

Kazimierz Dabrowski's Paradigm of Emotional Development

Announcing an Intensive 5-Day Workshop, June 6-10, 1990, in the theory and research of Kazimierz Dabrowski's Paradigm of Emotional Development. This unique seminar will be led by:

- R. Frank Falk
- Nancy D. Miller
- Michael M. Piechowski
- Linda K. Silverman

Leading researchers in advanced emotional development and gifted education, the workshop leaders are all members of the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development. All four presenters will be present for the entire seminar.

Dabrowski's Theory provides a framework for understanding qualitatively different levels of emotional development and areas of developmental potential. Levels of development span the range from psychopaths to self-actualized individuals and beyond. Developmental potential includes psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual and emotional realms. This perspective has direct application for teachers, researchers and counselors. More information on Dabrowski's Theory can be found in the first issue of *Advanced Development*.

Major theoretical concepts will be presented in the morning session, and data collection and coding techniques will be the primary focus of the afternoon sessions. The seminar will take place in a small, bucolic college-town setting. Time will be provided for informal discussions among participants and leaders. Two semester hours of graduate credit are available.

For information regarding registration and housing, contact:

Dr. Jane Piirto
Department of Graduate Education
Ashland University
Ashland, Ohio 44805
Telephone (419) 289-5379

Dialogue

In this issue we are inaugurating a new feature: **Dialogue**. We are introducing this section in order to provide readers with an opportunity to respond in depth to ideas presented in this or other issues. **Dialogue** allows *Advanced Development* to be interactive with readers, as well as providing continuity from issue to issue. We welcome your submissions. Please see the inside back cover for details.

Moral Development: Theories and Lives

Barry Grant

Barry Grant, Ph.D., is a psychotherapist and adjunct faculty member at Kendall College. A graduate of the counseling psychology program at Northwestern University, he is interested in the qualitative study of moral development and the exploration of moral issues related to psychotherapy.

ABSTRACT: Most theories of moral development aim at universality. One problem with trying to achieve this goal is that individuals' moralities and paths of development often are distorted by the terms the theories provide to describe them. Research that explores individuals' points of view on their lives and morality may be a valuable corrective to "theory-driven" methodologies. The value of this approach is illustrated by comparing aspects of two lives to two theories—those of Lawrence Kohlberg and Kazimierz Dabrowski.

In attempting to provide accounts of development that have wide applicability, theories of moral development—most of which aim at universality—sometimes cannot do justice to individual lives. The conceptions of morality that these theories contain and the terms they use in depicting moral development may distort and misrepresent individuals' morality and moral development.

Research that respects and seeks to understand individuals' points of view on their lives and morality is a valuable corrective to "theory-driven" methodologies (Polkingham, 1983; Watson, 1978). By treating people as theorists and philosophers in their own right and seeking to empathically understand their views and their lives, a *dialogue* can be orchestrated between individuals and theorists. Such a dialogue uses the theories to illuminate lives and uses the lives

to criticize theories. This approach to the study of moral development increases the possibility of uncovering new phenomena, seeing old phenomena in new ways, and generating new ideas and doubts about old ones (Gergen, 1980; Glaser & Strauss, 1965).

I used this methodology in an in-depth study of four individuals and four theorists (Grant, 1988). Aspects of the lives of two of these individuals, John Hendricks and Deanna Burns (both pseudonyms), and two theorists, Lawrence Kohlberg and Kazimierz Dabrowski, will be presented to illustrate the value of this approach.

The participants in the study were chosen because they were thoughtful and articulate about their moral views and actively engaged with moral issues, however they saw them. Hendricks's and Burns's educational attainments, self-presentation, and quality of ideas and experience leave no doubt that they are gifted. They both scored at Stage 4/5 according to Kohlberg's scheme — one-half stage below the top of his instrument — which indicates that they use principled moral reasoning. Both have a clearly defined hierarchy of values that would put them at least at Level III in Dabrowski's scheme. In the last issue of *Advanced Development*, Hague (1989) discusses Kohlberg's theory, and Nelson (1989) describes Dabrowski's theory.

