

SOME REMARKS ON THE SCOPE OF
THE THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

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each one of the levels of the inner psychic milieu have been the object of extensive and detailed analysis. (3)

The developmental approach to personality underlines the fact that conflict, struggle, pain, and suffering, normally play a very important role in psychic growth, and are the conditions that will provoke the disintegration of primitive psychic structures. This loosening of the structures organized mainly around biological interests and drives, gives place to the shaping of new attitudes and, gradually, to the initial conflict among different instincts or drives of the same level. This is expressed in behavior by attitudes of ambivalence and ambipendencies, and will begin to differentiate within the drives or functions themselves by distinguishing in them different levels, some with a higher personal quality than others.

At this point a new stage begins called multilevel disintegration. It arises as a spontaneous process and is normally the developmental result of the conflicts of the previous stage. Here the individual begins to feel insecure about himself, with feelings of inferiority in relation to himself, astonishment with himself, disquietude, and feelings of shame and guilt. There also appear creative forces. Further on the autonomous forces

(3) K. Dabrowski Positive disintegration. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1964.

K. Dabrowski Personality-shaping through positive disintegration. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967.

K. Dabrowski Mental growth through positive disintegration. Submitted for publication.

K. Dabrowski Le milieu psychique interne. Annales Medico-psychologiques, 1968, 2, 457-485.

of the individual take an active part in the process, organizing, directing and shaping it. This stage is called multilevel organized disintegration and constitutes the fourth developmental stage. On this level the higher integrative forces play a greater role over the disintegrative ones. Dynamisms such as the "subject-object" in oneself, the "third factor", self-awareness, self-control, and others are of a mixed type and act as integrators and disintegrators, while other dynamisms act mainly as integrators. These are the dynamisms of autonomy, authenticity, self-education, autopsychotherapy, and others. The next stage is known as the level of secondary integration or personality level, where the will or directing force is identified with the personality ideal.

One of the most fruitful intuitions of Dr. Dabrowski is the recognition of different levels of psychic functions related to the various groups of dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu. In this way, besides the neurophysiological criterion for distinguishing higher and lower psychic functions, there are two other objective criteria that open a very rich and new area for further research and verification. It is the description of the group of dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu that shape certain particular traits in the individual's patterns of behavior and that express themselves through the function or group of functions (emotional, intellectual or instinctive) that can be observed and studied. The actual specific qualities of the function itself, even though very much influenced by the

presence or absence of the previously mentioned dynamisms, will also express its level of development directly through the comprehension of certain values proper of this type and level of function or group of functions. Besides the diagnosis of the developmental stage of the inner psychic milieu, and the recognition of the different dynamisms that constitute it, we approach the possibility of establishing the degree of emotional development of a given individual through objectively designed tests.

The study of the levels of emotional functions is related to the field of ethics and may have a powerful influence over it in the future. According to the theory of positive disintegration, a certain degree of maturity is necessary for the individual in order to enable him to apprehend values, as Nicolai Hartmann already pointed out in his "Ethics", (4) but with the invaluable addition that the developmental stages that lead to this "ethical maturity" are studied and described, thereby pouring new light on the deep meaning of many of the so-called pathological phenomena and opening a completely new perspective in the study of personality.

Thus, the necessary psychological conditions for the development of the capacity for objective valuation are given. According to them, a high statistical correlation is expected

(4) "Not everyone is capable of it, not everyone has the eye, the ethical maturity, the spiritual elevation, for seeing the situation as it is. Nevertheless, the universality, necessity and objectivity of the valuational judgment hold good in idea. For this universality does not at all mean that everyone is capable of insight in question. It only means that whoever is capable of it--that is, whoever has attained the adequate mentality--must necessarily feel and judge thus and not otherwise." Nicolai Hartmann Ethics, Vol. 1. London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1932. Pp. 225-226.

among the valuation of groups of different individuals pertaining to the higher levels of development, as established by independent tests concerning the types of dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu present in them.

