, ability to compare oneself with others, ability for judgment, ability for making decisions, and sensitivity to feedback.

[Fig. 10 Conscious Emotional Experience. Amygdala connections with working memory circuits.]

Joseph LeDoux (2002)- Neuroscientist explains that conscious experiences of an emotion are made up of a number of ingredients. Although the classic working memory, the lateral prefrontal cortex does not have direct connections with the amygdala, two other regions implicated in working memory do. These are the medial prefrontal cortex and the orbital prefrontal cortex.

Working memory is indirectly influenced by outputs of the amygdala to brain stem arousal systems that release modulatory monoamines in all areas of the prefrontal cortex and by feedback from body responses initiated by amygdala activity (Fig. 10).

**Fragment from diary of seventeen years old girl**

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"I think that I am bad. I am trying to change myself, to be more feminine. I want to be more serious, more thoughtful and have more time for my parents. I love them so much. When I write it I almost cry...
I promise here that:
I will read more, not only prose but also poetry
I will help to mom and be good for dad
I will not argue with my brother, and feeling of anger I will control..."
(Troszkiewicz, 1966)

She expresses the drive toward positive development and self-perfection. She has the need to higher hierarchy of values, to the ideal, to that which "ought to be." She starts to feel something with others, understand them and want to help them. These are characteristics of developmental dynamism of positive maladjustment.

**Conclusion**

The process of spontaneous multilevel disintegration corresponds to dramatic changes in brain of adolescent. Young teenagers have well-developed emotional systems but the cognitive systems are still developing. When emotions acting as positive feedback are stronger than cognitive systems acting as negative feedback that the mental structure is in the state of chaotic attractor. What seems to emerge during the adolescent transition is a newly, more balanced integrated systems of cognitive activity, a system that is increasingly under conscious control. Creation of the Self, social regulation, planning for the future, maturity of judgment, decision making, the ability to integrate cognition and emotion are important skills that rely on numerous interconnecting cognitive components that emerge as the brain develops during adolescence. A wide variety of studies suggest that the maturation of the prefrontal cortex is a bifurcation for developing these skills. I can speculate that dynamism - positive maladjustment started to appear when the lateral prefrontal cortex interconnects with the orbital and medial prefrontal cortex and through them with the emotional system. Using language of Chaos Theory, I can say that positive maladjustment pushes the individual's mental structure from chaotic attractor characterized by spontaneity, non-linearity and unpredictability to more organized, adaptive state of self-awareness and self-control.

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The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development
August 3-5, 2006
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Title:
The Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect: Social Comparison Processes and Positive Maladjustment.

Abstract
Although there are multiple theories of gifted individuals’ self-concept development (Mendaglio & Pyryt, 2003), recent attention has focused on the role of social comparison processes (Dai, 2004; Marsh & Craven, 2001; Marsh & Hau, 2003, 2004; Plucker, Robinson, Greenspon, Feldhusen, McCoach, & Subotnik, 2004). Marsh and Hau (2003) examined the cross-cultural generalizability of the big-fish-little pond effect (BFLPE) in a monumental study of 103,558 15-year olds from 26 countries. The mean regression coefficient for school-average achievement was -.20 indicating that students’ academic self-concepts were negatively affected by attending academically selective schools. The mean regression coefficient for individual student achievement was .38 indicating that an individual’s level of achievement positively affects the individual’s self-concept.

This session will discuss the BFLPE in the context of Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration. As gifted individuals enter more competitive environments, they move from being big-fishes-in-little-ponds to smaller-fishes-in-bigger-ponds. This transformation can be a catalyst for disintegration. Whether the disintegration is positive or negative depends on the individual’s interpretation of the experience and the support systems available. This session will explore the role of developmental potential, overexcitabilities, and dynamisms in understanding the BFLPE.

Please also see the PowerPoint file for the original presentation.
The Big-Fish-Little-Pond-Effect: Social Comparison Processes and Positive Maladjustment

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Introduction

In psychology, interest in self-concept can be traced to the writings of William James (1890). Self-concept has been viewed as an integral of the self-system (Epstein, 1973; Harter, 1993; James, 1890; Mönks & Ferguson, 1983) and a precursor to eminent achievement (Feldhusen, 1986; Foster, 1983). Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) delineated self-concept in terms of the organization of many facets such as academic self-concept, social self-concept, and physical self-concept. These facets or dimensions are viewed as hierarchical in nature. General self-concept is at the apex of the hierarchy. Situation-specific self-concept is at the base of the hierarchy. While general self-concept is hypothesized to be relatively stable, situation-specific self-concept is hypothesized to vary across time and situation. The facets of self-concept are viewed as differentiating over the lifespan, and as having both description and evaluative elements. Much empirical support (Byrne, 1984; Marsh, 1990a, 1990b, Marsh, Bryne & Shavelson, 1988; Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982) exists for this conception of self-concept.

Although there are multiple theories of gifted individuals’ self-concept development (Mendaglio & Pyryt, 2003), recent attention has focused on the role of social comparison processes (Dai, 2004; Marsh & Craven, 2001; Marsh & Hau, 2003, 2004; Plucker, Robinson, Greenspon, Feldhusen, McCoach, & Subotnik, 2004). Festinger’s (1954) theory of social comparison hypothesized the existence of a drive in human beings to evaluate their opinions and abilities. For Festinger, social comparison was accomplished by using similar others, and its goal was attainment of accurate information on these attributes. The greater the similarity between self and others, the greater the accuracy of the information gleaned about us in the comparison process. The original theory of social comparison generated a great deal of research that has refined and delineated Festinger’s seminal work. Other motivations such as self-enhancement, self-protection, and self-validation (Wood & Lockwood, 1999), and self-improvement (Wood & Taylor, 1991) have been identified. These other motives for social comparison are achieved by comparing ourselves with dissimilar others. Some have referred to this as a downward or upward comparison. If self-enhancement is the goal, Wills’ (1981) notion of downward social comparison, that is, comparison of ourselves to people less fortunate (dissimilar others) is needed. If improvement is the goal, upward comparison, comparing ourselves with others who are better off (Wood & Taylor, 1991) is preferable. In addition to such refinements, some have viewed comparison processes in a developmental perspective (Suls and Mullen (1982). This approach suggests that self-concept develops in relation to our observed comparison with peers on comparison measures. If we see ourselves as performing better at academic tasks (by making better grades), then we see ourselves as smart. To understand an individual’s self-concept from the social comparison perspective, it is essential to
understand the individual's reference or comparison group. A gifted student in a heterogeneous classroom environment might develop an inflated academic self-concept by comparing oneself with less able peers. A gifted student in a homogeneous classroom environment might develop a depressed academic self-concept by comparing oneself to equally able peers. In the first scenario, the student becomes a "big fish in a little pond". In the second scenario, the student becomes a "little fish in a big pond". Marsh, Chessor, Craven, and Roche (1995) have found that gifted programs may negatively impact the academic self-concepts of students in them. Marsh and Hau (2003) examined the cross-cultural generalizability of the big-fish-little pond effect (BFLPE) in a monumental study of 103,558 15-year olds from 26 countries. The mean regression coefficient for school-average achievement was -.20 indicating that students’ academic self-concepts were negatively affected by attending academically selective schools. The impact of school average achievement was lowest in Korea (-.02) and highest in Italy (.36). The mean regression coefficient for individual student achievement was .38 indicating that an individual’s level of achievement positively affects the individual’s self-concept. Individual achievement had the greatest impact on academic self-concept in Hungary (.63) and the least impact in Belgium (.14). In the United States, the regression coefficients for individual student achievement and school average achievement were .45 and -.26 respectively.

**Methodological Perspectives.**

Sophisticated regression techniques such as multilevel modeling used by Marsh and Hau (2003) provide the opportunity to simultaneously study the impact of individual and school-related variables on the academic self-concept. In Marsh & Hau’s (2003) study there were five predictors (individual student achievement, individual student achievement squared, school average achievement, the interaction between individual student achievement, and school average achievement, and the interaction between student achievement squared and school average achievement). Results are reported for the three “main effects.” As in all multiple regression techniques, the estimates of beta weights are dependent upon the particular variable set used in the analysis. It’s unfortunate that a correlation matrix showing the relationships among all predictors and the dependent variable was not provided. The inclusion of the quadratic term (individual achievement term had a minimal effect on overall prediction of academic self-concept but probably lowered the regression weight for individual student achievement. Similarly, the inclusion of interaction terms probably also lessened the observed impact of individual student achievement. Although Marsh highlights the negative impact of school average achievement, it accounted for 4% of the variance in academic self-concept scores (.20²). Individual student achievement accounted for 14% of the variance in academic self-concept scores (.38²). The PISA dataset that was used in the current study likely had other variables of relevance such as SES. It would have been helpful to have a clearer rationale for variable selection.

Meta-analytic techniques (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993) permit the examination of effects of educational placements on the self-concepts of gifted students in terms of quantifiable outcomes known as effect sizes. The power of this technique for synthesizing research in an area is impacted by the small dataset of placement studies and
the variability in sampling, instrumentation, and time of assessment. I used the effect sizes reported in Hoge & Renzulli to estimate the impact of gifted programming on academic self-concept. The average effect size for 20 comparisons in 7 studies was .02, indicating a trivial effect. In pretest/posttest designs the average effect size was .03 for 7 comparisons in 3 studies, once again indicating a trivial effect. Marsh & Hau’s (2003) findings are consistent with an overall conclusion of a minimal effect.

Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the stability of self-concept over time and experiences. Evidence (Olszewski-Kubilius, Kulieke, & Willis, 1987) suggests that gifted students’ self-concepts change positively during the course of an academic program. In the current study, we have no information about the overall levels of self-concept and the extent to which they actually changed based on schooling experiences. All we know is that 103,558 15-year olds were studied from 3,849 high schools in 26 countries. We don’t know if students in Grade 10 are being placed in more selective or less selective settings on average.

Although quantitative methods promote discovery of general principles, such methods can only predict modal patterns. Qualitative methods are needed to assess the gifted individuals’ experience of educational placements such as academically selective schools.

In addition to social comparison processes, Mendaglio and Pyryt (2003) recognize the role of reflected appraisals and attribution in impacting self-concept. Marsh (1986) provides a unique perspective on self-concept with his internal/external frame of reference model. Marsh and Hau (2003) seem to be putting all of their eggs in the self-concept in the social comparison basket. Future research should focus on the variety of inputs that can impact an individual’s academic self-concept. There is an intuitive appeal to the Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect, particularly upon entrance into university and work environments. Mendaglio and Pyryt (2003) also discuss self-concept from a Dabrowskian perspective. From this viewpoint, self-concept is a function of level of development. The following section highlights the Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect in the context of Dabrowskian theory.

**Dabrowskian Perspective**

Dabrowski’s views on adjustment and maladjustment are another example of how his theory of positive disintegration (TPD) reframes common psychological terminology. Regardless of the specific definitions used, in the field of psychology adjustment is generally depicted as positive; maladjustment is depicted as negative. When individuals are deemed maladjusted, the goal of helping professionals (psychologists, counselors, and educators) is to help them adjust to the situations that may be perceived as causing the maladjustment. Adjustment, conforming to societal norms or being within the normal range of attitudes and behaviours, is perceived as a desirable state. In contrast, Dabrowski proposed a counterintuitive view of adjustment, namely, that adjustment is not necessarily a desirable state nor is maladjustment necessarily an undesirable state (Dabrowski 1970; 1972; 1973). In fact, under certain conditions, adjustment indicates a lack of growth while maladjustment indicates growth. As with other Dabrowskian concepts, whether adjustment or maladjustment is growthful or not depends on the level of developmental potential with which one is endowed.

Dabrowski (1972) proposed four distinct forms of adjustment and maladjustment: negative adjustment, positive adjustment; negative maladjustment and positive
maladjustment. Whether individuals engage in the developmental forms of adjustment or maladjustment depends on fundamentally the level of developmental potential and the presence of such factors as a hierarchy of values and self-awareness. Negative maladjustment is analogous to the typical use of adjustment. Individuals who are negatively adjusted conform to socially-prescribed values without examination. Dabrowski (1972) termed this type nondevelopmental and defined it as: “Unqualified conformity to a hierarchy of values prevailing in a person’s social environment. The values are accepted without an independent critical evaluation. It is an acceptance of an external system of values without autonomous choice. An adjustment to ‘what is’ (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 299).” In this form of adjustment, two indicators of growth are absent. The individual is aware of a hierarchy of values but it is society’s hierarchy that the individual conforms to, and not the product of the individual’s self-analysis and soul searching. Further, there is no evidence of inner conflict sparked by the individual’s experiencing of a discrepancy between what the world ought to be and the way it is. The individual experiences “what is” and adapts to that perception. Negative adjustment is associated with lack of development and low developmental potential. In contrast, Positive adjustment is associated with the higher levels of development and Dabrowski defines positive adjustment as: “Conformity to higher levels of a hierarchy of values self-discovered and consciously followed. It is an acceptance of values after critical examination and an autonomous choice. It is an adjustment to “what ought to be”. Such hierarchy of values is controlled by (or developed from) the personality ideal (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 301).” Individuals who are positively adjusted do not blindly conform to values pre-established by others. A personally developed hierarchy of values guides one’s behaviour. In essence, the positively adjusted individual is enacting her or his personality ideal, the highest developmental dynamism.

Negative maladjustment is reserved by Dabrowski to describe the state of individuals who reject societal values to satisfy their own primitive drives or egocentric needs. Dabrowski defines negative maladjustment as: “Rejection of social norms and accepted patterns of behavior because of the controlling power of primitive drives and nondevelopmental or pathologically deformed structures and functions. In the extreme case it takes the form of psychosis, psychopathy, or criminal activity (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 299).” Negatively maladjusted individuals are controlled by their drives and needs, rather than by their will or values. This may be the product of organic damage or the individuals’ inability to transcend their animal nature, which is ultimately associated with low levels of developmental potential and/or lack of supportive social environments. In contrast there are positively maladjusted individuals. Dabrowski defined positive maladjustment as: “A conflict with and rejection of those standards and attitudes of one's social environment which are incompatible with one's growing awareness of a higher scale of values which is developing as an internal imperative (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 302).” The positively maladjusted person experiences conflict in the course of the development of her or his own hierarchy of values.

In the discussion of adjustment maladjustment, it seems that for Dabrowski, positive adjustment is the most developmental while negative maladjustment is the least developmental. Positive adjustment is an enactment of the personality ideal by which the individual conforms to his or her own hierarchy of values in day to day living. Negative maladjustment reflects a gratification of drives and needs which influences individual’s
daily living. Positive adjustment and positive maladjustment are premised on developmental potential and the experiencing of inner conflict. Initially the conflict may be sparked by an individual’s responses to external events, later, more likely by the individual’s own reflections. In the process, an individual creates a hierarchy of values and begins to live by them. The other forms of adjustment, negative adjustment and negative maladjustment are not developmental because they reflect unconscious conformity to society and primitive instincts respectively.