John Hendricks

At the time I interviewed him, John Hendricks was 50 years old. A twice-divorced father of two, he has a Ph.D. in history and has worked most of his adult life in a peace organization. He was reared in a devout Christian family and in adolescence briefly considered becoming a minister. In college he began to question his religious beliefs. Some years later, in graduate school, after a difficult stint in the Navy, he rejected all belief in the supernatural.

The story of his moral development has striking parallels to Kohlberg's (1986b) own story. Both men were influenced by moral questions raised by *The Brothers Karamozov*, both believed in democratic values, both saw injustices that prompted them to reflect on the nature of justice and ways of resolving conflicts without violence. Both had a graduate education, studied philosophy, and were widely read in the literature of the liberal tradition on which our democracy is based.

Most significantly, both men grappled with moral relativism and sought a rational foundation for a universal morality as an alternative to it. Kohlberg found his rational, universal principles in a form of reasoning that has characteristics of mature cognitive-logical (Piagetian) reasoning — what he calls "Stage 6 justice reasoning." Kohlberg's (1981, 1984, 1986a) theory of justice reasoning maintains that everyone, given the right set of experiences, will go through the same stages of moral reasoning in the same order and will arrive at a universal, rational form of reasoning.

Hendricks has a different view. He thinks that few people find a rationalist ethic compelling or are interested in getting one. For him, rationality is an attitude toward finding and debating the truth — tolerance, open-mindedness, awareness of merit in competing views. Hendricks has made a commitment to being rational and views rational moral reasoning not as the application of perfected fixed principles but, rather, as an ever-perfectible art that is "mostly a matter of training and skill" requiring the coordination of a variety of principles. No principle applies in all cases — they are all imperfect guides to action — and no principle, such as justice, is most important.

Kohlberg's belief in a single, universal path of moral development implies that the world would be better and conflicts over rights and resources would decrease if there were more morally mature people. His efforts to develop educational programs to promote moral development are consistent with this idea. In contrast, Hendricks does not believe that there is only one path of moral development, as his reflections on justice show:

There will always be conflicts between people with different conceptions of justice... Each view has an element of truth that needs to be preserved through institutions and understandings that enable non-violent resolutions of conflicting views... One of the central tenets of Gandhi and King in working for social change is that you should honestly state what you want to the person you think is unjust and needs to change to enable you to get what you want, and to open up yourself to the possibility that you might be wrong when you enter into the dialogue. As a result, you agree to accept some kind of modus operandi for continuing to live together while you work on what you think is the injustice of the other party. In doing so, you come closer to a higher truth than the one either of you had at the beginning.

Without an empathic understanding of Hendricks's morality and its relationship to his other beliefs, we might just score his reasoning according to Kohlberg's scheme, give him a 4/5 stage score, and say no more about him. But once we understand his moral views and know what else he thinks, we know that the stage score does not do justice to his thinking. This is not because it simplifies Hendricks's thinking, but because it is based on a conceptual scheme that is different from Hendricks's. Hendricks sees morality, as does Kohlberg, as a matter of having rational principles of conduct. But he has a different understanding of rationality than Kohlberg does and, with it, a different understanding of morality, of what it means to decide moral issues rationally, and of how to bring about a better world. Hendricks is not a half stage or so behind the end of Kohlberg's path; he is on a different path.

Because he has developed a hierarchy of values and, with a strong sense of responsibility, seeks to live out his ideals, Hendricks would be at Level III or IV in Dabrowski's (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977) scheme. But this would imply that Hendricks is on a path of transforming growth (Piechowski, 1986), which he

does not at all appear to be. He is committed to peace work but not to personal examination and transformation.

