

# Synopsis: Kazimierz Dąbrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration.

W. Tillier

Calgary, Alberta.

2016

(Available at:

[http://www.positivedisintegration.com/  
Dabrowskisyn.pdf](http://www.positivedisintegration.com/Dabrowskisyn.pdf)).



- ❖ "Dąbrowski refers to his view of personality development as the Theory of Positive Disintegration" (1964, p. xiii).
- ❖ "Personality is the aim and the result of development through positive disintegration" (1972, p. 181).
- ❖ Basic assumption: "There exist empirically verifiable differences between levels of all mental functions comparable to the difference between levels of intelligence" (1970, p. 2).
- ❖ "Mental development is assumed to consist of a transition from lower ranks of the scale towards higher ranks" (1970, p. 2).
- ❖ "In the course of evolution from higher animals to man, and from the normal man to the universally and highly developed man, we observe processes of disintegration of lower functions and an integration of higher functions" (1972, p. 62).

- ❖ "The functions involved in this evolutionary process are all the emotional, instinctive and intellectual functions" (1972, p. 62).
- ❖ There are "two qualitatively different types of mental life: the heteronomous, determined by biological or environmental factors, and the autonomous, self-conscious, self-determined, and self-controlled" (1970, p. 11).
- ❖ "Mental life at its first, more primitive stage, is determined by and subordinated to biological forces and influences of the social environment" . . . In development, "a new quality arises. Things cease to remain under exclusive control of biological and social determinants. Self-conscious, autonomous choice between alternatives becomes real" (1970, p. 12).

- ❖ Development requires "the stimulation of higher functions and the inhibition of lower functions. This involves many kinds of sensitivity and excitability, numerous inner conflicts, [and the] emergence of multilevel inner forces, which can be called dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu" (1972, p. 62).
- ❖ "The engagement of the higher mental functions in the transformation of the lower ones" causes various types of nervous and mental disturbances (1972, p. 62).
- ❖ Psychoneurosis "represents a 'hierarchy of higher functions,' which means a hierarchy in which mental dynamisms predominate over nervous reactions. Psychoneurosis is a more psychical or more mental form of functional disorder, while neurosis is a more nervous or somatopsychic form" (1972, p. 41).

- ❖ "The symptomatological levels have to be taken into account beginning with the somatopsychic as the lowest, then psychosomatic, distinctly psychic, and finally the most conscious as the most complex and the highest" (1972, p. 57).
- ❖ Depending upon several factors, "we have in psychoneuroses either a dominance of psychical processes [higher] or of the processes involving the autonomic nervous system [lower, neurosis]" (1972, p. 63).
- ❖ As symptoms become 'higher' they are linked to volition – "these disturbances come gradually under control in the general development of the human species and concretely in individual development" (1972, pp. 62-63).
- ❖ "The higher the functions in psychoneurosis, the more one uncovers elements of personality development in the subject" (1972, p. 197).

- ❖ Conscious internal conflicts . . . [create] conscious restructuring of different levels of the psyche . . . the restructuring of different levels occurs through inner psychic transformation (paraphrased from 1972, pp. 67-68).
- ❖ "In normal individuals every manifestation of development is, to a greater or lessor degree, related to disintegration" (1972, p. 20).
- ❖ Development "takes a great deal of tension, inner conflict and struggle, anxiety, and even despair" (1970, p. 3).
- ❖ "Psychoneuroses are observed in people possessing special talents, sensitivity, and creative capacities; they are common among outstanding people" (1972, p. 2).

- ❖ "Psychoneuroses – especially those of a higher level – provide an opportunity to 'take one's life into one's own hands.' They are expressive of a drive for psychic autonomy, especially moral autonomy, through transformation of a more or less primitively integrated structure" (1972, p. 4).
- ❖ "'Psychoneurotic experiences' by disturbing the lower levels of values help gradually to enter higher levels of values, i.e. the level of higher emotions" (1972, p. 3). This is the crux of the process of development.
- ❖ "Psychoneurotics, rather than being treated as ill, should be considered as individuals most prone to a positive and even accelerated psychic development" (1972, p. 4).