**Application to BFLPE**

Moving from a regular classroom environment to gifted education program may elicit BFLPE in gifted students. When this occurs, it is likely that negative emotions such as disappointment and frustration may be experienced by gifted students. Whereas in their regular classroom experiences, they may have received praise for their extraordinary knowledge and skills when compared to non gifted students in the class, transitioning to a gifted education program includes being only one of many students who are characterized by extraordinary potential and achievement. This state of affairs may lead to, among other things, a lessening of self-esteem.

From a TPD perspective the BFLPE represents an externally-created crisis for gifted students who experience it. Whether this conflict is developmental or not will be influenced by the gifted students’ developmental potential. Developmental potential includes overexcitabilities (OEs), special talents and abilities and the third factor. With respect to the OEs, the strength of the big three—imaginational, intellectual and emotional—needs to overshadow the other two—psychomotor and sensual.

Gifted students with low levels of developmental potential may experience negative adjustment or negative maladjustment. The negatively adjusted students would with little or no questioning begin to learn the values and expectations of the new program manifested by adults and students in the new setting and begin the process of conforming to the norms in the new environment. The negatively maladjusted would become aware of the expectations and norms of the new setting but would not comply. Their attitudes and behaviours would sooner or later be seen as running counter to school norms and conflict would arise. Such students would likely become academic underachievers and behavior problem children. Their motivation for the nonconformity would lie in the need to gratify their ego needs, rather than principles or values. Specifically, the nonconformity may be used to rationalize their inability to exert the effort required in a gifted education program or the loss of peer attention or adult reinforcement.

Gifted students with higher developmental potential may experience positive maladjustment or elements of positive adjustment. Similar to the negatively maladjusted students, these students would experience conflict with the new school environment, however, the reason for the conflict would be significantly different. The positively maladjusted students would experience conflict because they perceive school norms or expectations that run counter to their own evolving hierarchy of values. Nonconformity based on one’s values may lead to negative outcomes such as being perceived as noncompliant, but the nonconformity is principled. Such students are able to articulate their issues with school policies or expectations in such a way that addresses the issues and not as a way to rationalize their own situation.
students, their self-generated hierarchy of values would guide them through the change of setting. Although it would be highly unlikely to associate the accomplishment of the personality ideal with individuals of this age, it is possible that they have created a set of values that guides their behaviors in a school environment. For these students, academic achievement is not likely the primary goal, being true to their beliefs is.

References


The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development
August 3-5, 2006
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Title:

Abstract
Dabrowski was heavily influenced by several prominent philosophers and by two traditions of philosophy, Essentialism and Existentialism. The former approach was formulated by Plato and the first presentation in this series outlined the major influence Plato had on Dabrowski’s thoughts. Existentialism was developed by several authors, the two most influential to Dabrowski were Soren Kierkegaard, the topic of my second presentation, and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, the topic of the current paper.

This presentation will introduce Nietzsche and discuss some of his fundamental ideas. It will be very clear that Nietzsche had many ideas in common with Dabrowski including their fundamental approach to personality, to the necessity of disintegration in development, and to the existence of exemplars who display extraordinary nervous energy and sensitivity. Nietzsche’s own life reflected a developmental pathway fraught with many disintegrations and his writing reflects his own struggle with the “dragon.” While Nietzsche’s writing often incorporated metaphors and analogies and was not systematically developed into a unified cogent theory, there is no escaping the fundamentally Dabrowskian approach that he espoused.

Please see PowerPoint file TillierNietzscheshort.ppt for the 39 slide version as it was shown at the congress.

Please also see PowerPoint file TillierNietzscheelong.ppt for a 53 slide expanded version of the presentation for the proceedings (given below).
The Philosophical Foundations of Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration

Part 3: Friedrich Nietzsche and Dabrowski.

Presented by Bill Tillier at the Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development
August 3-5, 2006, Calgary, Alberta.
Positive Maladjustment: Theoretical, Educational and Therapeutic Perspectives.

Series Review

- The first presentation in this series outlined the major and many influences of Plato’s basic ideas on Dabrowski’s thinking (2000).
- The second presentation in this series dealt with the major influence that Kierkegaard had on Dabrowski (2002). Dabrowski was also influenced by several other existential thinkers, including Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Jaspers, Henri Bergson and Miguel de Unamuno.
- This third presentation examines the influence of Nietzsche and follows up on a presentation by Dr. J. G. McGraw on Nietzsche and Dabrowski from the 2002 Congress, held in Fort Lauderdale.

Dabrowski and philosophy

- Dabrowski was influenced by two major philosophical approaches: essentialism and existentialism:
  - The individual has certain innate essences (Plato).
  - The individual has a degree of individual freedom that he or she must exercise to become an authentic individual.
- Dabrowski combined both approaches in what he called the “existentio-essentialist compound”* but he felt that ultimately, essentialism was more important than existentialism:
  - “Essence is more important than existence for the birth of a truly human being.”
  - “There is no true human existence without genuine essence.” (Existential thoughts and aphorisms, page 11).
* (see Dynamics of Concepts).

Existentialism – 1

- Synopsis: The individual must realize the necessity of choice in actively making their life, this creates anxiety and conflict, features inherent in human experience that cannot be eliminated.
- Existentialism emphasizes existence over essence:
Sartre: “What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself.” (Existentialism, 1947)

Existentialism is not a unified philosophical approach. There are many diverse sources and approaches:


Existentialism – 2

- Division in existentialism between theists and atheists:
  - Man is alone on earth, but with God in Heaven to act as our ultimate judge: (Kierkegaard and Jaspers, Dabrowski).
  - Man is alone on earth – there is no God: (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus).
  - Both approaches emphasize individual choice: in the atheistic, we alone choose, there is no God to judge us.

- There is no timeless or absolute truth or reality and therefore life is largely meaningless. We create what truth or meaning (values) we have, as we participate in the experience of life: “life is what you make it.”

- Seeking refuge in social norms or religion is generally seen to stymie self development and autonomy.

Friedrich Nietzsche – 1

- Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900):
  - Born in 1844 in Röcken, Saxony, in what was then Prussia.
  - An excellent student, he began studying classical philology at the University of Bonn.
  - At 24, made professor of philology at the University of Basel.
  - Served as a medical orderly during the Franco-Prussian War. He saw and experienced the traumatic effects of battle.
  - In 1879, he resigned his teaching position due to several grim health issues that plagued him the rest of his life.
  - Began a prolific period of writing but often struggled, printing copies of his books himself and giving them to friends.
  - He and his sister, Elizabeth, had frequent conflicts and reconciliations.

Friedrich Nietzsche – 2

- Friends with and influenced by Paul Réé, also a German philosopher:
  - Réé combined a pessimistic view of human nature with a theory of morality based on natural selection (Darwin).
  - Nietzsche also befriends the intellectual and free spirited, Lou Andreas-Salomé.
  - Lou lived with both men in an asexual (?) friendship until Nietzsche’s unrequited love (and his sister) forced a break.
Lou marries Andreas (their unconsummated marriage lasting 43 years): 14 years later Rée commits suicide, seemingly over her. Lou was later a lover of & influence on German poet Rainer Maria Rilke. She became a psychoanalyst, joined Freud’s inner circle, and was an important influence on Freud, including introducing Freud to Nietzsche’s ideas.

Friedrich Nietzsche – 3

“Freud several times said of Nietzsche that he had a more penetrating knowledge of himself than any other man who ever lived or was likely to live” Ernest Jones, The life and work of Sigmund Freud, II, 1955, p. 344.

Friedrich Nietzsche – 4

Nietzsche struggled with bouts of illness (including severe migraines and stomach bleeding), depression, suicidal thoughts and relative isolation. In 1889 he had a sudden mental breakdown and became psychotic (most think it was due to syphilis of the brain). The uncommunicative Nietzsche was cared for by his mother, then by his sister, Elisabeth, until his death in 1900. Elisabeth was noted for marrying Bernhard Förster, an anti-Semitic agitator. In 1886 they founded Nueva Germania in the Paraguay jungle. It was later a hideout for escaped Nazis (including Josef Mengele). After his death, Elisabeth also took over the management of his papers. It is accepted that Elisabeth injected her own ideas and altered or distorted at least some of Nietzsche’s works.
(Nietzsche’s works were later used by the Nazis).

Critique of Dogmatic Morality

- Socrates created a false representation of what is real, making morality a set of external ideas (“objects of dialectic”) and with it, “real” Man degenerated into the “the good Man,” “the wise Man,” etc.
- Plato further made these ideas mere abstract inventions – metaphysical ideals (Plato’s Forms) held out for us to try to emulate.
- Nietzsche: All schemes of morality (like Christianity) are just dogmas developed by some given group who held power at some given time – these “herd moralities” of good and evil deny us our individuality of finding our own values and selves.

Critique of Herd Morality

- Nietzsche laments that the world has degenerated to the lowest common denominator of the herd:
  - “The instinct of the herd considers the middle and the mean as the highest and most valuable: the place where the majority finds itself” (WP159)*.
  - “Let us stick to the facts: the people have won—or ‘the slaves,’ or ‘the mob,’ or ‘the herd,’ or whatever you like to call them — if this has happened through the Jews, very well! in that case no people had a more world-historic mission. ‘The masters’ have been disposed of; the morality of the common man has won” (GM35-36).

*page numbers given

Critique of Truth

- Ultimately, one finds out that the “truth” and various otherworlds (like Heaven) are literal fabrications, built by Man and reflecting his psychological needs, designed to promote the smooth succession of the status quo and to provide individuals with security.
- Knowledge and truth are provisional and change over time and with the ruling class:
  - Example: today’s scientific beliefs may be shown to be false tomorrow.
  - “there are many kinds of ‘truths,’ and consequently there is no truth” (WP291).
  - “Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies” (Human, all too human179).

Critique of Religion

- Nietzsche saw no ultimate or deeper meaning or purpose to the world or to human existence – Nietzsche (and Sartre) saw God as a human invention designed to comfort us and to repel our loneliness:
  - “There is not enough love and goodness in the world for us to be permitted to give any of it away to imaginary beings” (Human all too human 69).
- Social morality suspends us from the need to review our own individual value assumptions or to develop autonomous morality. Religion suspends us from our need to develop our individual selves. Our comforts and security and company are provided by this man-made system of ideas, thus removing the stimuli needed for real, individual development.
“God is Dead”

Nietzsche famously proclaimed “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.” This, “the greatest event of our time,” is an attempt to refocus people’s attention on their inherent, individual freedoms and responsibilities and on the here-and-now world, and away from all escapist, pain-relieving, heavenly otherworlds (GS167).

A Godless world means that we are alone on earth and cannot resort to a deity to guide us or to absolve our sins (responsibilities). We are now free to – and must – create our own, new, moral ideals and we must take absolute responsibility for our own actions – this can only be done by rejecting external, metaphysical or religious ideals.

Apollonian and Dionysus

Nietzsche uses the terms Apollonian and Dionysus to refer to two principles in Greek culture (see BT).

Apollonian is the basis for all analytic distinctions and everything that is part of the unique individual is Apollonian as is all structure and form.

Dionysus is directly opposed to the Apollonian, it is drunkenness and madness and these forces break down the individual’s character. Enthusiasm and ecstasy are examples as is music, as it appeals to one’s instinctive emotions and not to the rational mind.

Nietzsche believed that a tension between the two forces was necessary to create true tragedy and his life seems to have displayed both factors as well.

Three Developmental Outcomes

Nietzsche says that as a species, man is not progressing. Higher types appear but do not last.

Nietzsche delineated three possible outcomes:

- The “herd” or “slave” masses made up of “the last man,” content, comfort seeking conformers with no motive to develop: if we don’t aspire to be more, this is where we end up. (Wilber 2006: “70% of the world’s population are [ethnocentric] Nazis.”)
- Many “higher men:” a type of human who needs to “be more” and who “writes his or her own story.”
- Nietzsche also describes the ideal human – a few “Superhumans,” a role model to strive for, but that may be too unrealistic for most people to achieve.

The Superman

Nietzsche calls the highest mode of being the übermenschlich:

- Common translations: “the Superman” or “overman” or “hyperman”
  - über: from the Latin for super
  - ὑπερ: Greek for hyper
  - Menschlich: German for Human being.

Metamorphoses of the Spirit

Nietzsche outlines a hierarchy of spiritual development in what he calls three “metamorphoses of the spirit” entailing a progression from:
The camel ("the average man") who slavishly bears the load & obeys the “thou shalt” with little protest,

to the lion (a “higher man”) who says “no” and violently kills the status quo of “thou shalt,”

culminating in the child (Superman), who says an emphatic and “sacred Yes” to life and creates a new reality and a new self – the child applies his or her will in developing and achieving unique values and developing autonomy.

(see TSZ54).

The Camel

- The camel carries the “weight of the spirit,” kneeling to accept its load, just as we kneel to carry the weight of what we believe are our duties – the “herd morality.” We feel guilt if we don’t maintain the burden.
- In doing our duties, some may come to have doubts. One heavy blow is the discovery that wisdom and knowledge are only apparent. We slowly discover there is no fundamental bedrock supporting “truth” and we realize that we live in a world devoid of eternal standards.
- As the camel finds the solitude of the desert, the truth seeker also must find and deal with solitude.

The Lion

- In transforming, the camel becomes a lion, as “it wants to capture freedom & be lord in its own desert” (TSZ54).
  - Camel: an unquestioning slave – a beast of burden.
  - But the might of the lion – a beast of prey, willing to say NO and to kill, is required to capture freedom.
- “To seize the right to new values” the lion must steal freedom from the love of commandments by killing a dragon – the “thou shalt” – the idea that others tell us what we must believe and accept as truth and what we must do (and our corresponding love of compliance to these rules). Capturing freedom creates an opportunity – a “freedom for new creation.”
- The lion has the will to create new realities.

The Child

- Having destroyed the thou shalt dragon, the lion realizes he or she is not able to create new values: the lion now must become a child.
- A child’s perspective is needed to create new values. The child is innocence, with no guilt, and with no sense of the “thou shalt” of the herd – he or she has not yet been acculturated (e.g. The Little Prince).
- The child affirms the ongoing cycle of life – “a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes”
- The child (“Superman”) represents the new beginning of individuality – “the spirit now wills its own will, the spirit sundered from the world now wins its own world” (TSZ55).
The Will to Power [The Third Factor]

- The will to power is an ever-dominant feature of life and the basic drive of humanity. “The will to power is the primitive form of affect and all other affects are only developments of it” (WP366).
- Rejecting pleasure as a core motivator, Nietzsche suggests that “every living thing does everything it can not to preserve itself but to become more –” (WP367).
- Nietzsche casts the will to power as a proactive force – the will to act in life (not to merely react to life).
- The will to power is not power over others, but the feelings of “creative energy and control” over oneself that are necessary to achieve self-creation, self-direction and to express individual creativity.

