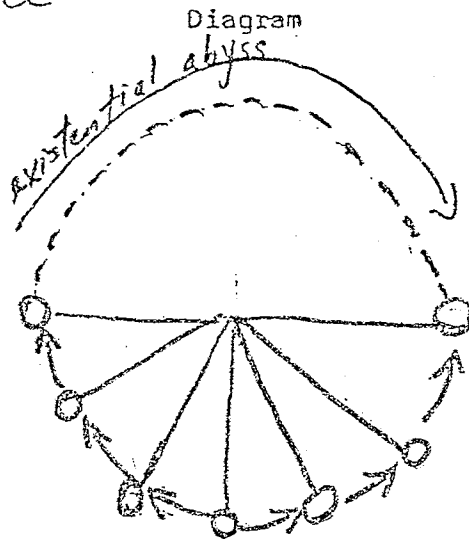


June 7/76

-for Bob Luce

-by M King
elaboration of
Theory of Positive
Disintegration



midlevel tension (maxi mecon)

What I think is this - that, developmentally speaking, one's life begins as a plumb line, a pendulum not yet in motion, but possessing the potential for motion, both internally and externally. So, initially, there is a biological (internal) factor, and a sociological (external) factor. The internal or biologically given factor is, initially, in a non-reflective state. The capacity to reflect about one's own biologically given characteristics, as well as one's sociological influences eventually gives rise to a third factor, always conscious, considered by Dr. Dabrowski to be made up of intellectual, emotional and imaginal components, in varying degrees and thus proportions in different individuals. It is this third factor which gives direction to development, direction which is autonomous and authentic and marks the individual for the person he is. Before this third factor is operating, one's developmental thrust and direction is a haphazard result of internal and non-reflective (biological) and uncritically accepted social influences.

So this inert pendulum is set in motion by the unique interaction of the individual's biological 'given' and the social circumstances (i.e. a timid child and an aggressive, over-controlling parent, or an aggressive child and a timid parent, or a reversal of both timid-timid, aggressive-aggressive, etc.) For the young child, the environment consists almost solely of the family per se. Later, the community at large plays a part in keeping the pendulum swinging, or not. Eventually, with the first manifestations of the third factor, the individual's own reaction to these strong influences plays the crucial role in development, giving it direction, acting as a compass in a storm, the storm being the winds of either social change or biochemical fluctuations.

So the pendulum is set in motion, and this motion, if development occurs, increases until, at the end of the second level, as defined by Dabrowski, the tension of the swing is felt as maximum, with strong but ambivalent feelings about almost everything tossing the individual ~~in~~ in what feels like a small boat on a stormy ocean. Although there are few constitutional psychopaths (inert plumb lines, never going to budge, developmentally speaking), society often encourages individuals to acquire psychopathic traits in order to survive. Thus, not very many individuals suffer the torments of maximum second level tension.

For those who do, there are several choices open to them: 1) return to a psychopathic integration (return to the harbor, where all is safe) 2) madness (chronic negative disintegration) 3) further development. At this point, one parts company with fellow-travelers, for, from this point on, socially speaking, one must journey alone. The developing individual senses this and is often terrified of the uncharted route, the loneliness, and the dark. Should he survive the first swing over the existential abyss (in the diagram, over the top), he may well still suicide, ~~since~~ ^{may be} for now going back is impossible for him, and, if going ahead is impossible, suicide is an alternative. This is a particularly dangerous time, the early part of the third level, where thrust and direction are still spontaneous, and, while the individual has some control over what is happening to him, it is still minimal and sometimes so sporadic that he doubts himself into despair and even death. Or, if he is sophisticated he may spend the rest of his life philosophizing about his one trip over. A lot of existential philosophers find themselves in this bind, where they go on and on inauthentically about what was once authentic for them but no longer is.

If the individual decides to take another swing over the top, he may find, to his delight, that he has more time to look around and see what is happening. If this is the case, his development will begin to take conscious direction. Since the decision to step into the unknown is voluntary, it is easy to see why fewer and fewer people are taking the journey at this level. Those who do find that increased awareness brings increased responsibility, for themselves and others, a responsibility not at all in the sense of duty, externally imposed, but an 'obligation which is a privilege,' paradoxically speaking.

