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MULTILEVELNESS OF INSTINCTIVE  
AND EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

The use of expressions like "noble emotions", "base emotions", "noble instincts", "base instincts", suggests that different emotions and instincts operate on different levels. Flaubert in "Salambo" even used the expression: "she experienced feelings of higher order". Can emotions and instincts be split into levels? In regard to this problem there exist two contrary positions: The first is based on personal experiences and a penetrating psychological insight of people who show the characteristics of global development. It is expressed in a conviction that there clearly exist levels of instincts and emotions, and that these levels can be defined and described and can be universally accepted. The second position is represented by behaviorists and other scientists who maintain that the so-called multilevelness of instinctive and emotional functions is a relative phenomenon dependent on a particular culture and the history of that culture.

This conflicting situation was changed gradually by many investigations concerning intelligence and psychomotricity. The methods and techniques which were developed and which made systematic empirical studies possible have an objective character and with some modification can be applied to individuals belonging to different cultures. As a result, the position of common sense is gradually overcoming the so-called exact and scientific position which does not take into account human developmental dynamisms.

So-called normal people can generally agree in distinguishing what is right from what is wrong, what is lower from what is higher, what is moral from what is immoral, and what is human from what is beastly.

Child-beating, brutal fights, abuse of weakness, lying, tortures, desecration of cemeteries, will all be universally regarded as an expression of moral deficiency, while helping the sick, gratitude, not punishing without trial, care of children and women, will be universally regarded as more human, higher and moral.

These criteria do not apply to the conduct of societies in times of war, to material and moral exploitation, to extreme poverty and to collective following of a wrong example, i.e. at times when the lowest drives are uncontrolled.

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What happens under these conditions is a sort of negative regression to primitive impulse and action. Individuals who are not psychopathic or intellectually or morally deficient, are ashamed of these actions, if they were drawn into them; subsequently they develop feelings of inferiority, dissatisfaction with themselves, and a desire for expiation. These feelings are, in fact, evidence of developmental potential.

These positive human feelings can be clearly observed in individuals developing globally at an accelerated rate. They can also be observed in those who develop special mental abilities. In such individuals, and in groups of such individuals, we encounter a developed sensitivity and subtlety of awareness in discriminating between that which is more human and that which is less human, that which is higher and that which is lower, that which is moral and that which is immoral. These people actively resist manifestations of moral evil and actions which express moral deficiency. They display a facility in transposing the experiences of others onto themselves and of their own experiences onto others. In this way they show empathy and the capacity for identification with others. Not only are they sensitive in regard to the events of everyday life but are ready to act so as to realize higher human attitudes.

Such individuals usually have a much sharper awareness of a hierarchy of values than so-called normal individuals; taken as a group they show less divergency in their judgment of higher or lower levels of a given phenomenon, which they consider in the context of a universal hierarchy of values. In general these are the individuals who for themselves, and by themselves, work out a program of emotional and moral development, control it, and apply it in everyday life. These are the individuals who strive for moral perfection, who strive to achieve control of expression of their primitive drives and emotions.

These individuals in some ways represent the personality ideals that have a tremendous influence on the shaping of values in smaller or larger groups. They are the creators of so-called norm-patterns which are the fundamentals of an objective hierarchy of values.

The question of the objectivity of a hierarchy of values is discussed elsewhere. (1) In summary one can say that individuals who undergo universal

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(1) Higher emotions and the objective of value judgments. In K. Dabrowski, Mental growth through positive disintegration.

development arrive at their own hierarchy of values somewhat independently of their background, education and culture. The development of these individuals is propelled by autonomous mental functions. Its mark is a consciously chosen self-determination. The values developed by these individuals tend to be universal. A closer analysis of their development was one of the starting points for the formulation of the theory of positive disintegration. (2,3).

### The Inner Psychic Milieu (3,4)

Personality growth involves conflicts: external, if it is between oneself and others, and internal, if it is within oneself. The territory where man enters into a conflict with himself is the inner psychic milieu.