Steps to Become a Superman

- Three steps to become a Superman:
  - Use one’s will to power to reject and rebel against old ideals and moral codes;
  - Use one’s will to power to overcome nihilism and to re-evaluate old ideals or to create new ones;
  - Through a continual process of self-overcoming.
- One is largely constituted by one’s genealogy – Superhumans take control of their genealogies and write their own stories (members of the herd have their life stories written for them).

Zarathustra Details Development

- Nietzsche appropriates the name of Persian religious leader Zarathustra as one of his main characters.
- In Nietzsche’s version, Zarathustra has spent from age 30 to 40, alone on a mountaintop quest and now decides to return to describe spiritual and individual development in a new, Godless, reality.
- On his descent, someone comments Zarathustra has changed, he has become a child – an awakened one.
- Zarathustra goes to the first village he sees where a crowd has gathered to see the circus act of a tight-rope walker and they accept him as part of the circus.

Man Must Overcome Man

Zarathustra speaks to the crowd:

- “I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?”
- “All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?”
  “What is the ape to men? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the Superman: a laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment.”

Man is a Process Not a Goal

- “You have made your way from the worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once
you were apes, and even now man is more of an ape than any ape. . .” (TSZ41-42).
- “Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman – a rope over an abyss. A
dangerous going across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous
shuddering and staying still” (TSZ43).
- “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal: what can be loved in man is
that he is a going-across and a down-going. I love those who do not know how to live
except their lives be a down-going, for they are those who are going across” (TSZ44).

The Abyss
- We must cross the abyss to create ourselves, our ideals and to become Superhuman.
- There are 3 possible outcomes:
  - to not try and simply stay in the herd,
  - to try to cross but fail (and fall into the abyss),
  - or to try to cross and succeed.

The Crowd Are Not Ready For the Lesson
- The crowd reject Zarathustra’s story and he says to us: “You Higher Men, learn this from
me: In the market-place no one believes in Higher Men. And if you want to speak there,
very well, do so! But the mob blink and say: ‘We are all equal’” (TSZ297).
- Zarathustra laments his reception: “I want to teach men the meaning of their existence:
which is the Superman, the lightning from the dark cloud man. But I am still distant from
them, and my meaning does not speak to their minds. To men, I am still a cross between
a fool and a corpse” (TSZ49).

Second Factor – Socialization
- The herd uncritically take their ideals of “good & evil” from the cultural & religious
conventions of the day:
  - Nietzsche calls on us to resist the impulse to submit to “slave morality” and to
  “undertake a critique of the moral evaluations themselves” (WP215).
  - Zarathustra says the Superman must overcome his or her acculturated self and apply the
will to power to a momentous new creativity – to building a truly autonomous self.
  - Supermen move beyond “good and evil” through a deep reflection on their own basic
instincts, emotions, character traits, and senses: they go on to develop their own
individual values for living [Personality Ideal].

Hierarchy of Autonomous Values
- “Fundamental thought: the new values must first be created – we shall not be spared this
task!” (WP512).
- The new values, and the process of value creation are not prescriptive: “This – is now
my way, – where is yours?” Thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ For the way
– does not exist!” (TSZ213).
- Summary: The Superman creates a unique new “master morality” reflecting the strength
and independence of a self freed from all “old” acculturated, herd values. Now, an
individual can review current conventions, reject values, adopt old values that he or she deems as valid, or create new values reflecting his or her unique self and ideals.

**Eternal Recurrence and the Superman**

- “Eternal recurrence” is the idea that one might be forced to relive every moment of one’s life over & over, with no omissions, however small, happy or painful.
  
  (Think of the movie *Groundhog Day* but without Bill Murray)
  
  - This idea encourages us to see that our current life is all there is – we must wake up to the “the real world” we actually live in, and live in the present – there is no escape to other (future) lives or to “higher” worlds.
  
  - Nietzsche says only a Superman could face eternal recurrence and embrace this life in its entirety and face the idea that this is all there is, and all there will be, for eternity.

**Every Second Counts**

- The Superhuman also gains a new perspective that brings about his or her own redemption – the endlessly recurring pains & mistakes of life do not provoke endless suffering, they are now seen and accepted as necessary steps in one’s development, each a step on the path leading to the present.
  
  - Every second of life is now seen as a valued moment, worthy of being repeated over and over, in and of itself, and is not merely a step toward some promise of a better world to come in the future (for example, Heaven).

**Rebirth via a New World View**

- The Superman uses his or her will to power to develop a new perspective, a new reality and a new self.
  
  - The Superman becomes his or her own judge: “Can you furnish yourself your own good and evil and hang up your own will above yourself as a law? Can you be judge of yourself and avenger of your law?” (TSZ89).
  
  - This process represents the rebirth of man and the creation of new, human, life-affirming values in this real and finite (temporal) world. These new beliefs lie in our intrinsic will to be more, the ability to transcend and to constantly overcome our old self, and to create new life and works.

**Three Prototypes**

- Personality incorporates 3 prototypes with 3 instincts:
  
  - the beauty creator (artist), [instinct of feeling]
  
  - the truth seeker (philosopher) [instinct of reason]
  
  - and the “goodness liver” (the Saint) [instinct of will – goodness and love]
  
  - The union of these 3 represents the ultimate model of human beings – the exemplar of the Superman.
  
  - The “wisest” person is one who has had a wide vertical [Multilevel] perspective and has experience from the deepest caverns to the mountaintops.
  
  - Finally, Nietzsche says that development never reaches an endpoint, integration is never complete.
Life as an Endless Cycle

- For the rest of his life Zarathustra continues to try to advocate for the Superman.
- Nietzsche is anti-systemic and does not present his ideas in a coherent, systematic way, thus there are many ambiguities and some contradictions in his writing. As well, Zarathustra has grave doubts and his ideas change as he has experiences with people and as he ages.
- One major issue is that Zarathustra comes to see life as a endless cycle that repeats itself, thus even if a higher level of man is achieved, it will only be a phase in the cycle and, eventually, the lower stages will have to reappear and be repeated again.

Personality Must be Constructed

- For Nietzsche, personality must be self-created, largely by overcoming, mastering and transforming one’s inner “chaos” into order:
  - “I tell you: one must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: you still have chaos in you” (TSZ46).
  - One must go through seven steps (“devils”) on the way to personality development (see TSZ90).
  - Overcoming also involves creating a new unity (McGraw: “synergy”) of cognition, emotion & volition.
  - The Superman becomes free (a “free spirit”) and now sees the real world and his or her place in it clearly (& without the distortion of social and religious influence).

The Self Must be Transformed

- The Superman develops a clear view of his or her “calling” [Personality Ideal] & must now obey this inner voice with the will to power, applying it to self-mastery.
- Often misinterpreted or misapplied, the will to power is applied in controlling and transforming one’s self:
  - Step 1. social morality [2nd Factor] is used to gain power over nature & the “wild animal [1st Factor].” Step 2: “one can employ this power in the further free development of oneself: will to power as self-elevation and strengthening” [3rd Factor] (WP218).
  - One overcomes oneself to become oneself: “What does your conscience say? – “You shall become the person you are” (GS219).

Few Achieve Personality

- In Nietzsche’s view, few achieve what he calls personality (the Superman), most people are not personalities at all, or are just a confused, undisciplined and non-integrated jumble. Nietzsche said only a few are able or willing to “discover and to follow their fate.”

Need for a Ruling Class

- The Superman represents a new, stronger & ultimate morality that easily resists external social controls.
Creates a small, “higher” ruling class, that humanity should foster: “the goal of humanity cannot lie in its end but only in its highest exemplars” (UM111).

Nietzsche: “My philosophy aims at an ordering of rank: not an individualistic morality” The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd – but not reach out beyond it: the leaders of the herd require a fundamentally different valuation for their own actions, as do the independent, or the ‘beasts of prey,’ etc” (WP162).

“The new philosopher can arise only in conjunction with a ruling caste, as its highest spiritualization” (WP512).

### Developmental Potential

- Nietzsche relates an individual’s potential to develop to the richness and intricacy of his or her emotion, cognition and volition (the will to power).
- The more potential a person has, the more internally complex he or she is: “The higher type represents an incomparably greater complexity . . . so its disintegration is also incomparably more likely” (WP363).
- Lower forms of life and people representing the herd type are simpler and thus, the lowest types are “virtually indestructible,” showing few noticeable effects of life (and none of the suffering of the Superman) (see WP363).

### Suffering Separates the Hero

- Nietzsche describes a general developmental disintegration – suffering leads to a vertical separation, a rising up, of the “hero” from the herd, leads to “nobility” and ultimately, to individual personality – to attaining one’s ideal self.
- This separation finds one alone, away from the security of the masses and without God for company.
  - “The higher philosophical man, who has solitude not because he wishes to be alone but because he is something that finds no equals: what dangers and new sufferings have been reserved for him” (WP514).

### Must First Fall Before We Rise

- The Superman is alone and few can tolerate this ultimate sense of solitariness, most must have the security and company of the herd (and of God).
- “I love him, who lives for knowledge and who wants knowledge that one day the Superman may live. And thus he wills his own downfall” (TSZ44).
  - “You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame: how could you become new, if you had not first become ashes!” (TSZ90).
- “I love him whose soul is deep even in its ability to be wounded, and whom even a little thing can destroy: thus he is glad to go over the bridge” (TSZ45).

### Suffering Leads to Growth

- Supermen see that in their suffering and destruction is new life: the seed must die for the plant to grow.
- The capacity to experience and overcome suffering and solitariness are the key traits of the Superman.
- “Suffering and dissatisfaction of our basic drives are a positive feature as these feelings
create an ‘agitation of the feeling of life,’ and act as a ‘great stimulus to life’” (WP370).

- “The discipline of suffering, of great suffering, do you not know that only this suffering has created all enhancements of man so far?” (BGE154).
- “[T]he path to one’s own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one’s own hell” (GS269).

**Suffering Challenges Us**

- “That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting, and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness — was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering?” (BGE154).

**The Road of Disintegration**

- “Thereupon I advanced further down the road of disintegration – where I found new sources of strength for individuals. We have to be destroyers! – I perceived that the state of disintegration, in which individual natures can perfect themselves as never before – is an image and isolated example of existence in general. To the paralyzing sense of general disintegration and incompleteness I opposed the eternal recurrence” (WP224).
- “We, however, want to become those we are – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves” (GS266).

**Health: How We Overcome Illness**

- Illness plays a major role in this transformation, as Nietzsche says, he is “grateful even to need and vacillating sickness because they always rid us from some rule and its ‘prejudice,’ . . .” (BGE55).
- Suffering many serious health issues himself, Nietzsche defined health not as the absence of illness, rather, by how one faces and overcomes illness.
- Nietzsche says he used his “will to health” to transform his illness into autonomy – it gave him the courage to be himself. In a practical sense, it also forced him to change his lifestyle and these changes facilitated a lifestyle more suited to his personality and to the life of a philosopher.

**The Neurosis of the Artist**

- Nietzsche describes a sort of neurosis afflicting the artist: “It is exceptional states that condition the artist – all of them profoundly related to and interlaced with morbid phenomena – so it seems impossible to be an artist and not to be sick” . . .
- . . . “Physiological states that are in the artist as it were molded into a ‘personality’ and, that characterize men in general to some degree:
  - 1. Intoxication: the feeling of enhanced power; the inner need to make of things a reflex of one’s own fullness and perfection (WP428)
  – and also what we may read as overexcitability:
“Extreme Sharpness”

- . . . 2. the extreme sharpness of certain senses, so they understand a quite different sign language – and create one – the condition that seems to be a part of many nervous disorders –; extreme mobility that turns into an extreme urge to communicate; the desire to speak on the part of everything that knows how to make signs –; a need to get rid of oneself, as it were, through signs and gestures; ability to speak of oneself through a hundred speech media – an explosive condition. . . .

The Inner Psychic Milieu Emerges

- . . . One must first think of this condition as a compulsion and urge to get rid of the exuberance of inner tension through muscular activity and movements of all kinds; then as an involuntary coordination between this movement and the inner processes (images, thoughts, desires) – as a kind of automatism of the whole muscular system impelled by strong stimuli from within –; inability to prevent reaction; the system of inhibitions suspended, as it were” (WP428-429).

Positive Maladjustment

- Nietzsche: “Whoever has overthrown an existing law of custom has always first been accounted a bad man: but when, as did happen, the law could not afterwards be reinstated and this fact was accepted, the predicate gradually changed; - history treats almost exclusively of these bad men who subsequently became good men!” (Daybreak19).

References:

  33, p. 82.

• The End
Title:
Dabrowski, enlightenment and transformation: A personal reflection.

Abstract
Ten years ago I was introduced to Dabrowski and was immediately struck by the “common sense” of this man’s thinking and life view. It resonated with me. From those first moments my fascination has grown and continues, even now, to grow. My initial exposure was in the context of emotional issues associated with giftedness. I immediately began to weave what I understood of the principles and concepts of Positive Disintegration and Overexcitability into my own thinking. At first as an educator and adviser I found in Dabrowski solid ground upon which I could base my work with highly able, often intense, young men and women at post secondary levels of education. Since that time and as a counselor meeting with many young people of different ages, their siblings and their parents, Dabrowski has again provided a solid footing, powerful insights, and reliable pathways to pursue in the quest for psychological health. This paper reflects experiences encountered when applying theory to practice.
This paper reflects some experiences, thoughts and observations arising from my professional involvement in the lives of different individuals while becoming increasingly familiar with Dabrowski’s work and endeavoring to translate his theory into practice.

Ten years ago I was introduced to Dabrowski. Immediately I was struck by the “common sense” of this man’s thinking – especially his perception of human differences and development. From those first moments my fascination with his work has grown and even now, continues to grow. It resonates with me.

Immediately after my very basic introduction, I began to weave what I understood of the principles and concepts of positive disintegration and overexcitability into my own thinking. My initial exposure was in the context of emotional issues associated with giftedness and, although not exclusively so, I have to say the greater emphasis was placed on overexcitability. At first as an educator and adviser, I found in Dabrowski’s philosophy solid ground upon which I could base my own work with highly able, often intense, young men and women at post secondary levels of education. Since that time and as a counselor meeting with many young people of different ages, their siblings and their parents, Dabrowski has again and again provided a firm footing, powerful insights, and reliable pathways to pursue in the quest for psychological health.

