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MENTAL GROWTH AND THE JUSTIFICATION
OF VALUE-JUDGMENTS

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I will deal in this paper with one kind of criticism raised against the theory of positive disintegration which comes from intellectual circles committed to the rigidly horizontal account of reality. Its claims may be laid down as follows.

The theory of positive disintegration is entirely arbitrary in its description of the so-called autonomous mental development. One can, without difficulty, outline a number of alternative lines of transformations of mental qualities which may stress other clusters of capacities and inclinations, contrary to those which are characteristic of individuals structured along the pattern called secondary integration. Those alternative conceptions of the perfection of human personality, incompatible with the theory of positive disintegration, are not only possible but notorious. As a matter of fact, each independent ethical system, each separately developed culture exhibits, or at least implies a somewhat different model of perfection, and consequently, another concept of development--ascent.

If it is claimed in defense of the theory of positive disintegration that those other kinds of development do not involve a transformation through disintegration of mental functions and structures then the answer is that transformations in some directions may necessitate mental disintegration and psychoneurosis, while transformations in other directions may not. There is no logical reason to put the first above the second. If any scale of preference would have to be drawn on this ground, it should rather consider inferiorer those models of perfection which can be achieved only through the painful process of disintegration.

Furthermore, the criticism insists that there is no such thing as

an all-round, genuinely versatile mental development. Man has a practically inexhaustible amount of potentialities and possible combinations of qualities. Any kind of consciously chosen, approved and controlled development must be selective, that is to say, must favor some qualities and disfavor others. This is strengthened by the fact that although the growth of some qualities is in no way impeding the growth of some other qualities, there is a kind of antagonistic relationship among still other qualities, that is to say, the growth of some of them excludes, restricts or counteracts to the growth of some other qualities.

Whoever sees in the transformations of human personality development--ascent, development which is more than a deterministic unfolding of latent potentialities, must have an a priori, preconceived idea of the hierarchy of qualities and such a hierarchy cannot be but subjective and arbitrary.

This criticism is not willing to admit that there is any significance in the fact of a striking unanimity of basic valuations among individuals who reached secondary integration. It points out that the criteria of admission into the class of secondarily integrated individuals are such that those admitted have to agree in their basic valuations. Thus, the theory of positive disintegration confirms no more than what it assumed at the beginning. This is due to the fact that crucial statements of the theory of positive disintegration are tantologous. Their truth is grounded in the meaning of terms, not in any empirically verifiable or falsifiable connection.

This seems to be the gist of the criticism coming from empiricist

positivistic and behavioristic circles.

In answer to this, it may be worthwhile to notice, in the first place, that the presence of analytic statements can be noticed in any theory of natural science. What is expected from scientific theories is not that they would include solely empirical nonanalytic statements, but that at least some empirical statements would belong to the core of the theory.

Secondly, the criteria of development--ascent are not arbitrary, on the contrary, they depict a deep connection between various qualities and their dynamics. Let us review the main criteria of autonomous development as implied by the theory of positive disintegration. They may be summed up as: 1) Capacity for transformation of oneself and the environment, 2) Degree of consciousness and self-consciousness, 3) Self-determination as opposed to the determination by biological and environmental factors, 4) Codetermination of the intellectual and emotional functions, 5) Understanding and empathic insight, 6) Sensitivity and responsiveness, 7) Creativity and 8) Capacity for further development. It may be noticed that some of those criteria underline the methodology and conceptual frameworks of natural science. E.g., the degree of understanding, its extent and depth are decisive in the preference of some theories over others. It is always the more general hypothesis that is put above a more specific one. The whole set of criteria is not independent, but interconnected. The capacity for transformation of oneself and the environment depends on understanding of oneself and the environment, on the degree of consciousness and self-consciousness, on sensitivity and responsiveness. Self-determination and codetermination of intellectual and emotional functions depend on the degree of consciousness and understanding. Creativity and capacity for further development depend

on the other criteria. Consequently, if one accepts some of the criteria, especially the criterion of increasing understanding and empathic insight, one cannot reject other criteria, and the criterion of understanding belongs to the basic assumptions of all scientific theories, because if the claim that understanding is possible and growing in proportion to the growth of science, would not be, at least tacitly, admitted, there would be no such thing as scientific exploration.

Furthermore, all the above criteria are not arbitrary in the sense that they all serve the enhancement, enrichment and deepening of life. This belief that enhanced, enriched and deepened forms of life are preferable to contrary forms seems to be at the foundation of the scientific endeavour and perhaps of all cultural activities. The insistence that even this is arbitrary does not seem to allow for any rational activity, not even for the survival of the human race. Thus, the fundamental criteria of distinction between development--unfolding and development--ascent seem to be rooted in the very concept of rationality.

The distinctive feature of the theory of positive disintegration is that it considers mental disintegration and psychoneurotic experiences the main dynamisms of change and ascent to higher level mental structures. This element of the theory is empirically connected with the basic criteria of development--ascent, because all forms of psychoneurosis are expressions of above average sensitivity and responsiveness, of nervousness and psychological hyperexcitability.

It must be stressed that the theory of positive disintegration does not commit us directly to the acceptance of any definite moral judgment.

It is less concerned with the substance of moral judgments as with the manner in which they are formed. It commits us to the search for an adequate understanding of the context of moral issues, for a coordination of this understanding with our emotional responses and the search for autonomy in the manner we reach our conclusions. This corresponds very closely to the criterion by means of which Sartre defines bad faith and self-deception, the primary sin for all existentialist philosophers.

The problem of ethics for the existentialist is not the question whether we have a moral code a definite, set of absolutely certain standards, the problem is whether our choice is well-informed, autonomous and authentic. In the light of new information and insight we may find it necessary to correct it and change. Both the theory of positive disintegration and existentialist philosophy are antirelativistic, but open, leaving it up to the future to correct the present.

The scientific status and the objectivity of the basic tenets of the theory of positive disintegration will be decided in the last resort by the tests which usually assess the validity of all statements pretending to represent scientific insight, and that is empirical verification, confirmation of deducible predictions and the scope of explanations. The presently available experimental data concerning the theory of positive disintegration are certainly not discouraging.

Insofar as the theory of positive disintegration includes elements which are not directly empirically testable, it is not different from the theories in natural science. The present writer does not believe in the rigid separation of philosophy and science, in the justification of scientific theories from philosophical assumptions. Even if it could be achieved, it

would deprive science of the depth and vision, which it has always derived from philosophical schemes and which are indispensable for its further growth.