The concept of inner psychic milieu can be loosely defined as a group of dynamisms of the psyche, which can be in mutual conflict or collaboration. Both the conflict and the collaboration of dynamisms serve personality development. (5) The organization of the inner psychic milieu has a certain hierarchy of levels where different dynamisms can operate on different levels. If they oppose each other then a multilevel conflict arises. Undeveloped inner psychic milieu is ahierarchical, i.e. it is an early stage where different levels of functioning have not yet appeared.

The presence and growth of the inner psychic milieu is especially characteristic of so-called accelerated development and at the same time of nervousness and psychoneuroses.

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

(3) K. Dabrowski Mental growth through positive disintegration. Unpublished manuscript.

(4) K. Dabrowski Le milieu psychique interne. Annales medico-psychologiques, 1968,2, 457-485.

(5) K. Dabrowski Mental growth through positive disintegration. Unpublished manuscript.

In our view, lability of the autonomic nervous system (neuro-vegetative functions), psychic excitability and light depressions in combination with certain dynamisms of multilevel disintegration such as astonishment with respect to oneself, feelings of guilt, feelings of inferiority towards oneself, and most important - the third factor, make up the dynamic elements of a positive psychic development of the individual. These dynamic elements contribute to the formation of a rich inner milieu.

These forms of increased sensitivity, and the dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu, denoting a great richness on one hand and a lability and disequilibrium of psychic functioning on the other, are expressions of a rich hereditary endowment, of a capacity for inner transformation of personal experiences, and of a psychic plasticity necessary for positive development. These symptoms are predominantly psychoneurotic but they indicate, except for a small percentage of cases which end in involution, that what is happening is a process of positive human development - not a disease. One could even risk a statement that creative development without some nervous, neurotic, or psychoneurotic dynamisms is rarely possible.

#### The Stages of the Process of Positive Disintegration

Human development according to the theory of positive disintegration includes five clearly distinguishable stages or levels: primary integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, directed multilevel disintegration and secondary integration.

The first stage, called primary integration, is characterized by mental structures and functions of a low level which are automatic and impulsive, determined by primitive, innate drives. At this stage, intelligence neither controls nor transforms basic drives. It is used in a purely instrumental way, so as to supply the means towards the ends determined by primitive drives. There is no inner conflict.

Positive disintegration can be differentiated into unilevel disintegration and multilevel disintegration.

Unilevel disintegration consists of disintegrative processes on a single structural and emotional level. Unilevel disintegration begins with a loosening of the rigid structure of primary integration. Among its first symptoms are increased sensitivity to internal stimuli, vague feelings of disquietude, ambivalences and ambtendencies, various forms of disharmony, and, gradually, the nuclei of hierarchization of both the external stimuli and one's own mental structure. At the beginning this hierarchization is very weak. There is a continuous vacillation between "pros" and "cons", no clear direction "up" or "down".

Multilevel disintegration can be spontaneous (early phase of development) or organized and controlled (advanced phase of development). As soon as the process of hierarchization becomes more pronounced (i.e. when it can be said to become multilevel), the difference between that which is "closer to my better self" and that which is more distant from it, and the difference between "what is" and "what ought to be", becomes clearly distinguishable, the individual passes to the next developmental stage, that of spontaneous multilevel disintegration. This is the time of the appearance of such developmental dynamisms as astpnishment with oneself, disquietude with oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself, the feelings of shame and guilt, the feeling of inferiority toward oneself. The individual searches not only for novelty, but for something higher; he searches for examples and models in his external environment and in himself. He starts to feel the difference between a higher and a lower level. This is the beginning of an experience and of perception of many levels. We can notice the formation of a critical awareness of oneself and of other people, awareness of one's "essence" as it arises from one's existence. Spontaneous multilevel disintegration is a crucial period for positive, developmental transformations.