First – a story. It is potentially a long story with an end yet to be determined, therefore a shortened version must suffice. Gilbert is a 35-year old male and resident of a half-way house for individuals whose mental health is, for various reasons and to various degrees, impaired. I became acquainted with Gilbert after being asked if I could help coach a very difficult resident as a prospective employee in a local supermarket. I tentatively agreed although my forte is not as a job coach – not at least at that level. Frankly, I was intrigued because, although Gilbert had been
causing difficulties in his small community, I was also told he was a “smart” guy and “smartness” fascinates me – it has for almost 25 years now.

I agreed to see him once a week. He was low in spirits and somewhat resistant to me at first, but as the ice was gradually broken he indicated a willingness to hang in. So, we looked at his situation, making some plans for the future.

Gilbert is indeed gifted with a prodigious knowledge of the American Civil War and other global conflicts. He is not an example of Asperger’s syndrome – he does not bend your ear with constant dialogue about these things, but when you begin to talk about the subject, his superior knowledge is quickly apparent. He has a phenomenal memory. His vocabulary is advanced and his reasoning power can be intimidating. That is the good news.

The bad news? Typical of many highly able individuals, he is disorganized, forgetful of small details, and possessed of a sometimes trying social etiquette. When I met him, his self-esteem was extremely low. He had become something of a victim of his own thoughts, frustrated, quickly angered, difficult to relate in a community setting, and sadly, jobless. In addition, he stuttered and had a shuffling walk, apparently being very slightly cerebral palsied from birth. He was reported to me as being bipolar and as having ADHD. For these and other reasons, for many years of his life, Gilbert has been medicated with a smorgasbord of well known drugs such as Lithium, Adderal, and Depakote.

Recently, after what was considered a manic episode by himself, his case managers and his long-term psychiatrist, he was administered 1200 mg of Lithium in addition to other drugs. To see this young man once again slurring his speech and looking at me with drooping eyelids was distressing and, unlike everyone else, I was not convinced that Gilbert’s episode signified a worsening of his condition. Although I was somewhat familiar with Dabrowski’s Theory of
Positive Disintegration, this event precipitated a deeper examination of his work published in 1967, *Personality Shaping Through Positive Disintegration*.

Dabrowski considered neurotic behavior as a herald, possibly signaling positive disintegration and thus permitting subsequent reintegration at a higher level. The distinction he proposes between unhealthy and healthy behavior struck me as especially pertinent to this case. A seminal question was raised in my mind: Is Gilbert’s behavior truly manic in nature and indicative a real illness or is he feeling inferior in relation to himself and thus grappling with a powerful but troubling transition? In other words, were his recent behaviors more to do with his recognition of what he is capable of becoming as opposed to what he perceives as being his capabilities at present? Dabrowski posits that this “feeling of inferiority in relation to oneself is manifested as a rule, by individuals with the capacity for distinct, accelerated development.”\(^1\) He further posited that this feeling of inferiority is “never observed in psychopathy and with persons offering no promise for the development of personality.”\(^2\)

Having worked with the young man for almost a year, many insights have been gained into his state of mind. Week by week, I have worked diligently to raise his conscious awareness of self. My *modus operandi* from the first meeting has been to help him recognize and focus on his strengths in the ultimate hope that through their engagement he will overcome his deficiencies. For years his father and the case managers in the half-way house have constantly detailed minute weaknesses (e.g., untied shoes, unbrushed hair, and untidy room). Not that these things are unimportant, especially if someone is applying for a job, however the message ultimately reinforces the notion that he is preeminently a deficient human being. It is not

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2 Ibid. page 100.
uncommon for the sense of self or personal identity to be formed entirely upon the perceptions of others, erroneous though it may be. I am convinced that identity change is crucial to psychological healing.

In my opinion – indeed the evidence is clear – Gilbert does have potential for the development of a personality ideal. He is beginning to see himself as having some relevance, some value in the larger community, compared with a pariah with nothing to offer. He recognizes the need for improvement in many areas of his life in order for him to enjoy some degree of success. He has begun to form a vision of himself – a qualitatively different picture composed of what he could be doing and where he could be going. For example, he took a college course this past year, he has been exploring the possibilities of becoming a teacher, he is writing articles on aspects of the American Civil War – a topic with which he is exceptionally knowledgeable. He has also made contact with a local history professor with the view of him becoming a mentor, he has joined the local History Club, and he is deeply involved with a re-enactment group in the person of Brigadier General Stannard.

This newly emerging picture stands in stark contrast to the rather dismal one which slowly but surely emerged since early childhood. An alchemy of factors contributed to a toxic brew, including; brilliant siblings, a father who, despite being loving and caring, in Gilbert’s words “does not easily tolerate things he doesn’t understand,” years of special education, and eleven years living in various protective environments with caregivers who do not recognize or are not prepared to fully appreciate his strengths.

With insights and perspectives gained from reading Dabrowski, I concluded that Gilbert is in the midst of a major transition. It seemed very reasonable therefore to accept his behavior – although admittedly difficult, as symptomatic of an improvement in his general mental state.
Solomon said, “Without vision people perish.” Ergo – with vision people are less likely to perish. Gilbert seems to be developing a vision and, hopefully, is therefore less likely to perish.

Earlier in the year, I received a very heart-warming note from Gilbert’s psychiatrist. He wrote “Your methods are working.” Affirmed as I was, I shared my hopeful view and the theoretical basis of my belief and actions with him and the staff working with Gilbert I sensed some measure of accord, but perhaps predictably, when Gilbert became especially agitated, his caregivers could only imagine him getting worse and called in the same psychiatrist who then medicated him. They also grounded him, severely restricting his movements beyond the home and ultimately giving him notice to leave the residence by the end of the month. At that time Gilbert was proving to be an extremely difficult individual for whom they have scant hope and little time. He is simply a labor-intensive inmate who causes great problems within the small community and although his caretakers are doubtless kind and well-intentioned, his departure would constitute a huge relief.

I became increasingly concerned about Gilbert’s future – especially when all the main players, with the exception of myself (I was not invited), met to discuss my client’s future. It was agreed that my services would be terminated after three additional sessions. I was informed that “Things had to be fixed.”

But this is not a case for some magic potion – not simply a problem to be “fixed.” Of this I was certain – therapy is in the relationship and for other ethical reasons, I should not abandon my client. The insights gained from Dabrowski’s work inspired me to hang in with this young man in the hope that his transition will continue, that his identity will change and that he will move forward in his personal development.
Thankfully an opportunity arose to explain in greater detail the foundations for my work with Gilbert. I am grateful that his case manager understood the principles of Positive Disintegration. When she also reframed Gilbert’s behaviors in the light of this new perspective she recognized them as potentially positive. Additionally she had noticed other day-to-day behaviors that she could see were evidence of a gradual change for the better. Wisdom prevailed. Gilbert is granted a reprieve. Interestingly, I am not only working with him again, my time with him spent on a monthly basis has been considerably increased.

This is an on-going story and at the time of writing I don’t as yet know exactly how it will develop, but I feel a growing security in the principles and concepts learned from Dabrowski’s writings.

So how did this all start?

About six years ago, I was honored to be invited as visiting fellow from the University of Connecticut to the University of Pennsylvania. Specifically, I was asked to talk about my work with honors students. During my short visit, I shared experiences with several groups of faculty members, residential life administrators, and students from the University of Pennsylvania honors program – The Schreyer Honors College.

Up to this time, I was interested in Dabrowski’s ideas – in fact deeply interested, but I had not read any of his original work. At this time, my information had been gathered from readings written in the context of the gifted child. The ideas were still couched in rather theoretical terms and although I had an appreciation of the “big idea” it was somewhat sketchy in my mind. In Pennsylvania, all that changed while conducting a seminar with twenty or so senior

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honors students when the relevance and power of Dabrowski’s thinking really began to emerge for me.

The topic discussed was how social emotional concerns and events in life, possibly associated with giftedness, can play a significant role in the overall experience of especially able undergraduates. We talked about many of the most obvious – functional and dysfunctional perfectionism, fear of failure, the Imposter Syndrome, procrastination, underachievement, existential depression and the like. The majority of my audience had encountered, directly or indirectly, one or a combination of these conditions. The next thing on my list was Dabrowski and overexcitability – essentially my theme was “What has intensity got to do with it?”

No one had heard of Dabrowski. Neither student nor attending faculty. First I shared the precious little I knew about the man and how his thinking emerged out of his own, sometimes harrowing, life experiences in the troubled and war-torn Europe of the 1930s and 40s. I then warmed to my topic of overexcitability. That was Dabrowski for me at that time – overexcitability. Although I knew a little about Positive Disintegration, overexcitability was my focus.

My audience was attentive. They may not have known about Dabrowski, but intensity – that was another matter. They recognized their own and that of others, it was apparently something quite common to the group. I began to describe affective or emotional intensity. As I proceeded I noticed nodding heads and other affirmative body language. When describing this particular overexcitability to students back in Connecticut, a chord was always struck and reactions were similar. It was going well.
Suddenly from somewhere on my right there came sounds of stifled weeping. All eyes immediately shifted their focus from me to the young man whose head was buried in his hands. There was a sudden and very pregnant pause.

The young man – Tom – somehow became aware of the silence and the attention – an intuitive soul I suspect (probably an INFP if we go by Myers-Briggs). He lifted his head and he looked at me and said quietly, “I am sorry… but I am not crying because I am sad. I am crying because I feel utter relief. I thought I was sick. I began to believe the intensity I felt was a sickness. I feel so deeply for people and I was so worried about it. Now I know it is OK. I am normal. I am normal.”

As might be imagined, this was powerful, not only for me but also for my young audience. The students were visibly moved. After fielding some questions, I concluded the talk and canceling my next appointment took the opportunity to talk with Tom. Sadly, with hindsight, I did not know enough to talk to him about other aspects of Dabrowski’s ideas regarding positive disintegration and how his intensity fit into the broader picture. I am certain it would be been helpful and wise to do so. Never-the-less, it was a seminal experience and one not easily forgotten. Similar, though not quite so powerful, situations have arisen over the years while working with high ability students in first year experience (FYE) courses in both university and college settings.4

4 In the 1980s, Edward Boyer and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching spent a great deal of time looking closely at college and university campus life (1990). Evidence was found of what is described as “the darker side of student life” including incidents of excessive use of alcohol, incivility, and sexual and racial harassment. It is, in part, recognition of “the darkside” along with a focus upon the quality of undergraduate education, that the First Year Experience (FYE) movement in the US has become firmly established. The movement is most often associated with the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina and Dr. John Garner. Its success and continued growth, within and beyond the borders of the United States – the 19th International Conference on The First-Year Experience July 24-27 - 2006, was held in Toronto, is a witness to a growing awareness of how these physical, psychological, and environmental changes are significant and powerful in the lives of individuals as they make the transition and exchange school and

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The notion of overexcitability, or intensity, as I more often express it, seems to help highly able young people grapple and come to terms with who they are. Whereas they may feel extremely uncomfortable with a label such as gifted, the concept of being intense is OK – much more acceptable to them. It is something they seem able to recognize immediately and own far more readily.

From my perspective, many highly able young people newly deposited at the doors of post-secondary institutions seem somewhat confused and mystified in regards to why they are where they are, who they are, and what they are all about. This is absolutely not true of all students of course, but I have observed a tendency towards denial of an integral element of self when it comes to giftedness, high ability, or high capacity. Even the validity and reality of giftedness is questioned. Disbelief and doubt are very evident. For many the label “gifted” is a gross aggravation, and they react with very real, red-faced, sweaty-palmed anger when it is attributed to them. When pressed for some explanation of their chagrin it appears they harbor doubts about the accuracy of the identification and the subjectivity of parents or past teachers of whom they were favorites. The immediate pre-college years – typically a period of uncertainty and questing for identity — is also a time when they are subject to powerful peer pressure to conform. They simply do not want to be labeled – especially not “gifted,” wanting only to “fit-in” and not stand out. Painful memories linger of their being regarded as geeks, nerds, brains and the like, by peers in middle and secondary – even in elementary school. It was painful to be

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teased and bullied because of their differentness, their creativity, their avidity and profound dedication to learning.

As if this were not enough, an all-too-common worse-case scenario sometimes lurked in recent memory – misdiagnosis and erroneous labeling (e.g., typically ADHD, bipolar, OCD, ODD). Or needless and inappropriate medication recommended by teachers, a psychologist, psychiatrist or pediatrician and sanctioned by parents. This served only to exacerbate their anger.

Young women in particular have been heard to say, “I am not gifted, I just work hard, I am not one of the elite!” All were quite eager to cover-up, unwilling to talk, reticent to reveal self – presuming they had an accurate concept of self – that totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence is not always in place. 6

True, this could be a matter of natural immaturity on the continuum of human growth and development. Alternatively, it could also be a matter of unnatural and unwarranted delay in their development – a delay, I suspect, that could be rooted in a number of pre-college conditions, not least perhaps a deficiency in knowledge and understanding about educational and social emotional aspects of giftedness and the out workings of such ignorance, e.g., obvious deficiencies in appropriate educational accommodation for highly able children. Sadly curricula misalignment, uninformed counseling, stereotyping, and an odd anti-intellectualism seems to pervade K-12 schools throughout North America.

However, getting back to my students: to be considered intensely intellectual, or imaginational, or emotional, or sensual, or physical was something they could grasp. They were

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able to discern all these aspects in themselves, in their siblings, friends, parents, and other acquaintances. Emotional sensitivity was the one condition most readily understood. It was apparent to them that if emotional intensity is somehow misunderstood or unacknowledged or unrecognized or unmanaged, a myriad of situations – some possibly intense, some possibly harmful, may ensue. They could see how this might be implicated in the loss of a relationship, problems at home, failure, or the perception of failure, stressful relationships, personal verbal or physical abuse, inappropriate educational provision, and, or disaffirmation of qualities and strengths.

I remember one student telling our FYE group about her closest friend back home – by all accounts an intellectually, emotionally, sensually, and imaginationally intense individual. “*I need to explain this to her! This says everything. She became pregnant, dropped out of college and is now at home depressed, on medication . . . just not coping with life at all. She thought she was weird. She didn’t fit in. So-called friends drifted away from her. She became real lonely. I have been afraid for her. She has talked about suicide. This makes soooo much sense!*”

My experience with highly able students, especially with respect to their disinclination to own or even recognize an integral part of themselves has been intriguing to me. I am reminded of Carl Roger’s work⁷ in this context. He describes the *actualizing tendency* as the drive of every organism to fulfill its biological potential and to become whatever it is capable of becoming. He further describes the *self-actualizing tendency* as the human drive to fulfill self-concept or image of self and the *fully functional human being* as one whose self-concept most closely resembles his or her capacity/potential.

