

INTERIORIZATION AND THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY  
AN ETHICAL AND CULTURAL APPROACH

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"The patient (or person) of today suffers most under the problem of what he should believe in and who he should - or, indeed, might - be or become; while the patient of early psychoanalysis suffers most under inhibitions which prevented him from being what and who he thought he knew he was."

E. Erikson  
Childhood and Society

"A great number of individuals, according to Dabrowski, never substantially reach beyond primary integration."

A. Kawczak  
"A new conception of authentic Existence"

"Shame (as against the 'culturally defined wrong act' characterizing guilt) cannot be modified by addition, or wiped out by subtraction, or exorcised by expiation. It is not an isolated act that can be detached from the self.... It is pervasive as anxiety is pervasive; its focus is not a separate act, but revelation of the whole self."

H.M. Lynd  
On Shame and the Search for Identity

The three quotes from authors whom I admire and whose work I much esteem, may serve as an overture to what is in itself a set of variations on a theme. I hope to outline against the background of the notion of Positive Disintegration a complex of cultural problems which at once militate against Dr. Dabrowski's approach, and by the very same characteristic require such an approach. This irony is in itself suggestive of the nature of dialectical crisis wherein what obstructs a solution provides the direction and even much of the character this solution will assume. (This can be noted in the function of the refractory medium, eg., marble, light, language, in the creation of a work of art).

It will first be useful to indicate the aspects of the theory of Positive Disintegration with which my discussion is immediately concerned. 1) Positive Disintegration necessitates and interiorization of values and attitudes. 2) Positive Alienation, the state of habitus of which Positive Disintegration is the proper activity, demands conscious maladjustment respecting prior data of one's inner and outer environments. 3) Positive Disintegration, multilevel and universal, "is distinguished by the dominance of emotional over intellectual components"...

I shall speak discretely to problems concerning each of these dimensions, but first I would relate all to the encompassing problem of what Erikson calls the crisis of identity, what Lynd calls the crucial issue of "holistic" against "atomic" vision, what H.R. Niebuhr calls the problem of "the responsible self".

The contemporary problem of identity is closely involved with what may briefly be described as the demise of rule of law and taboo in normative ethics. The spiritual and psychological poverty of taboo ethics or "code morality" is frequently noted (1) and generally admitted. What is less often and less clearly grasped is the fact and the consequences of the fact that such ethics are no longer possible. And since the sense of self and of identity depends in so large

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(1) Cf. Louis Monden, S.J. Sin, Liberty and Law

Jacques Leclercq Christ and the Modern Conscience

a measure of the sense of right, just or appropriate conduct, identity suffers the crisis and enjoys the triumphs of normative ethics. What, one may ask however, justifies the rather bald assertion that rule, or code ethics is no longer possible? A proper analysis of this question would be wonderfully long and would signally include an analysis of accentuated subjectivity, the centrality of the aesthetic and other aspects of the Existentialist Revolt.

In a more limited Apollonian format, however, let me point out but two factors endemic to the present state of the ethical question: 1) Mores or conventions concerning moral questions have long been the sociological and psychological props to moral law and code. We live, of course, in an age characterized by a spirit of criticism and analysis (when not by suspicion and desiccation). In a critical atmosphere, the whole fabric of socio-ethical conventions (mores), along with the entire range of intellectual tenets, is put to the question. Mores, however, unlike intellectual positions or frank volitional options, are destroyed in an atmosphere which exposes them to criticism. More particular and conditioned, less unusual than values proper, they focus upon and support localized ethos. They are therefore peculiarly vulnerable to mass media and urban drift. More basically, their force, depending upon a literal confusion with moral values, dissipates on a critical (and moralistic) atmosphere in which, in one form or another the question arises, "Is this moral truth or merely mores?" The "or" requires the "merely". 2) The second point to be made about ethos as bearing upon identity is clearly related to the first, but articulates the problem more subtly. I owe this setting to a remarkable monograph on situation ethics by the German philosopher, Walter Dirks. (2). Dirks, referring back to an age more characterized than ours by systems and stasis, writes: "The simpler and the more solid are the rules of the social order... The more is good realized in acceptance and submission." The "rule" of our society, increasingly complex fluid, yield the converse conclusion that acceptance and submission are no longer attitudinal channels to the ethical good and the concomitant sense of identity. Dirks speaks of "a collapse of the objective social frame work, the result of which is that the individual is forced to take a position which is

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(2) Walter Dirks... "How can I know what God Wants of Me? Translation in Cross Currents, originally in Frankfurter Hefte, April 1951.

which is more free, more conscious, and more fully responsible." An important word here is "forced"; radical autonomy is no longer a vocation of the spiritual elite; it is the requisite today if one would be moral and mature, that is to say, human, at all.