The loosening and disintegration of the inner psychic milieu in multilevel disintegration occurs at higher and lower strata at the same time. This means that the whole personality structure is affected by this process.

During organized multilevel disintegration which is the next stage, a person exhibits more tranquility, systematization and conscious transformation

of oneself. The developmental dynamisms which distinctly appear at this stage are: "subject-object" in oneself, the third factor, self-awareness and self-control, identification, education-of-oneself and autopsychotherapy. The ideal of personality takes more distinct contours and becomes closer to the individual. There is a pronounced growth of empathy.

The last stage called secondary integration brings about a new organization and harmonization of personality. The main dynamisms active at this stage are: autonomy and authenticism, personality ideal, a subtle highly refined empathy, and activation of the ideal. The relationship of "I" and "thou" takes on a new dimension. There appears a growing need to transcend "verifiable" reality (known through sensory perceptions) and to reach toward an empirical reality through intuition, contemplation, and ecstasy.

#### Multilevelness in Psychology and Physiology

The psychologist does not accept the concept of "higher in level". In other scientific fields like physiology and neurophysiology there is a tradition of using this concept. In neurophysiology the cortical activities are higher than spinal and subcortical activities. In the cortex the frontal activities are higher than the parietal, occipital and temporal activities. It is not clearly understandable why the transition from neurophysiology to psychology changed basically the terms nearer and higher and their application to fairly strictly defined groups and levels of functions.

Hughlings Jackson has already given us the basis for a general grasping of the multilevelness of functions.

Jackson has formulated three principles operating in the evolution of the nervous system. These principles are as follows:

1. Evolution is the transition from the simplest toward the most complex centers.
2. Evolution is the transition from a well organized lower center toward



higher, less well organized centers.

3. Evolution is the transition from more automatic toward more voluntary functions.

Syllabus of Multilevelness of Functions.

The author of this theory has depicted the mental development of man in a syllabus of transition from lower to higher forms of mental functions.

SYLLABUS OF TRANSITIONS FROM LOWER TO HIGHER FORMS OF PSYCHIC FUNCTIONS

primitive automatic reflexiveness	reflectiveness (action of the "own forces", voluntary action)
stimulus-response system of drives	motivation follows intra-psychic transformation
first and second factors heredity and environment	the third factor and other autonomous factors
primitive instincts (e.g. self-preservation, sex, aggressiveness)	higher instincts (e.g. cognitive, creative, instinct of perfection)
primitive levels of an instinct	higher levels of the same instinct (intra-instinctive development)
unilevel	multilevel
ahierarchic	hierarchic
reality function limited to everyday life	creative reality function associated with retrospection and prospection (new aims and higher aims)
fractional, narrow understanding of reality	integral, broad understanding of reality
impulsive syntony	reflective and meditative syntony

intellect subordinated to  
primitive drives

intellect in strict collaboration  
with higher emotions (i.e. intellect  
and higher emotions operate equipoten-  
tially)

subordination to primitive  
instinctive forces

autonomy

limited role of consciousness

significant role of consciousness (self-  
awareness)

selfishness

alterocentrism

complete dependence on the  
biological cycle

transcendence of the biological life cycle  
(e.g. sustained mental vitality, creativi-  
ty and lucidity of the mind in spite of  
senile infirmity of the body)

limitation to innate psycholo-  
gical type

transcendence of innate psychological  
type

imitation of others

originality and creativity

conformity

authenticity

one-sided development

universal development

adjustment to social norm

adjustment to norm derived from the  
personality ideal

simple adjustment to actual si-  
tuation in life (i.e. adjust-  
ment to "what is")

qualified adjustment and positive malad-  
justment (adjustment to "what ought to be")

feelings of inferiority in  
relation to others

feelings of inferiority in relation  
to oneself

taking education

education-of-oneself

heteropsychotherapy

autopsychotherapy

unity of volition with primitive  
drives

will as a function of personality

### Some Examples of the Multilevelness of Functions

Following are some examples of the multilevelness of emotional and instinctive functions based on the theory of positive disintegration.