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The concept of a fully functional human being is clearly similar to that of Abraham Maslow’s self-actualized individual and may, at first, appear somewhat parallel to Dabrowski’s notion of an individual who achieves secondary integration level and his or her ideal personality. However, as I now understand the issue, Dabrowski considered self-actualization only as actualization of potential and insufficient in his view, failing to capture the vitality of multilevelness. Action is involved. Dabrowski’s fifth level assumes not only an individual’s capacity to differentiate between lower and higher aspects of self but also conscious inhibition of the lower and actualization of the higher. In other words – actually in Dabrowski’s words\(^8\) – a person becomes “aware of his own development” and “more and more inner directed” in the process of achieving the personality ideal. To be consciously aware and actively involved in one’s own growth is an exciting concept. By comparison, Maslow’s self-actualization process is somewhat pedestrian and, as such, not difficult to categorize his guilt-free acceptance of “the self as it is” as a unilevel approach.\(^9\)

With these thoughts in mind, it seems logical that when an individual recognizes and embraces important elements of self thus possessing a fuller, more complete and authentic picture of self, the more likely he or she is to develop into a fully functional person. Based on this logic, the converse seems also true: if part of self is somehow denied or goes unrecognized or is lost or disaffirmed, the less likely it will be for an individual to become fully functional, self actualized or to achieve his or her personality ideal.


\(^9\) a) I am grateful to William Tillier for his help in explaining the difference between Maslow’s and Dabrowski’s thinking in this regard. (Personal communication September 17\(^{th}\) 2006)
b) I am also grateful for access to a piece written by William Tillier and Sal Mendaglio, entitled Dabrowski and Maslow, undated.
While working with post secondary youth, I have frequently observed patterns of behavior and attitudes of mind signaling poor self-concept and other potential impediments to a healthy development towards becoming fully functioning or achieving the personality ideal. Psychometric data may distinguish these young people as intellectually highly able but the energy and direction otherwise expected is lost, compromised and somehow dissipated by:

- Indecision & poor decision-making, e.g., selection of completely inappropriate majors and therefore also courses of study
- Lack of motivation and commitment
- Lethargy and boredom
- Lack of self efficacy, corresponding uncertainty and avoidance of tasks
- Procrastination in terms of work and facing reality
- Apologetic behaviors and excuses
- Obvious stress and anxiety
- Fear of failure, loss of scholarship, letting down parents, being a fool, etc.
- Fear of talking to parents, fear of facing professors, fear of counseling
- Sense of despair and depression (talk of giving up, dropping out and worse)
- Underachievement – insignificant work, plagiarism, GPAs of 1.00 or less,
- Marginalization – disassociation from group (especially from Honors)
- Complete failure and a resigned attitude towards a “failure” mindset

These observations have been fairly consistent over 10 or more years. They have contributed to my conclusion that having only a vague sense of self or virtually no knowledge of self, especially at a time when the need for an accurate view of self becomes increasing vital,
potentially spells trouble. It is disturbing to watch as those lacking a solid sense of self struggle on in the hope of a successful undergraduate experience.

The inimitable Pooh Bear\textsuperscript{10} is reported having said:

\begin{quote}
How can you get very far,
If you don’t know Who You Are?
How can you do what you ought,
If you don’t know What You’ve Got?
And if you don’t know Which To Do
Of all the things in front of you,
Then what you’ll have when you are through
Is just a mess without a clue
Of all the best that can come true
If you know What and Which and Who
\end{quote}

How true! This little gem reflects Jung’s wisdom: “Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens” and that of Lao Tzu who said, “Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is enlightenment” and that of Dabrowski with his concepts of conscious awareness and self-education. The prospect of becoming aware of self and how that consciousness might affect a change in identity is both a fascination and inspiration.

I have been an educator for almost 40 years. Well before I ever became involved in higher education or counseling, my unconscious (maybe semi-conscious) aim was always to facilitate some degree of personal transformation in all my students from a self-efficacy,

\textsuperscript{10} In Hoff, B.(1982) The Tao of Pooh, New York, N.Y. Penguin
knowledge and developmental perspective. As a teacher, adviser, mentor, counselor, and educational consultant, if a young person’s mental well-being has been a particular issue, I have always searched for means whereby I could facilitate a “shift” away from a debilitating malaise toward greater psychological health.

I believe there are those predisposed toward working in certain ways with people in some personal context, e.g., having a vocation for teaching, nursing, counseling. I have met many individuals who intuitively know how to react to, or what to do with, for example, children in a learning environment or adults in some stressful situation. Reflecting on what I did in the past made me realize the degree to which my actions were largely intuitive and, or based at best, on fragments of pertinent knowledge gained here and there. My actions were certainly sans insights gained from a focused reading of Dabrowski’s own words.

In recent years, I have made a much greater effort to balance and enhance a potentially random intuitive approach with a more conscious, deliberate application of taxonomies associated with human growth and development. In Dabrowski’s terms – self-education. In becoming more familiar with Dabrowski, I also became increasingly appreciative of his illumination and clarification of what I now regard as imperatives around which my work is structured. For example, at one time it intuitively seemed right for me to facilitate acquisition of self knowledge in my students. Now such action is not only powerfully affirmed but also greatly enriched by Dabrowski’s own thinking with respect to the necessity of knowing or observing one’s self and the significance of an advisor or mentor in this process. Dabrowski (1967) clearly expresses his belief that in order for healthy development to take place and thus also to achieve optimal realization of the personality ideal, the shaping of the personality is a process shared and
helped by individuals who recognize and understand the indications of the personality, e.g., “tendencies for introversion, creativity, and sensitivity” (p.144).

Dabrowski also wrote:

_The Meaning of Personality:_ The advisor helps the individual in the development of these dynamisms of conscious organization by acting upon him and cooperating with him in the following respects:

1. By developing in the individual the capacity to observe himself, to discover his “true” self, and by training him to look objectively (experiencing himself as an object)

2. By training the individual to fight with the tendencies to affirm and justify rashly his own interests, to develop a mistrust of certainties in his own behavior, to fight back the tendencies to subordinate intelligence to instincts, treating the former as a tool of the later

3. By developing the individual’s capacity for the conscious organization of his own internal milieu, for localizing and placing into a hierarchy the values of this environment, and for checking and controlling its level of development. (Dabrowski, 1967, p. 161).

Dabrowski’s work provides a solid theoretical keel in what might be described as the stormy seas of the real world. It has become especially so for me given the struggle to convince others of an alternative and viable approach to the development of mental health in general, and if need be, to specific psychological healing.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) School personnel, for example, when considering the needs of highly able children don’t always understand how the intellect is not the whole person and affective and cognitive needs of a child are so closely intertwined. In tending cognitive in isolation from affective aspects of any individual, schools and parents court the potential of highly undesirable, even dangerous behavior.
Three young women immediately come to mind as examples of recent – and I must say better informed, interaction. There is April – a self mutilating cutter struggling with constant emotional pain, guilt and depression; May, a sexually abused, grossly underachieving, suicidal teenager who also cut herself; and June, a gifted, athletic, perfectionistic anorexic in daily denial of her problems who lost at least 50 lbs in body weight in a few short weeks.

In dealing with such serious and complicated cases, energy is derived from the hope that the problems might reasonably be addressed, even resolved, by gathering of knowledge, deepening one’s understanding and applying the knowledge gained in terms of self, e.g., our value, what we value, and how we might apply this knowledge in various contexts associated with our life. Accordingly, I focused upon the individual’s strengths and positive predispositions in an effort to help them understand they were “enough,” having within themselves the wherewithal to overcome perceived and, or actual weaknesses and thus progress towards higher levels of personal consciousness and emotional health. We spent many hours, either face to face and, or via instance messaging discussing the benefits of conscious positive disintegration from the present “place” in order for integration to take place on a different, healthier (higher) level.

The strategy seems to have worked well in all cases. To my knowledge, April has stopped cutting, put many of her previously constant problems behind her, and begun to make decisions that clearly redound to her benefit as a highly intelligent, creative individual with the potential of becoming an extremely productive member of her community. Her latest instant text message to me read: “I am happy. I had a great summer. I haven’t cut myself for six months (the 12 This is a reference to language used in Choice Theory. While working with the young people at UConn, my colleague – Kevin Sullivan and I included aspects of Glasser’s Choice Theory in our classes and we found certain aspects of Glasser’s work blended well with OverExcitability. While Dabrowski talks in terms of the recognizing the indicators or dynamisms that portend or line our path towards personality ideal, Glasser thinks in terms of examining and making choices that enable an individual to come as close as possible to the quality world vision they have for themselves. For an individual to understand him or herself in terms of personal “intensities” is, I believe, greatly empowering. Such knowledge informs decision-making, greatly enhancing the positive significance choice.
longest time ever) and I don’t feel the urge to do so anymore!”\textsuperscript{13} In the case of May, suffice to say, my wife and I attended her very moving graduation after she became valedictorian of her class. In the third case, the progress is ongoing and positive, but rather slow. Anorexia is an especially difficult and troubling condition to work with. Even so, June is now in her junior year as an education student, enjoying her field experience in an elementary school, and in significantly better shape physically and mentally than she has been in the past. Her latest instant message read: “I am reeeeeaaaally enjoying teaching, but I love psychology. I love what you are doing and I want to apply lessons learnt from my own experience in the field when I become a psychologist.”

I digress here (hopefully wittingly). We know that highly able individuals are not simply advanced intellectually, i.e., in the sense of measurable intelligence, say for example, by the WSC-IV. It is not a matter of a number – intellectual capacity is but a part of the picture. For example, whereas the ability to grasp abstract concepts typically begins to flourish at a 5\textsuperscript{th}/6\textsuperscript{th} grade level, more highly able individuals may be 2, 3, 4 or more years ahead in this respect. Even preschoolers are found capable of understanding really complex ideas and issues, e.g. death, time, God, and ethical questions of right or wrong.\textsuperscript{14} They are likely to be developmentally advanced in language and thought, philosophically advanced for their age, and facing dissonance earlier than non-gifted peers (the resulting conflict actually indicating giftedness). Some suggest that autonomy may be achieved sooner in these individuals.

\textsuperscript{13} Dabrowski would say these kids deal with their intensity through self-harm, partly out of fear of harming another. See Dabrowski’s\textsuperscript{1937} monograph on self-mutilation.

Krathwohl’s Taxonomy of the Affective Domain is focused upon the development of values and according to Krathwohl, highly able individuals tend to establish their value system very much earlier than less advanced peers – in their early teens. They also begin to order their life around these values, eventually becoming known or characterized by these values. For example, the name of Mother Teresa is synonymous with a respected character – for most of us, the name alone represents a life of dedication built around a set of values. I have had the privilege of working with some young people who definitely made a name for themselves early on in the college or university setting simply because of a characterization based upon a life built on values. All of which supports the notion of earlier autonomy, a possible need for earlier guidance, assistance, and greater levels of understanding at home and in the classroom. All of this causes me to wonder if the process of positive disintegration, given the right circumstances, might possibly take place at an earlier age in individuals with higher levels of ability and greater intensity.

When working with individuals, teachers or parents for either mental health or educational reasons, ideas pertaining to overexcitability have provided an excellent springboard from which dive into the murky depths of more difficult issues. The opportunity this subject affords us to link sound theory with rational practice is magic. As my own self-efficacy towards putting Dabrowski’s ideas to the test has increased, so has the self-efficacy of my clients. They clearly understand how self-knowledge followed by self-education, especially in the context of their own intensities, helps them reframe and address conditions and situations that might otherwise have appeared difficult to overcome, at best, and be overwhelming at worse. Recognition, ownership, and understanding the potential of our physical attributes, i.e., our strengths, passions, talents and skills, personality, relationships, how we perceive ourselves as
moral beings and how others may perceive us. All such aspects of self form the substance of positive disintegration and personal transformation.

Imagine the tearful young man in class described earlier . . . imagine the difference in his decision-making process and the potential outcome if he had not become aware that his perceived “weakness” – emotional intensity – is quite normal in highly able individuals. What path may he have taken if he continued to regard himself as sick?

Returning once again to my students: transition was a major focus for colleagues and students alike. First semesters in colleges are certainly defining times for many young people.\textsuperscript{15} Even at the best of times, they are not always easy. If the transition process proves difficult, both college and future careers are easily compromised. If the transition process is impeded in a significant way or simply does not happen, the stakes become higher – without exaggeration, even to a point of living or dying.

The honors program FYE was almost entirely concerned with getting our students through that uneasy period of adjustment or transition to post secondary education as smoothly and successfully as possible. From the left-brained, positivist, institutional perspective, much of our energy was spent in pursuit of retention. In truth, my colleague Kevin Sullivan and I focused on facilitating a healthy and satisfying journey from freshmen-hood to graduation and helping them acquire a sense of intra, inter, and extra- personal competence.

There are many individuals whose maturity signals them ready and able to do whatever it takes. For these individuals, transition and the adjustments required to deal with new settings,

new friends, new expectations, new temptations, new possibilities, and so forth, present few problems. However, for perhaps as many others, the experience proves stressful. They may or may not get through the ordeal. Learning and academic work of any appreciable quantity and, or quality may suffer or fail. Unacceptable grade point averages begin to accrue. Relationships become strained. Hedonistic binges, bouts of self starvation or inflicting physical pain temporarily ameliorate existential pain and momentarily dissipate distress. Deepening depressions force visits to mental health clinics and psychiatrists. Solace may be found in Effexor, or Zoloft or some other proprietary medicine. Cutting, anorexia, and bulimia are particularly common in young women, emotionally paralyzed by some degree of abuse and, or dysfunctional perfectionism and in extreme cases, attempted or successful suicide is a reality. Young, highly able Asian women pressured by close and extended family members to become lawyers or doctors are particularly susceptible to high risk or self harm behavior.

Yes, a breakdown of this sort can indicate a lack of interest, poor use of time and effort, lack of concentration, or the excessive influence of seductive attractions and distractions. However, we often interacted with failing individuals who found transition overwhelming for other reasons. It was quite common for thoughts about home, a sense of loneliness for missed friends and family, and feelings of being out of place, to increasingly flood the mind. In essence, these students were unable or unwilling to positively disintegrate themselves from their past. They hung on to what was familiar, comfortable and secure.

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16 For example, Jane, an extremely energetic, intelligent, and creative first year student, arrived at college straight from Singapore. Initially she was as bright as a button, engaged – work was in on time, she contributed to discussion, and she asked questions. After only two weeks something was obviously troubling her. She described herself as being overwhelmed. The flow of work ceased. She became less and less engaged. She stopped coming to class. She was sick. She was tired. She woke up too late for class.

17 Perfectionism – particularly in association with the fear of failure, and a sense of being an imposter further intensified the pressures incumbent with change.

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Although I already had a sense of what it might signify, a growing number of encounters with these students helped me understand more fully the basic principles of the positive disintegration theory. I touched on it to the degree my knowledge allowed in the context of transition. I found I was able to express it in these terms: while still embracing a high-school mind set, full engagement and growth potential at this new level of experience was difficult at best, impossible at worst. Rightly or wrongly, for me, disentanglement from the high school experience and all it implies represented the important shift through the different levels of positive disintegration towards a personality ideal where individuals become conscious of their own behavior and recognize the imperative for transformation and to achieve autonomy through self-education.