With the signal announcement of freedom, consciousness and responsibility as radically necessary pre-conditions to authenticity, we have already, I think through a brief consideration of ethics and identity, come full circle back to central theories in the theory of Positive Disintegration. Dabrowski stresses autonomy, insight and volition, and empathy as conditions for psychic development. These qualities, in the microcosm of the individual psyche, are closely parallel to the requisites for sanity and salvation for man in the macrocosm of contemporary culture. This matter of cultural and ethical relationship to Positive Disintegration is in effect the main business of this paper, and discussion of the three areas of the Positive Disintegration theory noted at the outset will, I hope, provide some illuminating points of interaction. Before ending this section on ethics and identity, however, I should like to remark one further dimension of identity crisis which I think is increasingly important to an understanding of our whole topic.

I refer to the extreme alteration of Roles in contemporary culture, an alteration which appears to me as very recent, at least in its radical phase. Its causes are complex, and without attempting the lengthy task of tracing these causes, it may at least be relevant to note that, like the demise of mores, role alteration owes much to the peculiar dynamics of consumer capitalism, the manifold effects of massive urbanization and the effects of critical psychology and sociology upon old and once powerful assumptions.

What is more germane to our purpose, however, is an understanding of the existential character of role alteration as it presently infringes upon our culture. The matter may be put quite simply, I believe, though considerations of what may be termed (for want of a less tendentious phrase) the impoverishment of the predicate nomenclature. Consider the following designations: "I am an American"; "I am a professor"; "I, sir, am a married woman"; "I am a Roman Catholic"; "I am a woman". To each of these assertion or role (or identity), to varying

extent and with different shadings contemporary culture answers back: "So what!" Nationalism in all but retrograde personality in socio-cultural back-waters has become a joke, and a poor one. The Herr Professor is liable to be asked the embarrassing question what precisely he professes. The "Roman" qualifier of Catholic has lost its power and focus and is in danger of becoming quaint. And whatever it may mean to be married today is radically contingent upon the profoundly problematic question of what "woman" and "female" might possibly mean once the demythologizing is complete. What is central to the change in these and other role designations is the loss of resonance and connotation they have suffered in recent years. The "Roman Catholic" instance is quite illustrative. A decade ago, in North America, Catholics took orders from bishops eschewed meat on Friday, used contraceptives if at all, only in agony of conscience and did not divorce their spouses. Serious arguments persisted about the Roman index, the Holy Rota, and a complex of canonical, liturgical and ecclesial questions which in 1970 would be considered "camp". I for one would maintain (in the Dutch manner) that orthodoxy is not importantly involved here. What is involved, re. a "Catholic" deonominal identification, is the "collapse of the objective social framework" of which Dirks has written. I would suggest that whether the area in question be religious, ethnic, personal or sexual, identification does not any longer bring with it identity. It is no longer true merely that the unexamined life is not worth living; in a real sense the unclarified life cannot be lived.

In pointing out the withering out of mores and the weakening of predication, we are pointing out the inadequacy of external trappings and tangential props to psychic and cultural security. At this point Dabrowski's emphasis upon interiorization comes explicitly to the fore. As I understand the sense of interiorization in Positive Disintegration, its function is central. It is the condition for transformation of the self in its relation to inner and outer environment, which transformation is rendered fully explicit, i.e., in and for itself, i.e., incarnate, in an exteriorization in action and attitude. The process of interiorizing is parallel to the state of conscious maladjustment, which is to say that it is not osmotic or random, any more than empathy is random or spiritually promiscuous. These latter considerations, of course, deserve more extensive treatment; what I am attempting now is an interpretation or extrapolation of interiorization in terms of the socio-cultural emphases of this paper.

If what I have said up to now concerning mores, ethics and identity is clear, the necessity of interiorization can be seen as the only way in which the new dimension of greater freedom, consciousness and responsibility can become incarnate. These terms, it should be noted, suggest an openended dynamic. They do not obtain within any closed context, and indeed require a co-extensive mode of being, within the creative habitus of autonomous human personality. This is important, among other reasons, as contrast to "acceptance and submission" (Dirks) and other such functions of limitations.

Limiting functions effect us from without and in a cultural moment in which the transcendent and unconditional become peculiarly necessary, the vestigial structures of exteriority can become perricious, even as the newer modalities of interiorization are critically difficult to attain.

We can perhaps penetrate further into this paradox by applying the analysis once again in terms of identity, this time in a rather condensed format.

Structures extrinsically supportive of identity have disintegrated and are disintegrating. Extrinsic support, be they inclusive of the person (eg., Church membership) or intrusive (eg., social sanctions and taboos), deal piecemeal with psychic realities, and bind them together archetonicly. In such a situation either myth or regulative concepts can provide the occasion for the structure of the archetechonic cultural model. What is not done in this situation (and what did not generally need to be done) is the achievement of identity sense through and organic fusion in the personality of introjected perceptions and evaluations.