#### 1) Instinct of self-preservation.

Primitive integration is characterized by primitive, biological manifestations of this instinct taking the form either of aggression or escape. The instinct is directed primarily toward the preservation of the individual himself. It comes into action at times of threat to health or material existence (with periodical need of protecting the nearest family). In case of hunger the need for food is realized brutally, without any feeling for justice or comradeship. (Descriptions of this kind of behavior are common in the literature concerning German concentration camps).

On a slightly higher level the instinct of self-preservation shows a tendency for protective actions, but only into the near future, like selection of shelter or accululation of food supply. These actions frequently involve deceit and may cause harm to others.

On the second level the self-preservation instinct to a certain extent is "psychologized". One observes hesitations in the realization of self-preservation needs, weakening of brutality, ambivalences and ambitendencies (socio-moral inhibitions, inhibition of aggressive tendencies and their temporary removal, uncertainty of action, sympathy colliding with aggressive tendencies, etc.), certain manifestations of empathy toward others. Conflicts between drives do not introduce into decisions and emotional attitudes a differentiation of levels of values. In other words there is no distinct hierarchization. When certain capacity for identification with others and for understanding their difficulties is present (reduction of primitive manifestations of the self-preservation instinct) it exerts only very little effect towards a more lasting change of egocentric and selfish attitudes. If an individual on this level shows understanding of difficult situations, or joys of other people, then this phenomenon is temporary and quickly yields to retreat into

preoccupation with his own affairs. He shuts off momentarily shown "sentiments".

On the third level, the influence of the dynamisms of multilevel spontaneous disintegration, the modification of the self-preservation instinct become quite marked. The mental determinants of the self-preservation instinct begin to act. One observes on this level a growing care for the preservation of moral, intellectual and creative values, frequently with a neglect, for instance, of the necessary care for health. This stage of growing above the instinctive drive for self-preservation plays an enormously significant role in education. Its most frequent expression is the fact that parents and educators strive to develop in children moral values on a higher level than their own. This subjugation of the self-preservation instinct to moral values is shown in the care to preserve a good name and honour.

On the fourth level there is a clear hierarchical organization of values in which the lower levels of the self-preservation instinct are subordinated to its higher levels. This is manifested in a capacity for sacrifice for the sake of ideals, in a need to preserve and to develop these ideals. This is an expression of a partial death instinct which is closely connected with inner psychic transformation. The partial death instinct finds its expression in the experience, and resulting from it conviction, that some elements of our present experimental structure move towards the margin, or even are subject to total atrophy. In this way a part of "us" is lost: it is subject to spontaneous and consciously elected death. The phenomenon of partial death instinct can take different forms: elimination of the lowest levels of primitive drives, e.g. elimination of selfishness and kindness, asceticism (resignation from personal ambitions for the sake of serving others, etc. The partial death instinct is an example of an autonomous developmental dynamism. It points to the presence of other autonomous developmental dynamisms.

On the fifth level the characteristic traits are total identification with personality and its ideal, striving for the preservation of the "absolute" self, striving for the preservation of one's central personal qualities, and for the preservation of others as subjects. The highest expression of this level of development of self preservation that man has ever ascended to was the suffering of Christ.

## 2) Sexual instinct.

Sexual instinct on the first level is undifferentiated: it is entirely controlled by biological factors. It is directed towards typical more or less attractive representatives of the opposite sex. The result of the dominance of biological dynamisms over moral ones is lack of sensitivity towards the needs of the partner. Sexual needs are imposed on the other without sympathy and without understanding of the other's needs. This manner of satisfying the sexual drive makes stability, exclusiveness, and cooperation with parental instinct impossible. The dominant role of biological factors is evident through the following: lack of consideration for age, state of health, or mental condition of the partner; little inhibition in the use of force; lack of ability for retrospection and prospecting in sexual life. After the sexual act, i.e. after the release of energy, some psychopathic individuals are subject to "sexual depression" to which they react by aggression, even murder.