Stories, analogies, metaphors, and parables have always given me special pleasure – ever since exposure in my very early days to the BBC radio program, *Listen With Mother*. Every weekday for several years before I went to school as an “infant,” I sat with my mother listening to stories for children. I realize now how much my teaching and other interaction with young people has been based on the concept of a story – either drawn from my own or, preferably, their own experience. It is how I teach educational psychology and human growth and development. I have always felt comfortable with the Christian notion of passing on heavenly truths through earthly stories. Stories are helpful in coming to an understanding of some complex notion.

While reading Dabrowski (1967), I came across concept-laden phrases like “awakening the individual to the contradictions existing in himself based on examples and situations from his life” (p. 159). The idea of awakening the self and achieving self-insights through a story based upon real personal experience seems entirely appropriate, a distinctly powerful way of reaching
and examining those inner, sometimes dark and complex recesses of the human mind. As Dabrowski (1967) writes, “It … helps to ‘purify’ and strengthen the positive qualities, and trace the proper line of the individual’s behavior” (page 159).

In this same context, given my employment of stories in the educational process, I was also excited to come across this statement:

Education consists in developing the possibility of resignation from primitive needs; it consists of partial frustration, in experiencing the feeling of dissatisfaction with oneself, in developing self control, inhibition, retrospection, and prospection …. The pain and suffering of a child, his failures, his experiences of shame, and his feelings of inferiority or guilt are the dynamisms that reshape his primitive structure. They are positive dynamisms if, at the same time, they are offset by pleasant experiences – joy, satisfaction, ambitions, feelings of superiority, the feeling of having fulfilled one’s duty well, the experience of praise and the like. … It is an indispensable factor for the proper arrangement of one’s relations to the social environment … in the hands of a good educator, fundamental tools for the development of a child’s personality. (Dabrowski, 1967, page 169)

It seems evident to me that these “tools” are equally as important to the healthy, competent – “good” self-educator in his or her striving toward his or her personality ideal. Looking back with this statement in mind, I realize how appropriate it was that Kevin and I consistently engaged our students in self-reflection. We made sure that this reflection or exercise in metacognition was not simply applied in the context of academics, and academic success, but also in the context of the affective self. Our level of academic success must inevitably involve
volition and therefore reflect the degree to which we are motivated, seek access and confidently apply our full compliment of faculties both cognitive and affective.\(^ {18} \)

I have mentioned patterns of behavior that seemed to herald a difficult transition. It was also interesting to observe students more able to make a satisfactory transition. They seemed to have a clearer understanding of their own values – a clearer picture of self. They were the more assertive and more able to articulate a set of goals and pursue them purposefully. They were among the most successful, gaining reputations in the Honors Program and University for leadership and innovation in diverse areas of interest. We had individuals who, for example, started a new drama club, excelled in a Model United Nations, created and organized an International Night to raise money for special scholarships, spent a semester in Washington working with senators, experienced life in South Africa with AIDS victims, worked with native Senegal peoples and, or sacrificed spring-break to work with children in poverty-struck areas of Haiti. These students seemed well on their way toward secondary integration. Though still relatively “immature” chronologically, these students demonstrated obvious organization and harmonization of their personalities and ideals; they showed considerable responsibility, authentism and autonomy, empathy, self-perfection, a personality ideal. At a young age, their lives reflected, what seems in hind sight, an amazing degree of developmental potential.

\(^ {18} \) For me this particularly connects with some of Renzulli’s work in giftedness. His Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness, for example, argues that giftedness is demonstrated in extraordinary productiveness in some area of human endeavor springing from a three-element amalgam of creativity, high levels of intellectual ability and motivation. The motivation element is, of course, made up of the complex intertwining of the way we think and the way we feel. I have met many individuals, in both educational and therapy settings who are only moderately “successful” or not at all successful even though potentially able but who are disengaged and unhappy at school or college, finding no joy or pleasure in what they are doing, dogged by conflicting ideas about the direction to choose, and overwhelmed by their own uncertainty and doubts. See: Baum, S. M., Reis, S. M., & Maxfield, L. R. (Eds.). (1998). Nurturing the gifts and talents of primary grade students, Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.
With this experience and these observations in mind, the Theory of Positive Disintegration has gradually become a very real and important way for me to view the developmental process in human beings. I have begun to read Dabrowski’s work in depth in the hope that his influence will become more evident in my thinking and my professional practice, both as an educator and coach/counselor. The more I deal with highly able individuals in whatever scenario, the more I find his thoughts resonate with me and help provide a *raison d’etre*, a way to approach and reframe skewed perceptions of, and attitudes towards ourselves, our problems, our potential, and our relationships with our fellow human beings – in other words – to change our identity and the identity of others.

The reaction to Dabrowski’s teaching, once explained to students, teachers, moms and dads, clients, and colleagues, is invariably positive. It made sense to the young man at Schreyer’s College. It seems to make sense to everyone who cares to stop and listen. I gave a presentation recently to parents of highly able/gifted children attending an elementary school in New Hampshire. It was based on overexcitability. They listened intently. Once again, I saw nodding heads and clear indications of enlightenment – just as I had witnessed with my students. This time however, instead of one young man crying, by the end of the presentation there were six adults in floods of tears. I had a chance to talk to one or two of these individuals. One wet-cheeked mom came over to me, looked me in the eye and said, “Thank you so much. It was life changing information. It helped me understand my own intense child and myself – now as a mom and when I was a child.”

I held her hand and replied, “I understand” … and I do.
Title: The Vision of an Ideal Human Being: Genetic Manipulation and Positive Maladjustment

Abstract
The work was inspired by Gregory Stock’s reflections on genetic engineering, describing the germinal choice technology (GCT) which makes germline enhancement plausible.

Dean Hamer’s findings show that it may be possible to manipulate a gene accounting for people’s propensity for “harm avoidance,” which creates the possibility of removing such personality traits as anxiety, shyness, and depression. This creates the temptation of using genetic manipulations by parents to protect children from vulnerability to depression avoiding its possible consequences. However, Peter Whybrow, the director of the Neuropsychiatric Institute at UCLA’s School of Medicine, states that this way of protecting children from all harmful experience might hinder their personality development and leave them “untested and shallow.” Thus, genetic engineering is linked to personality development and particularly to positive maladjustment.

I will try to present the probable way of emerging “positive maladjustment” as a developmental dynamism of the third level in the Theory of Positive Disintegration, using several life-stories to illustrate this process. I hope it will show the important role of human propensity for anxiety and depression in the developmental process and help to define “positive maladjustment” more precisely.

I think there is an important problem to be considered: do we really need to make a choice between the possibility of breaking free from the risk of many disorders and getting a chance to reach higher levels of personality development? Another problem worth considering concerns the definition of “an ideal human being.” Should such an ideal be created via genetic manipulations as a result of our efforts to become resistant to harmful factors? Or is there a better concept of “an ideal” like the one presented in Kazimierz Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration – the vision of a human being who experiences “the toil of existence” and uses the experience to reach a “personality ideal”? This is what I intend to discuss.
The Vision of an Ideal Human Being: Genetic Manipulation and Positive Maladjustment

The following discussion attempts to describe the phenomenon of positive maladjustment as a process that constitutes a part of a far broader process of personality development. If it is considered as a long-term process we have to take into account that it has its own history in every person’s life. When we treat positive maladjustment as a part of a developmental process concerning a whole personality it must be linked to other developmental dynamisms, abilities or tendencies which are typical for successive levels of development. This way of perceiving positive maladjustment should make it possible to answer some questions related to the role of genetic engineering in human life and meaning of an ideal human being.

To begin with, let us analyze childhood as the initial stage of individual development. Some manifestations of maladjustment can become apparent at this stage of life; however, I do not think they should be regarded as evidence of the developmental dynamism called “positive maladjustment” in TPD terms. Although they could represent an opposition to primitive aspects of social environment they are rather biologically determined tendencies being a part of a child’s developmental potential. I suppose such a protest is an expression of strong will to escape or get rid of something tiresome and irritating. This tendency acts like instinct, without making its sense conscious. Social isolation is usually its outcome. This kind of reaction is described by E. Fromm (1978) as “freedom from” and it always leads to loneliness, social isolation, inner emptiness, anxiety. Here are short excerpts from two persons’ autonarratives which are epitomes of social maladjustment in childhood:

**Person 1. Male, age 36**
- about school (age 7-14):

“A teacher had her own preferences. If someone had not matched them, he was perceived badly and remained excluded from participating benefits. I reckoned that it was not my duty to attend school society. […] I had read only books I was interested in. […] Unfortunately, my method of coping with maladjustment was withdrawing into myself more and more. My principle was: nobody will help you if you cannot manage on your own.”

**Person 2. Male, age 52**
- about his relations to others (age till 15):

“First I wanted to be accepted by others so I created image of myself as someone funny, someone whose company makes people feel amused. But I was not meant to be funny. I discovered that sorrow was the authentic state of my mind. I felt I did not fit the patterns which were impressive in my town. […] I grew fond of my sorrow. I got convinced that my sorrow was not a bad state. I would say the sorrow was my proper emotional state.”

The result of this conviction was a retreat into an imaginary world:

“There were my dreams, my imaginations which were leading me, not my reality. […] I soon discovered that I functioned better in a world of dreams and wishes. I felt as though more complete.”
Such a state of defiance and social isolation can be transformed into more mature form of maladjustment. However, it must be taken into account that, according to Fromm, another possibility is feasible – an escape into authoritarianism or other form of compliance. Basing on several case studies, I am convinced that, to a large extent, the ultimate direction of transformation of these early tendencies depends on the experiences of adolescence. It is at this stage of life, where search for own identity is of crucial importance (Erikson, 2000), that first attempts to solve problems of maladjustment appear. The risk is, however, that solutions can be found totally by accident. The research I carried out a few years ago showed the important role of close emotional contact with at least one person, the result of which is a sense of being understood (the outcome of the research were presented in greater detail during the 5th International Conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 2002). This experience is probably one of the most important factors influencing further process of shaping the positive maladjustment as well as the whole process of personal development. Its beneficial effect is that it can help lessen feelings of loneliness and assist in discovering the significance of relationships with other people. Thus, adolescents can focus on seeking their own area of interests and values instead of struggling with fear or depression. Important existential questions which appear at that time are likely to become the foundations of someone’s own hierarchy of values. We should remember that search for and discovery of values is accompanied by different forms of existential anxiety anyway. This suffering is probably necessary to stimulate the developmental process. Another thing worth keeping in mind is that a typical tendency for adolescents is the creation inner world rather then influencing the external one.

Here are some basic questions posed and areas of interests discovered by two examined persons during their adolescence:

**Person 1**
Basic question: “How to communicate with people so that we could understand each other in spite of differences between our inner worlds?”
Discovering his own interests: “I felt fulfilled in what can be described as sensitivity towards art”

**Person 2**
Basic personal discovery: “Reality can be transformed into a performance in your imagination. It makes reality much safer and more attractive. And you can reveal your authentic emotions safely.”

These first important questions and conclusions become the beginning of shaping and reinforcing the crucial personal values which will serve as life principles and make maladjustment having sense. Both cases are examples of a long-term process of self-reflection accompanied by deep insight which is necessary to construct the inner system of values. Person number 1 described the experiences of his early adulthood (age 19-28) in the following way:

“I had discovered myself in chaos. I had time to think about sense of what I would like to do in my work. […] It had been building up something important inside me.”

When this process of “building up something important inside” is advanced, positive maladjustment becomes possible. Maladjustment can be evaluated as positive because is linked to consciousness of its sense arising from life motto (the motto in life of person 1 is: “Help yourself discover your own truth and agreement with other people” and the motto of person 2:
“Let my authentic feelings which look for wisdom become apparent.” The process at this stage is also inextricably linked to responsibility:

“This is my autonomy and I have to give myself to others. My point of view on responsibility for affecting other people changes. Now, it is me who is responsible. The responsibility is significant because I can do something valuable but I can destroy it as well. […] I make a choice and have to be conscious of my responsibility because I live in a world where it is easy to cross the border between truth and lack of truth in relations with close people”

(Person 1)

“Responsibility for others becomes power for myself. It forces me to make right choices”

(Person 2)

Such a form of maladjustment is no longer an expression of “freedom from.” It changes into “freedom to.” It does not lead to social isolation and does not cause a retreat any longer. Thus positive maladjustment is a deliberate choice of some values rather than a spontaneous rejection of others. If the process is limited to rejecting some values only it cannot be regarded as positive.

To sum up this part of discussion, in childhood the maladjustment is an expression of biologically determined tendencies and leads to social isolation, confusion, loneliness. Positive maladjustment can appear in adulthood as a part of personal development. Being a developmental dynamism of level III in terms of TPD it must be considered as connected with autonomous factor allowing conscious choices to be made.

One of the most important issues raised by the above considerations is the role of suffering in the process of transformation of spontaneous immature forms of maladjustment into a developmental dynamism. The analysis of the process suggests suffering being inevitable. Generally, suffering is inextricably linked to human existence; particularly it is a consequence of early manifestations of maladjustment. Being a natural unconscious phenomenon, mental disintegration is likely to be the only emotional motivator pushing people towards personal development. Developmental process could then be understood as a form of healing. Self-defense seems to be the strongest motivating factor for the human need to seek new paths leading to discovery of one’s own values. Thus, provided favorable circumstances, this unconscious existential experience can become the beginning of a conscious developmental process. The situation described above does not leave people any choice. The inevitability of suffering causes directly the necessity of defense. I cannot resist posing a question: what if we had a choice? What if we could design human beings resistant to harmful factors and free from physical and mental suffering? Could this possibility weaken the human need for personal development? These questions appear in reference to the results of recent research which make such situations plausible.

The concept of eugenics defined as genetic improving of species was expounded by Francis J. Galton in XIX century (Black, 2004). Galton used the word “eugenics” for the first time in “Inquires into Human Faculty and Development” published in 1883. In 1906 the term “genetics” meaning research on heredity was created. Since then eugenics and genetics have been in some way connected with each other. Currently two ways of thinking about eugenics can be distinguished: positive eugenics and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics focuses on the pursuit of genetic manipulations which lead to the creation of a pool of positive features existent in a
population and to the multiplication of special abilities and talents. Its aim is homo creator. Negative eugenics, on the other hand, strives for prevention of susceptibility to some diseases and elimination of what is called genetically determined pathology. Its primary focus of interest is homo patiens.