Hendricks has stayed with peace work for more than 25 years, through years of domestic strife, near poverty, and little recognition or status. According to Dabrowski, this sort of extended moral commitment is part of an inner psychic transformation increasingly guided by a personality ideal. "The aim of this transformation," Piechowski (1986) elaborates, "is to make one's ideals and actions one and the same, to live according to the precepts of love, compassion, helpfulness, and effective action" (p. 193). Persons with high developmental potential come to feel that they *must* transform themselves so as to be able to act effectively in the world for the good. They have a "strong sense of self and a need for self-development to serve the human community more fully" (Piechowski, 1986, p. 195).

Hendricks's life history provides little evidence consistent with Dabrowski's explanation of sustained commitment. He cares about others, but he does not seem interested in changing himself, or especially interested in himself. He is more inclined to work with ideas than people, and with people through ideas. He attends to and tries to change the public world much more than his inner world. The sources of his commitment are various and, for the most part, are "coolly" rational and moral and have little to do with feelings and personality transformation.

Deanna Burns

Deanna Burns, 35 years old, is a divorced mother of three. She is the oldest of five children in a working class, Catholic family. When I spoke with her, she worked for a relief organization. Eight years prior to that, she had a religious experience in which she heard God speak to her and felt his love and presence. This significantly changed her life and helped shape her religious and moral views.

Succinctly put, Burns sees morality as aiming at a wholeness, an integration and expression of one's complete being in harmony with that of others and in relationship to God—a sort of perfect balance of giving and getting, of independence and interdependence, of integrity within oneself and in relationship to God and others. Her morality is a guide to negotiating relationships and solving problems aimed at bringing about this ideal balance, which she calls justice. Justice, for Burns, is Biblical justice, from Amos: a creative restoration of a harmonious, loving community in which all persons can live with their entire being in relationship to others and to God.

Kohlberg's notion of justice as fairness is consistent with some of what Burns believes. It is necessary, but not sufficient, for her harmonious society. Moral reasoning that only addresses fair ways to allocate resources and adjudicate claims does not encompass justice in her sense. Her ethic has a religious component that cannot simply be added to a secular core of justice reasoning.

To her, moral reasoning is not always a purely cognitive process; it sometimes involves a spiritual relationship. In response to a question about the meaning of justice as restoration, Burns said:

I feel that my children should be able to be the people they are supposed to be, to have the medical care they need and find their niche as persons and personalities. I think that about everybody, myself included.... But economics and tradeoffs are involved.... In my morality, that's where the Spirit comes in. I can't figure that out.

The role of the Spirit in her moral life is seen clearly in her description of discernment. "Discernment is a process by which you make a decision... [which] has to do with figuring out what God is communicating to you.... The point of discernment is always to find the loving thing." When she hits a dead end and is unable to make a decision, moral or nonmoral, on her own, she listens and looks for signs to guide her. The process is not like reading tea leaves, nor does it result in a decision that any rational person would make in the same situation. Rather, it is premised on the existence of a spiritual dimension to reality and of a path that is hers to follow in this dimension.

Burns's moral beliefs are modeled in part on the relationship between God and human beings as revealed in (the Christian idea of) the incarnation. She reads this as God saying "yes" to human beings in becoming one. An important part of her life was coming to affirm herself and to respect her growth as a person. She grew up in a "battle zone" of abuse against her siblings, many harsh words, and severe punishments. Overcoming the self-criticality and alienation this engendered affected her moral development and how she understands morality. Perhaps the most important moral task in her life was to become a person. Central to her morality is the importance of becoming a person and changing society so that this is possible for everyone.

A significant part of this development was to become someone for whom relieving the suffering and respecting the dignity of others are not just intellectually affirmed but also experienced as feelingfully mattering and acted upon. She said:

Where does love enter into moral development? I think I had the vocabulary and the principles, but I also had this real heap of bitterness... I think the moral framework for respecting people just for being people was there, but not the emotional framework.