About the same time the individual goes over the top, voluntarily, for the second or third time, the circle, rather than being uni-level and uni-dimensional, begins to rotate on the other axis, so that, with continued spins over, it changes from a saucer shape to a sphere. When this process is complete, the individual has the freedom to range anywhere ~~with~~ within his own sphere, either across the spokes, so to speak, or around the circumference. His world, formerly static and rigid, and thus limited, is now global and dynamic and humming with life. The center of this sphere is the essence of the individual, his autonomy, his inner psychic milieu-through which is expressed his authenticity, all that makes him most free and most responsible at one and the same time, in short, all that makes him unique. This dynamic union of opposites (i.e. a person being vulnerable to others and strong in himself) appears as paradoxical to anyone who resolves developmental dilemmas by settling for one end of a continuum of polar opposites (and would influence others by urging them to do so as well). The autonomous individual is no longer subject to such influences, but, during the course of his development, suggestibility was a necessary, but not sufficient factor, given that, without suggestibility, the individual will never consider anyone or anything but ~~his~~ himself or his own thoughts and ideas. After having passed through a quagmire of suggestibility, the individual, ~~rich~~ rich with ideas, satiated with stimuli, begins to sculpt, out of this morass which is himself, the person that he is.

Developmentally speaking, the individual who develops consciously is both the artist and the canvas, the sculptor and the clay. Individuals at the first and second level of development experience themselves as the canvas or the clay, but do not comprehend taking themselves in hand.

Sometimes I think of it this way - the first twenty years or so of an individual's life consist of painting and re-painting a canvas, trying to get it right, much as a new artist experiments with various oils. Eventually there are so many layers that the canvas turns into a blob. The painter turns into a sculptor, and the next twenty years are spent selectively discarding what he is not.

That's about it for the diagram, but I want to talk about over-excitability, as I understand it. Dabrowski states that, for some, and perhaps most people, there is a stimulus, and there is a response. They are equal and opposite, ending in a zero point of tension. (i.e. travelling through mountains, "Oh, what a fantastic scene. Right. Where was I? Oh, yah, as I was saying about that business deal, curling game, etc.") A spike of excitability, followed by a return to the state prior to the stimulus. For the person with heightened developmental potential, when there is a stimulus, there is an over-response, with an inability to return quickly to a state of quiescence. This over-response is a manifestation of over-excitability. What then does one do with this excess energy? The psychopathic person uses it destructively, harming others when unable to contain himself, often bringing destruction to others, and, finally, to himself. The weak developer may dispel the extra energy with excessive drinking or excessive anything, work, sports, simply to neutralize himself, get himself back where he feels comfortable. What distinguishes the positive developer is the creative or constructive way in which he uses this excess energy, often, in his suffering, making a contribution in the form of art, literature, etc.

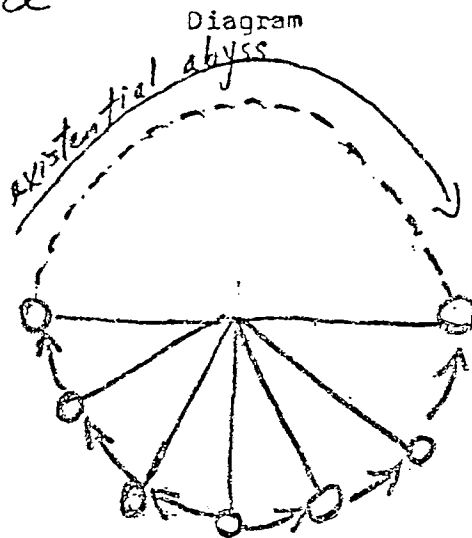
There are five forms of over-excitability, and, in order for conscious development to take place, intellectual, emotional and imaginal over-excitability must rule sensual and physical over-ex. Through the remnants of the sensual, the world still imposes, but the raw material is refined by the individual's intellect, emotion and imagination. The remains of the physical over-ex are used in the service of the execution of the problem imposed by the world. It's like two mail-boxes on an executive's desk, the one saying IN is the sensual, OUT is the physical. The problem in the letter, however, is solved by the executive in seclusion.

Of the five forms of over-excitability, I note the imaginal as most human, because I think the other four forms are experienced by animals. And, again, speaking analogously, the imagination seems to me to compare to the filament the spider spins out ahead of him, and on which he walks. Through his imagination, which he spins out ahead of him, man walks into his future.

June 11/63

-for Bob Kace

-by M. King
elaboration of
Theory of Positive
Disintegration



multilevel tension (maximum)

What I think is this - that, developmentally speaking, one's life begins as a plumb line, a pendulum not yet in motion, but possessing the potential for motion, both internally and externally. So, initially, there is a biological (internal) factor, and a sociological (external) factor. The internal or biologically given factor is, initially, in a non-reflective state. The capacity to reflect about one's own biologically given characteristics, as well as one's sociological influences eventually gives rise to a third factor, always conscious, considered by Dr. Dabrowski to be made up of intellectual, emotional and imaginal components, in varying degrees and thus proportions in different individuals. It is this third factor which gives direction to development, direction which is autonomous and authentic and marks the individual for the person he is. Before this third factor is operating, one's developmental thrust and direction is a haphazard result of internal and non-reflective (biological) and uncritically accepted social influences.

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