

# In Search of Kazimierz Dabrowski



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This is the first installment of a three-part article on Kazimierz Dabrowski, the Polish developmental theorist and visiting professor in Alberta for over a decade who died last year after returning to Poland. The purpose of the article is merely to interest the reader in a brilliant and fascinating man who laid down the foundation for a novel theory of personality development. Dabrowski earned a small but intensely loyal following in many places in the world: one of those places was the University of Alberta. Those who become interested can then personally evaluate Dabrowski's works. He wrote, alone and with others, at least eighteen books in almost as many languages.

It was a bright, unseasonably warm winter afternoon when Dr. Bill Hague (Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta) perched on a table surrounded by lecture-weary graduate students and attempted, in his own low-key manner, to interest us in yet another developmental theorist (albeit poet, dramatist, and sometime political prisoner, as well)—one Kazimierz Dabrowski.

Dr. Hague began by quietly reciting Dabrowski's strangely awkward yet affecting poem "Be Greeted Psychoneurotics!" It was immediately evident that like other famous (infamous) theorists such as T. Scaz and R.D. Laing, Dabrowski decried psychiatric labels and the judgmental and shoddy treatment afforded the "mentally ill". Most of us, as graduate students, already held much the same view. What psychology student has not spent endless hours discussing with professors and fellow students the usefulness of the classifications in the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual* as well as such intriguing philosophical problems as defining "abnormal" behavior? We all knew that like Lincoln, Dostoevski and Van Gogh, a human being could be severely troubled and yet awesomely creative and worthwhile. As student-therapists, we were experiencing a severe testing of our own psychological security by both clients and practicum supervisors. Some of us even kept secret our own colourful MMPI profiles!

However, Kazimierz Dabrowski's thinking went far beyond mere sympathy for those whom society labeled disturbed. He was passionately convinced that the very anguish, depression, guilt and confusion which resulted in the individual's voluntarily or involuntarily receiving psychiatric treatment was, in fact, a "positive disintegration": a hopeful sign that the individual had outgrown some lower level of personality development and a challenge to the individual to reintegrate at a higher level. How much higher that level would be depended not only on the innate capacity of the person for development but on his luck in finding a therapist worthy of him!

Dr. Hague had hooked us. Our suffering clients were experiencing the natural and necessary labour pains that accompany any birth. Our initial task as therapists was to

assess whether the pain was intense enough to prove productive: if not, then we might be required to add to those extrinsic and intrinsic pressures which had initiated the labour. After the birth, our function became almost a parental one. We must support and guide our client to a new level of personality development but like any good parent, our ultimate goal for our client must be autonomy so that in the final analysis, he will have created himself—a priceless original.

We are physically born only once: we may be psychologically reborn many times. Each painful rebirth presents an opportunity to more completely fulfill our human potential. Therapists are on the same journey of personal development as their clients. How effective a therapist will be depends on his strength to endure not only his client's disintegrations but his own. Presumably he must also have the capacity to reintegrate at a higher level of personality development than those individuals he presumes to treat. What an opportunity for the client! What a challenge for the therapist!



Be greeted psychoneurotics!

For you see sensitivity in the insensitivity of the world, uncertainty among the world's certainties

For you often feel others as you feel yourselves.

For you feel the anxiety of the world, and its bottomless narrowness and self-assurance.

For your phobia of washing your hands from the dirt of the world, for your fear of being locked in the world's limitations, for your fear of the absurdity of existence.

For your subtlety in not telling others what you see in them.

For your awkwardness in dealing with practical things, and for your practicalness in dealing with unknown things, for your transcendental realism and lack of everyday realism, for your exclusiveness and fear of losing close friends, for your creativity and ecstasy, for your maladjustment to that "which is" and adjustment to that which "ought to be", for your great but unutilized abilities

For the belated appreciation of the real value of your greatness which never allows the appreciation of the greatness of those who will come after you.

For your being treated instead of treating others, for your heavenly power being forever pushed down by brutal force, for that which is present, unsaid, infinite in you.

For the loneliness and strangeness of your ways,  
Be greeted!

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