The process of her becoming this sort of person is part of her "spiritual journey." This journey involved a process of "healing" that was essential to her psychological and moral development. An important part of this was experiencing love from others and coming to forgive her parents. The most significant influence in this regard was a series of powerful experiences in her late 20s in which she heard God speak to her and came to feel that she as a particular person was known and affirmed by God. She took from this that God's love is available

to all—not just to Catholics, as she had previously believed. She also felt called to grow as a person and chosen by God to fulfill certain tasks. Her relief work is tied to her experience of God.

Dabrowski's theory has very little to say about the specific content of Burns's morality—its partial derivation from religious teachings, its vision of an ideal society. In material I have not included here but which is hinted at in her quote about justice, Burns specifically rejects a morality of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation, which Dabrowski sees as emblematic of Level V development. Burns's empathy is directed equally toward herself and toward others. Her ethic rests on the idea that everyone, herself included, should be able to achieve self-realization.

This brief account of Burns's life story and her ethic shows clearly that her life takes place in a "world" quite different from the one in Kohlberg's theory and similar to the one in Dabrowski's. Unlike Kohlberg, Dabrowski does not see emotions as the handmaiden of cognitions. He attributes a separate and very important motive force to them and so can loosely accommodate Burn's distinction between a moral and an emotional framework. Because he sees moral development as a part of the development of the whole person, he also can accommodate some ways in which Burns's moral development is part of her personal growth. He grants reality to a spiritual dimension of life and developmental force to mystical experiences and so can do some justice to Burns's experience of God and her use of discernment in making decisions.

Conclusion

Mystics and poets may be able to see the universe in a grain of sand, but no moral development theorist can encompass all of the views of morality and types of moral development in a single theory. Life will always hold more than theories can contain, and tension will always be present between trying to fit lived experience into theories, and lived experience, so to speak, asserting itself and saying, "No, that's not me; there's more to me than that" or "I am not like that at all." Speaking for Hendricks and Burns, I have said this to Kohlberg and Dabrowski.

Moral development theories show how the world looks from the vantage point of certain values and assumptions. They encourage some people to elaborate and refine a point of view and provoke others to determine its flaws and limits and propose alternatives. They offer terms that are useful for understanding some lives, but not all. By listening carefully and empathically to individual voices, we can better judge the utility of a theory.

REFERENCES

- Dabrowski, K. & Piechowski, M. (1977). *Theory of levels of emotional development* (2 vols.). Oceanside, NY: Dabor Science Publications.
- Gergen, K. (1980). The emerging crisis in life-span developmental theory. In P. Baltes & O. Brim (Eds.), *Life-span development and behavior, Vol. 3* (pp. 31-63). New York: Academic Press.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1965). Discovery of substantive theory: A basic strategy underlying qualitative research. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 8(6), 5-12.
- Grant, B. (1988). *Four voices: Life history studies of moral development*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.
- Hague, W. (1989). State of the art in moral development: Moral development in the post-Kohlbergian age. *Advanced Development*, 1, 15-26.
- Kohlberg, L. (1981). *Essays on moral development, Vol. 1: The philosophy of moral development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Kohlberg, L. (1984). *Essays on moral development, Vol. 2: The psychology of moral development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Kohlberg, L. (1986a). A current statement on some theoretical issues. In S. Modgil & C. Modgil (Eds.), *Lawrence Kohlberg: Consensus and controversy* (pp. 485-546). London: Falmer Press.
- Kohlberg, L. (1986b). My personal search for universal morality. *Moral Education Forum*, 11(1), 4-10.
- Nelson, K. (1989). Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration. *Advanced Development*, 1, 1-14.
- Piechowski, M. (1986). The concept of developmental potential. *Roeper Review*, 8(3), 190-197.
- Polkingham, D. (1983). *Methodology for the human sciences*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Watson, L.C. (1978). The study of personality and the study of individuals. *Ethos*, 6, 3-21.