The distinction of levels in the emotional and instinctive functions opens a new dimension in the study of many psychological phenomena, as for instance, the inter- and intraneurotic hierarchies of psychic structures and functions, (5) the concept and function of maladjustment, and the notion of equilibrium. It is clearly pointed out that the distinction of levels in the process of mental growth towards the fully developed personality modifies the attitude of approaching mental problems without considering the actual meaning of the specific symptom in relation to the whole developmental process of the individual. It is not only a question of attaining psychic equilibrium or of having an integrated psyche, but it is most important to consider the "level" in which that particular equilibrium or integration has been attained. Emotional maturity and responsibility cannot be reached without painful experiences and crises, and they are much more valuable for the individual and for society than a very efficient kind of activity that would lack those particular traits. In fact, the latter usually is a source of discomfort and abuse in the social structure and may produce positive harm to great numbers of people that happen to be under that influence.

(5) K. Dabrowski Psychoneurosis is not an illness. Submitted for publication.

New fields are open to the systematic investigation of psychic phenomena, such as the differentiation of levels of mental functions, the transcending of the biological life cycle, the transformation of the psychological types, the correlation between psychoneurotic symptoms and special abilities and talents, the study of the inner psychic milieu and its importance in the shaping of human responses, (6) a new, deeper approach to the feeling of inferiority, (7) the concept of adjustment, the autonomous factors and their role in the developmental process, and a new approach to the study of personality as well as the levels of emotional disturbance, and the different meanings of mental equilibrium.

The influence of the theory in the fields of psychiatry, education, sociology and even philosophy may be decisive, and its contribution to the development of man, unsuspected.

It is very difficult to mention, in a brief article, all or even most of the outstanding contributions of the theory of positive disintegration in the knowledge of man and his world. There is a very complex philosophical attitude that sets up the basic ground for this new approach. It is the philosophy of development through experience, action, and choice. It is the understanding of the capacity of man for creating, so to

(6) Ludwig Klages studied the transformation of stimuli by the living being in general. Ludwig Klages The science of character. London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1929.

(7) Philipp Lersch approaches the problem of "self-esteem" in a similar way as Dabrowski's "inferiority feeling". Philipp Lersch Aufbau der person. Munchen: J.A. Barth, 1966.

speak, the reality in which he lives. The level of the reality discovered and created at the same time, will be in a strict correspondence with the level of psychic development attained by the individual.

Man is the creator of his own development, of the reality he will accomplish in himself by his own repeated choices. He cannot choose what is out of his reach, but within his possibilities he is able to select some and reject others.

There are strong biologically determined pressures that almost govern the psyche in its early life. But there are also powerful mental dynamisms which will gradually liberate man's life from the biological urges and will enable him to discover higher values of a different order, where the individual may find his more authentic and worthy expression in the search for his personality ideal and his way towards secondary integration.

Knowledge from the point of view of the theory, is not the attribute of one single function or group of functions, but must be attained through the collaboration of all the functions: emotional, intellectual and instinctive, interacting in the process of attaining higher levels. The full meaning of reality is not a one-sided reality which can be the realm of the mathematician, the philosopher, or of the poet alone, nor the efficient world of the economist. Reality must be approached through a multisided and multilevel perspective that finally enables man to find, in the plurality of his experiences, the

deep meaning of his own existence. (8)

The process of knowledge implies a capacity of objectifying one's own interior experiences and, in the same extent, the capacity of dealing with others as subjects, with all the meaning that this term has when we apply it to ourselves.

This new and revolutionary approach to the problem of mental health and human mental development is the result of many years of experience and clinical work under a high and exceptionally synthetic and powerful mind. The scope of the theory can be deduced from the number and importance of the problems reached. The simplicity and clarity of the approach brings with it the seal of great discoveries. One question arises, Are we prepared to grasp all its deep meaning and face its consequences? We know how many psychological "resistances" truth finds in its way to liberate us from comfortable irresponsibility and "sickness". Perhaps it will still take many years of labor, effort and trust, but one day we will understand what a great benefit we received from one man, sincere and courageous, that used the talents he had received in the service of mankind.

(8) K. Dabrowski Introduction to a developmental philosophy of man. In preparation.