Technological methods have become more and more sophisticated in the 20th century. These days, if we think about artificial intelligence we mean not so much a cybernetic construct imitating human intelligence as an artificially designed and genetically engineered human being. A concept of making human body and mind perfect is not new but its feasibility is still growing. Germinal Choice Technology (GCT) is one of the methods of genetic engineering. Dean Hamer reported several findings that show to what extent some genes account for particular personality traits. An interesting example is a gene which comprises 10% of the population’s genetic variability in novelty-seeking (Stock, 2002, p.107). Even more fascinating for psychologists is the fact that there exists a strong genetic determination of people’s propensity for anxiety, shyness and depression. A gene which is responsible for the tendencies has been discovered. Probably many physical and mental attributes are highly heritable:

“Genetics can explain some 80 percent of people’s variation in height, 70 percent of it in weight, and 60 percent of the variation in blood pressure. The same strong genetic connection also obtains for mental disorders: autism is reported as 90 percent heritable, schizophrenia 50 percent, bipolar disorder more then 70 percent. […] Studies report that our genes account for anywhere from 40 to 60 percent of the variation in personality among us. This includes our level of extroversion and self-involvement, our emotional stability and reaction to stress, our conformity and dependability, our friendliness and likableness, and our general openness and curiosity. Even whether a person says that religion is important in his or her life is about 50 percent heritable” (Stock, 2002. p. 103-104).

We cannot predict when this knowledge will be used empirically but some of scientists are convinced that genetic design of people is feasible. In 2000 Eric Lander, the director of the Whitehead Institute Center of Genome Research noticed: “There will come a time when we can do such things [germinal manipulations] safely, and it is not too soon to ask whether we should” (in: Stock, 2002, p.109).

Making children less vulnerable to harmful biological and social factors would be a great temptation for parents. This way of thinking about an ideal human being suits social expectations – it is the vision of a perfectly adjusted human being. If people could influence their offspring’s health, appearance and abilities making them socially desirable would they resist this possibility? I presume they could not. The rudimentary need for safety and comfort is much stronger and more appealing then the consciousness of the possibility to transcend biological limitations through personal development. It is probable that even knowledge about negative developmental consequences of genetic designing would not stop the pursuit of a homo perfectus effect as people’s common preferences are shaped by biological and social desires rather then by the autonomous factor.
Should we worry about the effects of future progress in the realm of genetics? Nobody can deny the essential human right to happiness and well-being. However, it is not easy to decipher the relationships between particular genes and human behavior as many genes are associated with a personality trait: “A coding variation that predisposes some families to manic depression – a regulatory enzyme, for example, that promotes an unusually broad oscillation of emotional homeostasis – may in combination with other genes determine melancholic psychosis in one family member, and high energy and short sleep in another, resulting in an optimistic temperament” (Whybrow, 1997 in: Stock, 2002, p.112). Besides, nobody can assess to what extent our personality traits depend on genetic predispositions and to what extent they are determined by environmental influences and incidental life events. Therefore we cannot predict the results of removing or weakening sensitivity to various external stimuli. Prediction of far-reaching results of genetic programming seems to be impossible.

Kazimierz Dabrowski suggested an alternative vision of an ideal human being and an alternative vision of reaching personality ideal. This vision is less popular and requires willingness to take risks connected with great developmental effort. The developmental process described by Dr. Dabrowski includes possible risks, especially during unilevel disintegration:

“Na tym poziomie mamy do czynienia z najcięższymi zaburzeniami psychicznymi, z napięciami nie do opanowania, stającymi się przyczyną samobójstwa i chorób psychicznych” (Dabrowski, 1986, p. 43).

(“At this level we have to deal with the most severe psychic disorders, with the tensions not to be controlled becoming the cause of suicides and mental diseases”)

A toil of crossing the mysterious border between level II and level III leads to numerous pathological states. Could possibility of modifying genetic material play any positive role in prevention of dangers? Would it be more sensible to intensify capabilities to cope with difficulties instead of lessening sensitivity? And would it be possible to design such a complicated process? I realize that any answers to the above questions cannot be provided at this moment. I am rather willing to pay attention to the problem of genetic manipulations which seems to be connected with issues concerning personal development and, in consequence, a
problem of positive maladjustment. We cannot avoid the interference of genetics into future functioning of humankind. Maybe it would be good to start to think how to do it wisely.

References:


Paper 9). Norbert Duda // Jean Duda

The Seventh International Congress of the
Institute for Positive Disintegration in
Human Development
August 3-5, 2006
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Title:
Norbert: positive maladjustment in clinical practice. Jean: positive maladjustment created by the clash of personal values and work environment.

Abstract
Norbert: this paper will deal with clarifying a few definitions; reflecting on the life of Dr. Dabrowski; examples in the life of a Vietnam veteran; in the life of faithful dissenters; in the life of French people and illegal immigrants.

Jean: positive maladjustment is often the result of conflicts between an individual's personal values and their work environment. This is especially true when the work environment is within an institution like the church which carries forward a complex institutionalized value structure.

Please also see the pdf file for the handouts.
Paper 10. Clive Hazell, Psychologist, Chicago, IL

The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development
August 3-5, 2006
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Title:
Alterity and the Theory of Positive Disintegration: An Organizing Template

Abstract
This presentation will be a largely theoretical presentation, with examples and illustrations, which will outline a developmental theory of alterity and show how this developmental sequence corresponds with the levels of the theory of positive disintegration. Alterity, or the individual’s sense of the “otherness” of others, is a concept that lies in the heart of many psychological theories. However, alterity takes on many different forms and the different qualities of these forms have not been examined in any systematic fashion. This presentation will describe several different forms of alterity and argue that they can be arranged in a hierarchical, developmental sequence. In addition it will be argued that this herarchical sequence shows remarkable and interesting correspondences with Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration. There are distinct senses of alterity (senses of self and other) that can be found at each of the levels of the theory. In addition, it is hoped that an instrument (currently under development) aimed at measuring several of these different forms of alterity will be available by the time of the presentation.

Please also see the PowerPoint file for the original presentation.
Alterity and the Theory of Positive Disintegration: An Organizing Template

by

Clive Hazell
“Then something even more extraordinary happened. My perception shifted, and for a moment I was the immensity of the stars perceiving the infinite in my physical body. I could see myself in the middle of the desert—so small. I saw that my physical body was made of billions of tiny stars, which I knew were atoms, and they were as vast as all of the stars in the sky.

That night, I knew that the infinite inside my physical body is just a continuation of the infinite all around me. I am part of the infinite all around me. I am part of that infinite, and so is every object I perceive. There is no difference between any of us, or between us and any object.”

(Don Miguel Ruiz, 2004, 46-7)

“I is an other—don’t let this impress you! Don’t start spreading it around that I is an other—it won’t impress anyone, believe me! And what is more it doesn’t mean anything. Because, to begin with, you have to know what an other means. The other—don’t use this term as mouthwash.”

Introduction

The word “alterity” rarely shows up in psychology books. Large numbers of psychologists do not seem to know the meaning of the word. Also uncommon is usage of the term “otherness.” Yet the whole of psychology is suffused with concepts that are intimately related to, or even based upon, assumptions about alterity. In turn, these concepts form parts of theories. These theories, in turn, affect beliefs, and, in turn, action in all the domains in which psychology operates. Thus, many psychological theories are operating on a conceptual basis that is unexamined or not made explicit. Much of the time, it appears that psychological theories operate as if the concept of alterity is stable and settled. It is taken for granted that a certain set of assumptions about self and other are such “common sense” that there is no need to uncover this assumptive base, make it explicit and thus locate the theory in relation to the various notions regarding self and other.

Thus, it is the purpose of this paper to anticipate various sets of assumptions regarding the phenomenon of alterity, to demonstrate the impact these differing assumptions have on theory (and thus action) and to propose a general theory of alterity that will aid in the organization of this concept. This theory will be yoked to Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration. This final position (in which notions of alterity are linked to the theory of positive disintegration) will assert that notions of alterity occur on a developmental continuum. By extension, psychological theories based on different conceptions of alterity will be applicable to specific regions of this developmental continuum.

The overall approach of this book is similar to that taken in The Experience of Emptiness (Hazell 2003), where a largely philosophical or religious idea is examined and defined and an attempt is made to connect it to the corpus of psychological thought. Thus, the concept of alterity
can be examined from a series of perspectives: psychological, philosophical, artistic and religious. These perspectives will only be very lightly hinted at here, as will any attempt to “empiricize” the concept. Forthcoming publications will cover these areas in greater detail. At the end, clinical examples to illustrate the utility of an approach that integrates notions of alterity and the theory of the positive disintegration will be shared.

**Definition of Alterity**

The concept of alterity has a number of different shadings of meaning. I would like, here, to “shave off” some additional meanings of alterity so that, for the purposes of this study we have a delimited, fairly focused definition.

Here, the term “alterity” simply means the state or quality of being other, or of not being of the self. As such, the term implies the recognition and discrimination of the categories of self and other. While it is assumed that the very nature of this discrimination alters with time, place and person such that self and other might be seen as fused, separate, radically separate, transcendentally connected or not discriminated at all, additional evaluations of self and other are not included in this definition. What is under examination here is alterity pure and simple. It may be (and some have argued) that this is a specious and impossible separation, for the very recognition of alterity necessitates such phenomena as devaluation, negation or marginalization of the other. The position held here, however, is that while these evaluations frequently (perhaps usually) are accompaniments of the recognition of alterity, they need not necessarily be and to include them in a study of alterity too early in the day causes unnecessary confusion.

The following seven points further elaborate and clarify the definition of the concept of alterity as it will be used here.
a) Although the antonym of other is often “same” as in self same, and although difference often alerts us to alterity, alterity and difference are not coterminous in meaning. One could be aware of an “identical other” or an imaginary twin.

b) Although the other is frequently disparaged or despised and seen as inferior to self, this is not always the case. Often enough, the other is idealized or worshipped. Equally the other could be viewed as neutral or “OK.” The other does not always have to be scapegoated and used as a repository for unwanted elements of the self nor, even if the other is so used, does it have to be so used unconsciously or with degradation.

c) Further, even though the other is often silent or silenced, this does not always have to be the case. It is possible to have a very vocal other, the other that will not be quiet.

d) While several writers have equated or more accurately conflated alterity with marginality, this conflation does not always have to be the case. One could have a “central other” as in the others that are in the “in crowd” when one is on the margins. Furthermore, alterity can exist in a neutral space, almost bland in its neutral discrimination of self and object.

e) “Alterity” is part of reality, not part of the real. I am using here Lacan’s tripartite notation of “registers” of Real, Symbolic and Imaginary (1977). The alterity of the Real is beyond us, only apprehended in moments of “tuché” when in an uncanny fashion a real event seems to coincide with the social constructions of reality. The Real is the “thing in itself” (of Kantian philosophy); absent symbols, absent imagination, it is complete, gapless and unapprehendable. The concept of alterity does not belong in this set.

f) The concept of alterity is just that, a concept. It thus belongs in the domain of the symbolic, the domain of language. The symbolic overlaps with and interacts with the Imaginary. (Lacan, 1977). Concepts and ideas are infused, to a greater or lesser extent, with imaginary
components, often powered by emotion. In addition, concepts themselves often are derived from imaginary phenomena. Thus the concept of alterity can be found as a “pure” concept, almost algebraic in its logical purity, and it can also be found in forms that are saturated with imaginary components, laden with fantasies and emotion, fantasies of persecution, humiliation, dread, victory and love.

Lacan offers symbols to capture and signify two forms of the other: l’Autre, grand A, and l’autre petit a (meaning the Other with a big “O” and the other with a little “o”).

The Other with a big O is the other (the sense of alterity) found in the symbolic register. This other is the other of laws, of the laws of language, the rules of symbol systems and communication. This other is the other of the prohibition of lawlessness. It is a “castrating other,” the other of the “paternal function.” This other is radically other, very separate from the self. It is perhaps linked with the other of the state.

The other with a little o (l’autre petit a) is the other of the imaginary register. This other is conceptually close to the symbiotic other of Mahler (2000) or the selfobject of Kohut (1971). This other is conceived of as the other that the infant “discovers” in its relationship to the mothering other—an other who is not distant, not rule bound and with whom powerful emotions of love, fear, loss, joy, grief and so on are experienced. The boundaries between self and other here are fuzzy and porous. Similarly, the boundaries between imaginary and symbolic are permeable and exchanges between the two domains are fluid. Another way of saying this is that the thinking about self and other in the domain of other with a little o is prone to primary process thinking—as elaborated by Freud in “Interpretation of Dreams.”(1900) In this realm, the self and other may at one moment be held in a somewhat stable manner by a symbolic representation, only to be disrupted the next moment by an influx primary process thought. There may be
subject-object reversal, condensation, displacement, metaphors that collapse into concreteness and repressed metonymy, to name a few.

From these last few paragraphs there emerges the notion that all discussions of alterity could be placed in these two registers, that is, they could be describing self-other (little o) or self-Other (big O).

It is important to recall that Lacan did not see these two domains as occurring in a developmental sequence even though this notion is at odds with most of ego psychology, which does see this as a diachronic process. One exception would be the elements of Kleinian theory (1946) that postulate the schizoid and depressive positions as being (at least after the attainment of the depressive position) as both synchronic and diachronic.

I have, I hope, accomplished the task of “shaving off” the additional meanings often adhering to the concept of alterity and reduced it, for the current examination, to the bare bones of its meaning, the state or quality of being other. This apprehension may quickly become suffused with meanings and may take multiple forms and the understandings of these are of vital importance in the comprehension of human relationships. These additional meanings, however, are regarded here as superstructure built upon, in complex ways, the substructure of the basic concept of alterity.

**The Theory of Positive Disintegration and Alterity**

In this section I will use the theory of positive disintegration of Kazimierz Dabrowski (1970) as an organizing framework for all the previously described conceptions of alterity. Thus, the different conceptions of alterity will be placed on a developmental continuum that corresponds to the levels of Dabrowski’s theory.
It is important to note, however, that these placements are not entirely diachronic, that is, forms of alterity do not map in a rigid one-to-one fashion for levels of TPD. Since TPD is a hierarchical theory, there will be considerable synchronic aspects to this matching. All levels are present, to a greater or lesser degree, and with greater or lesser degrees of realization in every individual. Thus, for example, while a level III individual will manifest “level III type alterities,” one will also find evidence of alterities typical of all the other levels, although to a lesser degree. In fact, it is the very presence of these different levels within the individual (or within the group) that potentiate development, giving, for example, glimpses of possibilities for further emotional development.

Various forms of alterity will be mapped on to the theory, thus providing an integrating framework for the concept and also arguing that forms of alterity are indicative of level of emotional development as framed by TPD.

The methodology here is the same as that found in The Experience of Emptiness (Hazell 2003) where different forms of the experience of emptiness were shown to be yoked to different levels in TPD.