This (organic vs archetechonic) approach to identity would appear, within a Hegelian, Trelhadian or Personalist context, to constitute a genuine advance in the objective conditions for the development of human consciousness. The functions of myth and regulative concept are replaced respectively by ideological commitment and synoptic vision, which are together manifest in the individual as style. The signal appearance of maturity and autonomy.

The crucial difficult here is that the newer, organic model, while offering a more autonomous and less contingent form of identity achievement, seems

to provide for a smaller proportion of people than did the archetomic model, which was by definition provided for the individual by the culture. Since this latter alternative is no longer available, the context of promise is indeed at once a context also of crisis.

If I have so far been able to develop with any clarity the crucial nexus of responsibility and interiorization; the remaining three aspects of Positive Disintegration which I noted at the outset may lend themselves to a somewhat easier treatment, again in reference to culture and ethics. I should like to take together the importance of Conscious Maladjustment and the "Dominance of Emotional components" in Positive Disintegration. I would in both cases stress as correlative notions Consciousness, Dignity and Intellectual commitment. First, it is important to note that the dominance of the emotional to which Dabrowski refers is a moment of dominance in a dialectical process; the state of Positive Alienation, if I understand correctly, is characterized by "neurotic" feelings of insecurity and inadequacy which constitute the ground for transformation and higher integration. This emotional state is relative however, to a prior state of comparative stasis characterized by an intellectual legemany. This difficulty I see is as follows: If it be proper to infer that the symptoms of Positive Alienation are in fact dialectically related to a prior state characterized substantially by intellectual focus, the possibility of the intellectual phase becomes critical to the developmental process. If, also the transformation factor in Positive Disintegration depends upon the development of a conscious focus of maladjustment out of the initial emotional malaise, the cultural availability as it were, of conscious resource also becomes a critical problem.

We face here frontally the paradox I remarked at the beginning of the paper. Positive Disintegration has to its great credit, it appears to me, an appreciation and creative understanding of suffering, anxiety, shame and perplexity on one hand, and of dignity, creativity, mature volition and value judgment on the other. Is it not apparent that these values and qualities are precisely those lacking in the present age? If they are lacking, a clinical approach emphatic of their importance is exactly what the culture therapeutically requires. On the other hand, as a theory of development within that same culture, Positive Disintegration is likely to encounter considerable opposition. Furthermore, its theoretical expectations concerning normative development are



endangered by a pessimistic response to the theory in the light of what is despairingly termed "reality" by the culture and what is hopefully expected by the theory.

I have not catalogued the cultural forces which militate against Dignity, Consciousness and Intellectual commitment. Most of what is wrong has been exposed by (I am tempted to say 'once and for all') by Nietzsche. The immediate cultural situation has its particular demons, however. I spoke earlier of myth and regulative concept being replaced in an organic cultural model, by ideology and synoptic vision; this feeling also a dialectic of politics and poetry and of the ethical and the aesthetic. But in the present age, wherein we thought we were recovering from the excess of rationalism, we are suddenly faced with the massive mythologizing of violence. In the moment that promised insight into the poverty of scientism and an awakening of the Pride of Spirit, we are faced with hysterical escapism, the refusal of commitment, the flight of the Responsible Self. It was in 1945 that the American Catholic Radical, Ed Willock wrote: "Opiates are the religion of the people".

So it appears that the wonderful and dreadful freedom of destroyed taboos, the death of tired gods, is conjoined with the incipient slavery of hallucination and fascination, the worship of new idols. Inauthenticity, always a danger, today has a program and an apologia. In Marcelian terms, self-hood gives way to ego. The multi-level disintegration of Dr. Dabrowski's vision becomes difficult when self lacks focus. Where the self is dissipated, disintegration seeks focus, and finds it in hypnotized fascinations. The "3rd factor" cannot emerge. The process, indeed, has ceased.

Process always ceases when the self, the center, disintegrates in despair. But the fact that we can cry out against despair before it reaches us, that men of science and men of art can elicit hope even in the desert; this is the warrant of our joy. In closing, I would like to appeal to the wisdom of two of the greatest seers of the last century, who tell us of the danger and the delight, the crisis and the hope. First, a stanza from W.B. Yeats, and finally, a few lines from the greatest of Welsh and of Jesuit bards, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

But from Hopkins, however,

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same....  
Crying 'what I do is me; for that I came".  
I say more: the just man justifies  
Keeps grace, that keeps all his goings graces  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is -  
Christ - for Christ plays in 10,000 places,  
Lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.