On the second level a gradual loosening of the biological structure of the sexual instinct takes place. This occurs through periodical states of reflection, periodical but changeable sympathy with the partner, periodical short range retrospection and prospecting, disequilibrium of excitations and inhibitions. Sexual tension builds up easily, there is some inclination towards perversion but with consent of the partner. This shows that sexual aggressiveness is less strong. Some responsibility for the partner and family is present and may increase but it is subject to hesitations. These hesitations are an expression of the dynamisms of ambivalence and ambivalence characteristic for unilevel disintegration. The biological force of the sexual instinct diminishes periodically. At such times it is subject to inhibition arising from an increase of sensitivity and sympathy to the feelings of the partner and the needs of the family. These are characteristic manifestations of unilevel disintegration in the area of sexual activity. This means that the experience is not subject to clear hierarchization of values but rather "moods of evaluation".

On the third level reflection and valuation begin to play an increasing role in sexual life. Its expression is sexual selectiveness. This selectiveness grows from actual experiences and from an ability to foresee the consequence of one's actions. There are manifestations of an exclusiveness and stability of feelings, of responsibility for the partner and the family, preponderance of emotional components over sexual-physical ones. Gradually the sexual instinct loses its character of a biological species drive and becomes an instinct with an expression individually human. This can be seen not only in the predominance of emotional over sexual attachment but also in exclusiveness. The feelings of exclusiveness frequently lead to strong sexual inhibition, even impotence, when the partner leaves or dies. For example in the author's clinical practice there was the case of a man 40 years old, father of seven children who became impotent after his wife left him. His impotence lasted several years until the time when his wife returned to him. This is an example of an inhibition of the lower level of an instinct (biological level of sexual drive) by a higher level of the same instinct (emotional attachment and exclusiveness).

Such attitudes arise as a result of the action of the dynamisms of spontaneous multilevel disintegration. These dynamisms promote the development not only of an increasing responsibility for the family but also of strong tendencies toward idealization of sexual and related experiences. Thus astonishment with the phenomena of one's own sexuality occurs when one is surprised by some ahierarchical (biological) and embarrassing symptoms of strong sexual tendencies arising easily and unselectively. Disquietude with oneself and feelings of inferiority towards oneself are similar in their manifestation, however, the emotional tension of these dynamisms is greater. Both dynamisms are an expression of the growing distance between the arising ideal of sexual life and certain tendencies in oneself which conflict with this ideal. Yielding often to frequently arising sexual impulses creates in consequence dissatisfaction with oneself. The feeling of shame, and the feeling of guilt towards the partner, are most often concerned with the subjective element of harm done to the partner in sexual life. At this stage of development the creative instinct helps to experience the "other" and the "new" (most often also the "higher") in sexual life.

On the fourth level a clear organization of emotional-cognitive dynamisms develops in the area of the sexual instinct. The activity of these organizing and systematizing dynamisms (such as the third factor and subject-object in oneself) causes deep transformations in the attitudes towards sexual life. In respect to the ideal of exclusiveness and stability what begins to develop is a philosophical attitude (i.e. a deeply reflective attitude). The partner becomes the subject endowed with individuality and uniqueness. The program of sexual life and of sublimation of the sexual drive is developed in the cooperation of retrospection and propection. Meditation and empathy on a high level play here a very significant role.

On the fifth level there is not only a high responsibility for the partner and his development but there is also an even greater responsibility for the development of sexual instinct in others. The expression of this responsibility is a tendency to make sexual hierarchization and sublimation a reality in the human world. The achievement of this reality is seen to be possible through the subordination of the sexual instinct to a highly developed hierarchy of values, moral ideals, family, psychic closeness with the partner, etc. The chief contents of this level of development of the sexual instinct are predominance of friendship over sexual love, and the realization of spiritual union through love (Kierkegaard).