Correspondences of Forms of Alterity with Levels of TPD

Figure 1 provides an image of the correspondence of notions of alterity to levels in the theory of positive disintegration

Figure 1: Correspondences of Alterity and TPD
The diagram and the table attempt to show the correspondences between the levels of TPD and different forms of alterity.

Development proceeds from left to right, from level I to V. As this development takes place so the sense of self and other is altered.

The developmental process is both diachronic and synchronic, especially in terms of alterity. It is diachronic insofar as there is a linear progression, through time, and if development occurs, from lower levels to higher levels. However, it is also synchronic insofar as once a higher level has been reached; the individual has the capacity to “regress” to earlier forms of alterity.
(for example, in sleep) and also contains synchronous representations of alternative notions of self and other in both the conscious and unconscious mind. Synchronic elements are also present in the model insofar as the potential for later forms of alterity are also present and, to a greater or lesser extent, ready to be activated in the individual at relatively lower levels of development.

**Level I** corresponds with forms of alterity that exist before differentiation of self and other, as we find in Mahler’s concept of “normal autism.” As development proceeds towards self-other differentiation, concepts of self and other progress through “symbiosis” (Mahler 2000) and the “contiguous other” (Ogden 1994). Prior to the emergence of these concepts of self and other we find the “sensation shapes” of Tustin (1952).

Level II is ushered in by concepts of self and other that are still dominated by sensory impressions and physical experiences. Since the majority of people are at level II, these ideas of self and other are very common and conventional, rarely being questioned by most people. It is as if most people, operating at this level, adopt the position, “I am me; you are you. We are separate. It’s only common sense.” In fact, this stage could perhaps be labeled the stage of the conventional, common sense alterity.

As individuals progress through this stage, the apparent stability begins to break up. For one thing, going along with the crowd, and its many voices, is not so easy. Secondly, the individual becomes more aware of their many internal selves. By extension, there is a dawning awareness that others have multiple selves. In this, and in communication, there is some sense of connection of self and other.

The person at this stage (Level II) often feels isolated. Self is separate from other, sustained, perhaps by “object constancy”(Mahler, 2000) but lacking any deep connection with the other, save in regressions to “symbiosis.” The otherness of the other at this stage can thus be
radical. Most psychology belongs to this level of development in that it operates on notions of separate monistic selves and others.

At level III hierarchization of parts of the self occur and fleeting intimations of self-other connectedness occur. These intimations of connection are different from symbiosis and the individual has much work to do to separate these two types of experience.

In addition, these intimations of self-other connection are unconventional and this throws the person into a condition of “positive maladjustment.”

Level III is quite confusional so these different experiences of self and other, self with other, self as other require much thinking out and this consumes much time and effort. Much existential psychology fits at this level, e.g. Tillich (1952).

At level IV we find this effort has paid off and the intimations of a “transcendent” self-other unity have become stabilized and organized. There is still “self” and still “other” but these are connected in deep but ever better comprehended fashion. Thus, in the level IV person we find an unconventional notion of self and other and individual responsibility—ideas different from the norm—ideas often found in poetry, speeches of inspired leaders, gurus and some psychologists.

Jung’s theory, with it concepts of the collective unconscious and synchronicity, provides ideas congruent with this level of development.

Level V, the level of secondary integration, goes beyond words. At this level the concepts of self and other are fused into one. This level is hardly ever addressed in psychology, perhaps because level V moves beyond conventional meanings of the concepts of “self” and “other.” No psychological language has been developed for this domain. Furthermore, such a domain seems
somehow unscientific and perhaps psychologists, anxious to preserve their image as “scientific” in the conventional sense of the word, have been reluctant to venture here.

Philosophers and theologians, perhaps because they are unhampered by such concerns, have ventured into this area. Perhaps Hegel’s (1807) (and Kojève’s, 1980) “absolute master” is level V. Perhaps the mystery of the other, written about by Levinas (1999) refers to level V experiences.

The *Upanishads* and many other religious writings are filled with references to such forms of self-other experiences, references that are often hard for persons at levels I-II to decode.

We can see, therefore, that there are correspondences between TPD and the multiple forms of alterity that seem to exist. TPD provides an organizing framework for all of these experiences.

**Altery: Clinical Examples**

Since all trauma is alteric and all therapy deals with trauma, all therapy deals with issues of alterity. Thus, in seeking clinical examples of alterity, alterity in the consulting room, as it were, one suffers an embarrassment of riches. Where to start?

In some ways the entire therapeutic project can be conceived of as a reformulation of alterity. In working through the transference the “other” of the therapist is liberated from the *meconnaissance* of the client. The client comes to see the therapist as radically other, rather than as a puppet playing a part in the internal phantasmagoria of the client’s past.

In a reverse flow, the client, as they come to recognize, work through, tame and “disown” their introjects, renders to the realm of other that which was felt to be self.
As these two findings regarding the redefinition of self and other are generalized to other relationships the client comes to reformulate notions of self and other on a broad front. This in turn opens the way to yet further redefinitions at higher levels of emotional development. Thus, the course of therapy can be conceived of as operating along the developmental lines described in the theory of positive disintegration. Thus, a clinician could use this scheme to organize their understanding of the client’s developmental struggles. I say struggles because typically clients are operating with a multiplicity of sub-personalities, each one working on its own developmental trajectory or mired in a conflictual morass.

The following examples will, I hope, show how cases may be usefully and interestingly formulated using these constructs.

Dave came to counseling with the presenting problem of what he called “social phobia.” He wanted to go to graduate school but was terrified when trying to enter the classroom. He had always felt like an outsider. He was the odd one out in his family. He was the intellectual. They liked popular television, football and Las Vegas. He had no chums as a boy and felt very alone. His social phobia could be understood as resulting from an overwhelming sense of alterity, of being radically different from others. This difference, as it usually does, associated with feelings of fear, suspicion and paranoia. The transference relationship with Dave was very much like the “twinning” transference described by Kohut(1971). The feeling was very often one of “you are just like me.” There was a similar and related feeling of egalitarian “chumship” between the therapist and Dave. Once the therapist had overcome his initial concerns about his countertransference and was able to both enjoy the sense of chumship while not forsaking their interpretive function, Dave moved forward. It was as if the experience of closeness and similarity
with one another enabled him to cope with the radical “otherness” of the graduate school classroom.

Interestingly, Dave’s forward progress was greatly assisted by a series of events we saw as synchronicity, “signs,” happy coincidences that gave him “lucky breaks” while also deepening in him a transcendent feeling of deep connectedness with others and the world.

Sally, too, presented with a serious social phobia, and this, too, was interfering with her forward progress. College classes were a torture to her, especially if they involved public speaking.

In counseling she told of a childhood of social ostracism and of being beaten by her angry sister. Her father abandoned her and she felt that her resemblance to him led to her being excluded by the family at large who also treated her as if she was “odd” and “somehow very different.” It was perhaps this chronic alienation that resulted in a deep feeling of “otherness” that she had. Much of the counseling had to do with helping her “read’ social situations, label feelings that she and others had and coming to accept them as ordinary, common, human experiences. An outgrowth of this seemed to be her feeling less “odd,” more at home and more like others. It was as if a radical alterity that she felt was slowly overcome and replaced with a sense of familiarity and continuity. This was not a transcendent sense of fusion of self and other. It was simply a sense of being similar to and in contact with the other. As this feeling strengthened, her social phobia weakened and she was able to progress in school and career.

While the previous two individuals felt estranged from others as a result of a chronic, cumulative trauma of being continually “othered” by their families, sometimes clients are radically othered by a short, sharp trauma. Marnie, for example, was traumatized upon discovering a cache of her father’s violent pornography. “Who was this man?” she wondered. He
was clearly other than she believed. A chasm, an unbridgeable rift formed between her as a young girl and her father, now a stranger.

Bronwyn had a similar experience of traumatic alterity not only when sexually molested by her brother, but also when her mother refused to believe her when she told her of the abuse.

In these instances, the individual is traumatically othered, isolated, estranged, cut off. This experience goes beyond the feeling of being alone, for the individual can conceptualize this. This radical alterity, however, goes beyond thought; it is unthinkable, dreadful, stunning, and even awesome.

One of the clinical tasks, in addition to the many that have been addressed in the extensive literature on trauma and sexual molestation and abuse, is to help the client work through the experience of radical alterity and its sequelae. Simple acknowledgment of this experience of radical alterity in an empathic way can go a long way to overcoming the deep estrangement adhering to these experiences.

In other clinical situations the process is approximately reversed. That which was felt to be self is, as it were, extruded, and experienced as other. In clinical language, an introject is identified and then disowned and seen as not belonging to the self.

Luke, 45, was depressed and lonely. Although he longed to marry and have a family, he had never had a significant, long relationship with a woman and was despairing of ever doing so. In the course of therapy it emerged that in some ways he had introjected his controlling and possessive mother. It was as if he was a sort of doppelgänger. Unawares, he was two people, himself and his mother. This couple, experienced as one, was “married” such that every time Luke started to have a successful relationship with a woman his jealous “wife-mother,” whom he experienced as a set of attitudes held by himself, would rear up in a jealous, possessive rage and
cause him to end the relationship. Luke would manifest these two subpersonalities in a striking way in therapy sessions. When speaking from “Luke” he would lean to one side of the seat. When speaking from “mother” he would lean to his right, the other side of the seat. In addition, when he was speaking as “defeated Luke,” when his relationship had been successfully sabotaged by his internalized mother, he would slump forward, fold his feet under his calves and put his hands together in an upside-down prayer position, manifesting a hole between his thumbs and forefingers.

Gradually, by drawing his awareness to these three subpersonalities, Luke was able to effect a “divorce” from his internalized “wife-mother” (that he felt as himself) and live a life relatively free from “her” internalized sabotage. This was not always easy because, since “she” was an introject, Luke would experience her as a center of his own subjectivity. Ultimately that which was experienced as himself was to some extent expunged and seen as other.

José manifested a similar dynamic. At times, during sessions, he would suddenly change, perhaps spooked by a word or comment made by the counselor. He would shift from being warm, lively, humorous and engaging to being officious, hard-driving, angry, forceful and argumentative. As he engaged in these tirades, he was, as it were, caught up in them. Only after a year or so were we able to see that these “tirade states” were the result of him having introjected a sadistic, persecutory brother. As a young boy, he had shared a bedroom with his older brother who had chronically teased and tormented him. It was excruciatingly painful for José and he had coped by introjecting his brother and by repressing the elements of himself that had been linked to him. This introject, originating as “other” was now experienced (when it became partially conscious) as part of self. Through the course of therapy this introjected other was identified as
such. The sense that this was “self” eroded and more libidinal energy was released. José became more confident, got and kept a girlfriend and completed graduate studies.

Conclusion

The experience of otherness is multidimensional and multilevel. As such, the theory of positive disintegration provides an extremely useful and comprehensive template for organizing and understanding its many forms. Given that the theory of positive disintegration is a developmental model, this also means that the clinical applications are close at hand, robust and practical.

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Ogden, T., *The Matrix of the Mind*, Jason Aronson, 1994


Paper 11). Dexter Amend, Psychologist, Spokane, WA

The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development
August 3-5, 2006
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Title:

Abstract

A brief overview of Michael Piechowski’s book, “Mellow Out,” They Say. If I Only Could: Intensities and Sensitivities of the Young and Bright, in the context of the Positive Maladjustment Congress.
2006 Dabrowski Congress

The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development

Positive Maladjustment:

Theoretical, Educational and Therapeutic Perspectives.

August 3-5, 2006

Calgary, Alberta
The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development

Conference Schedule
Location: Brentwood Room

Thursday, August 3, 2006 – Day 1

1800-2100 Reception: Best Western Village Park Inn

with the showing of the Dabrowski Video - followed by reminiscences of his former students

Friday, August 4, 2006 – Day 2

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<tr>
<td>0815-0830</td>
<td>Bill Tillier: Welcome and Opening Remarks</td>
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<td>An overview of the agenda, the context of positive maladjustment within the TPD and an introduction of Dr. Rankel.</td>
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<td>0830-0930</td>
<td>Marlene Rankel: Keynote Speaker</td>
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<td>“We, Whose Task is Wakefulness Itself ... Dr. K. Dabrowski – a most positively maladjusted psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and philosopher”</td>
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<td>0930-1000</td>
<td>Break: Discussion and Networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>1000-1100</td>
<td>Cecile de Vries and Dawn Johnston, Graduate Students, University of Calgary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Spiritual Development: Spiritual Crisis as Positive Maladjustment”</td>
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1100-1200 | Krystyna Laycraft, Center for Chaotic Studies, Nanton, Alberta

“Positive Maladjustment As a Transition from Chaos to Order”

1200-1330 | Lunch

1330-1430 | Sari Johanna Mullola-Mäkinen, Assistant, Researcher, Postgraduate Student, Centre for Research on Teaching, Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland

“Ethos of the Excellence: The Social-Emotional Well-Being of Sportily and Musically Talented Adolescents”

1430-1530 | Michael Pyryt, Centre for Gifted Education, University of Calgary, and Sal Mendaglio, Division of Teacher Preparation, University of Calgary

“The Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect: Social Comparison Processes and Positive Maladjustment”

1530-1600 | Break: Discussion and Networking

1600-1700 | Bill Tillier, Psychologist, Calgary Alberta


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Saturday, August 5, 2006 – Day 3

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<tr>
<td>0830-0930</td>
<td>Trevor J. Tebbs Ph.D., Educational Consultant Trevor, Franklin Pierce College, Rindge, New Hampshire</td>
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“Dabrowski, enlightenment and transformation: A personal reflection”
0930-1030  Anna Mroz, Professor, Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of Zielona Gora, Poland

“The Vision of an Ideal Human Being: Genetic Manipulations and Positive Maladjustment”

1030-1100  Break

1100-1230  Norbert & Jean Duda, Psychologists, Plantation, FL

“Positive Maladjustmen in Clinical Practice”

1230-1330  Lunch

1330-1430  Clive Hazell, Psychologist, Chicago, IL

“Alterity & the Theory of Positive Disintegration”

1430-1530  Dexter Amend, Psychologist, Spokane, WA

A review of the congress.

1530-1700  Q & A and Discussion Panel, followed by discussion on the planning of the 2008 Congress.

1815 -  BANQUET: Cocktails and socializing followed by dinner

Closing Remarks: Sal Mendaglio and Michael Pyryt

Sunday, August 6, 2006

No formal sessions planned

THE CONGRESS COMMITTEE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OFFERED BY:

The Seventh International Congress of the Institute for Positive Disintegration in Human Development
August 3-5, 2006
Calgary, AB, CANADA
Congress Handouts:

RELEVANT WEB PAGES

Bill’s Dabrowski webpage:
http://members.shaw.ca/positivedisintegration/

University of Calgary:
http://www.ucalgary.ca/

Centre for Gifted Education (co-sponsor)
http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gifteduc/
## List of Congress Attendees

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