- ❖ "In the higher psychoneuroses we have 'seeing' of new things, answers to the meaning of life, a search for the 'new and other,' separation into levels . . ." (1972, p. 199).
- ❖ "The general basic condition for the genesis and development of neuroses and psychoneuroses is - in our opinion - an increased psychic excitability" (1972, p. 46).
- ❖ "No genuine mental conflicts, that is to say, conflicts involving self-consciousness and authenticity, can be solved by any means other than the individual's conscious effort and inner growth" (1970, p. 119).
- ❖ "Mental Health consists of the functioning of processes which effect development towards higher levels of mental function" (1970, p. 173).



- ❖ Dąbrowski outlined five levels.
- ❖ Initial Integration:
  - ❖ Level I: Primitive or primary integration.
    - ❖ "This stage is exempt from disintegration and its characteristic feature is that behavior is controlled chiefly by constitutional factors" (1972, p. 111).
    - ❖ "No awareness of 'we' but only a strongly developed sense of 'me'" (1964, p. 74).
  - ❖ At the first integration there is essentially no development:
    - ❖ "The first stage, called primitive or primary integration, is characterized by mental structures and functions of a low level; they are automatic and impulsive, determined by primitive, innate drives" (1970, p. 21).

- ❖ Disintegration: Three levels describe a progressive series of disintegrations of the lower functions.
  - ❖ Level II: Unilevel disintegration.
  - ❖ Level III: Spontaneous multilevel disintegration.
  - ❖ Level IV: Organized multilevel.
- ❖ Level II: Unilevel disintegration.
  - ❖ The first disintegration is unilevel, horizontal and linear:
    - ❖ "Begins with loosening of the rigid structure of [Level I]" (1970, p. 21).
    - ❖ "Internal conflicts exist but are usually externalized. They lack a direction, they occur as if on one plane only (hence called unilevel)" (1970, p. 111). Characterized by ambivalences and ambitendencies.
    - ❖ Chaotic transitional phase: most fall back or move ahead.

- ❖ Advanced disintegration is linked to a new multilevel view:
  - ❖ "As soon as the process of hierarchization becomes more pronounced, the differences between that which is closer to 'more myself' and that which is more distant ('less myself'), between 'what is' and 'what ought to be,' becomes clearly distinguishable" (1970, p. 22).
  - ❖ Creates "a struggle for mental control between the 'lower' and the 'higher' within oneself. This is a multilevel conflict which carries the potential for a direction and further development" (1970, p. 112).
  - ❖ "We call it multilevel because there is an observable hierarchy of mental functions" (1972, p. 39).

- ❖ To reach higher levels of development, we must proceed gradually, or abruptly through crises, to separate ourselves from lower level functioning. We achieve this through positive disintegrations and progressive integrations until we reach complete secondary integration.
- ❖ One should work to eliminate the enemy in himself (his "lower self") and seek to find his friend (his "higher self") [Amend manuscript]

- ❖ "The last stage called secondary integration consists in a new organization and harmonization of personality" (1970, p. 22).
- ❖ "Mental health expresses itself through an evolution from primitive integration, through positive disintegration, to secondary integration, from primitive adjustment, through positive maladjustment, to secondary adjustment to the personality ideal, from an integrative balance at a low level, through mental imbalance, to secondary balance at the level, of personality " (1970, p. 61).
- ❖ "By personality we mean here the highest empirically recognizable structure of the human psyche. Personality is the aim and the result of disintegrative development. Its final form appears in the process of secondary integration" (1970, p. 79).

- ❖ "The last stage called secondary integration consists in a new organization and harmonization of personality" (1970, p. 22).
- ❖ "personality in its complete, fully developed and fully harmonized form appears only at the stage of secondary integration" (1970, p. 174).
- ❖ Secondary integration: "The integration of all mental functions into a harmonious structure controlled by higher emotions such as the dynamism of personality ideal, autonomy and authenticity. Secondary integration is the outcome of the full process of positive disintegration" (1972, p. 304).  
"Development is more extensive if it proceeds through several levels of positive disintegration. Development is most extensive when it reaches secondary integration. This is extremely rare, nevertheless not entirely beyond empirical reach" (1996, p. 13).