### 3) Laughter.

Laughter is primitive, violent, brutal, physiological on the first level. It is frequently evoked by humiliating situations (crippling disability, brutality, hurt, beating) that in most people provoke sadness or shock.

On this level smile as a mental expression practically does not exist. Laughter has the character of a collective explosion of primitive emotions.

On the second level laughter is calmer and becomes more subtle. Laughter becomes more individual, there are numerous symptoms of smile and a beginning of differentiation between primitive laughter and a cultured smile. Responsiveness to more subtle jokes develops.

On the third level laughter becomes more differentiated, quiet and subtle. There is a distinct kind of smile, which begins to predominate over loud laughter. The differentiation and sublimation of smile arises as a result of the activity of dynamisms of sympathy towards people, of the dynamisms that build a hierarchy of values, such as astonishment with oneself, disquietude with oneself, feelings of shame and guilt, and of creative tendencies which develop new and more subtle forms of smile.

On the fourth level collective laughter disappears and is replaced by individual laughter and more often by an individual smile. These transformations result from the action of the third factor, subject-object in oneself, self-awareness, self-control, identification and empathy. On this level one encounters smile that is moral, esthetic, a smile towards the ideal, a smile of mutual understanding in the most subtle things.

On the fifth level smile is autonomous and authentic. It is a smile of love, forgiveness and dedication. It is a smile of the highest empathy in recognizing and appreciating the existential unrepeatability of "I" and unrepeatability of "Thou". This level is expressed by a smile which is transcendental and existential.

#### 4) The Attitude towards Death.

On a primitive level (first level) there is no understanding of the problem of death and consequently complete inability to face death. The death of others might evoke a superficial, impersonal form of reflective thought. A primitive individual does not believe in the reality of his own death. In case of an immediate danger of death naive attempts are made to escape it in panic, there is sheer terror and fright and violent defensive reactions.

On the second level, i.e. that of unilevel disintegration, there is an abivalence in one's attitude towards death, ranging from uncontrolled fear, phobias and suicidal tendencies, up to mental rigidity and indifference. This relation to death is an expression of inner instability. There appears a certain "prise de conscience", or awareness which is, however, without any



hierarchical elements. These reactions express a tendency to think of death as something external to the normal order of life, consequently there is no significant effort to integrate the problem of death into the personality structure.

On the third level, i.e. multilevel disintegration, ambivalent states of anxiety, heroism, rationalization, and the like lead to a slow integration and hierarchization of death into the personality structure. This problem, then, is considered within the context of all human dilemmas. An individual on this level of development shows a dramatic attitude towards death, at times tragic, associated with all personality problems. Inclinations toward suicide are accompanied by some reflection, and suicide itself is possible. The value of many things is approached and defined from the point of view of death. The sense and meaning of life is seen in connection with matters of death.

On the fourth level, i.e. that of multilevel disintegration the problem of death is placed in a definite correlation with other problems and aspects of life. The development of a sublimated attitude towards death often causes the activity of the disintegrative dynamisms to increase in order to destroy residual structures of primitive levels in the inner milieu which are unwanted by the developing self. This conscious and willful program of extermination of the lower structures of personality can be called the instinct of partial death. The problem of death is placed within the hierarchy of values; it is incorporated into the personality structure; it is clearly "interiorized". Without being made less important or less dramatic it is placed in the context of other basic problems of equally high or even higher values such as responsibility for others, charity, permanence and unrepeatability of one's spiritual values.

On the highest level of human development, i.e. that of secondary integration, there appears a still more precise definition of one's personal relation to death. The death of others and their own attitude towards death become as important as our own view of it. The problem of death is not only subordinated to other problems and developmental values but enriches them in turn. When the individual becomes responsible for the totality of his own development and for the development of his external environment, he takes the problem of death as a part of the general process of inner development.