
Is Inner Transformation a Creative Process?

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ABSTRACT: After some musings, the answer to the title's question is "yes." Piechowski bases his argument on Dabrowski's theory of levels of emotional development, Maslow's concept of "self-actualization," and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Within this frame he takes up three cases: Etty Hillesum, the Dutch woman whose inner growth, recorded in her diary, led her finally to volunteer for deportation by the Nazis, and to go off singing; a woman named Ashley, a fiercely devoted teacher who kept a diary recording her inner struggle for purification; and a woman known as "Peace Pilgrim" who covered 25,000 miles on foot, telling peace along the way. The article concludes on the note that inner peace is the foundation of world peace. —Editors

Altruism, self-actualization, and high levels of moral development are readily recognized in exceptional individuals but not easy to find elsewhere. By what means could we find them in "ordinary" people? What might be the sign of a greater potential for developing these qualities in the first place? In the framework adopted here, these qualities are believed to develop as a result of transforming growth toward a life of service inspired by universal ideals of brotherhood and peace. The primary models of transforming growth are people like Mahatma Gandhi and Eleanor Roosevelt (Piechowski,

1990), but it would be worth our effort to recognize similar potential without reliance on fame and prominence. Is this potential necessarily a creative potential and is the process of inner transformation a creative process? In short, can moral development be viewed in any way as creative?

The term "moral creativity" seemed, at first, an oxymoron. As I understand self-actualizing people and moral exemplars, moral truths are self-evident to them; because they live these truths rather than debate and analyze them, I could not see any creative element to be manifestly present. But perhaps one could consider the process of advanced inner growth as a process of creating a new self. People involved in this type of quest often use the language of discovery, working to find their true selves. To discover or uncover the true self is to take everything away that obscures it, not unlike Michelangelo's method of bringing the figure out of the stone, bit by bit. If we can assume that discovering a truth is a creative process, then discovering one's true self must be one too. By the evidence of moral exemplars the true self is moral by its very nature, and if this is the case, can there

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be anything that would make it morally creative?

A Theory of Inner Transformation

The theoretical framework for this study is furnished by Maslow's construct of self-actualization, Dabrowski's theory of emotional development, and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Gardner, 1983; Maslow, 1970; Nelson, 1989; Piechowski, 1991). Dabrowski developed his theory from extensive experience with gifted and talented children, adolescents, and adults, some of whom were undergoing moral crises. His theory offers a broad framework in which Maslow's construct of self-actualization sits very precisely and Gardner's personal intelligences—the intrapersonal in particular—finds an extended formulation. The theory also furnishes concepts and empirical tools for identifying strong potential for advanced development, and for the assessment of cases in which the potential is actualized (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991). The theory distinguishes five levels of development (see Table 1). Transforming growth begins in Level III—the level of distinctly moral motivation—and continues through IV and into V. Detailed analysis showed that Level IV corresponds to Maslow's construct of self-actualization (Piechowski, 1978).

In Dabrowski's vision, development of personality was stratified into five ascending regions or levels. "Levels of personality development" is a rather abstract notion and I prefer to speak here of "regions" to convey something of their complexity and possibility of a variety of developmental patterns within each level. Self-serving motivations, self-protectiveness, manipulation, conflict with others, possessiveness, superficial attach-

Table 1.
Levels of Emotional Development

V	Life inspired by a powerful ideal, such as equal rights, world peace, universal love and compassion, sovereignty of all nations (<i>A magnetic field in the soul</i> — Dag Hammarskjöld)
IV	Self-actualization; ideals and actions agree: "what ought to be, will be," strong sense of responsibility (<i>Behind tranquility lies conquered unhappiness</i> — Eleanor Roosevelt)
III	Sense of the ideal but not reaching it; moral concerns: higher vs. lower in oneself (<i>Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor</i> — Marcus Tullius Cicero)
II	Lack of inner direction; inner fragmentation - many selves; submission to the values of the group; relativism of values and beliefs (<i>A reed in the wind</i> —)
I	Dominant concern with self-protection and survival; self-serving egocentrism; instrumental view of others (e.g., <i>Dog-eat-dog</i> mentality)

Note. This table was adapted from Piechowski (1991).

ments, and the like rule the region of Level 1. In Level II there is either a sense of inner fragmentation ("I feel split into a thousand pieces") and resulting oscillations of mood, vacillations in action, switching from one extreme to the other, or a fairly integrated world view of unregenerate relativism, or submission to mainstream values and conventions. Here the self derives its definition from fulfilling the expectations of others, family, or society. Personal growth in this region is most often a struggle toward the emancipation of an individual sense of self.

The condition of entry to the next region, or Level III, is a sense of self which may be

vulnerable and threatened yet deep down is autonomous. Here, at first a vague but gradually stronger and clearer experience of a vertical split within the self makes itself felt: the lower versus the higher (in the sense of an inner ideal), "what ought to be" versus "what is" (in the sense of a loathsome state of affairs of failing one's ideals, falling short of one's potential, perceiving oneself lacking in empathy, helpfulness, and so on). It is in this region that moral questions become important and may be intensely felt. It is here that others are always seen as individual persons, and the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number is felt to be inadequate. There is a heightened sense of moral and social responsibility. Inner realization leads to compassion, and compassion leads to service. The deepening understanding of universal ideals and their personal realization through service are themes that continue into Levels IV and V. (For those who wish to compare this theory against the yardstick of Kohlberg's theory, suffice it to say that Dabrowski deals with personality traits, types of personal growth, and motivation for moral action rather than with principles of moral reasoning and justice. Consequently, the reply to the question "why be moral" or "why be good" is to be found in the very emotional power with which moral questions are felt. Like William James, Dabrowski stressed the importance of emotions as motivators. Like Carol Gilligan, he stressed the centrality of empathy and moral responsibility. "Levels" in the theories of Kohlberg and Dabrowski are not directly comparable.)

Dabrowski's theory may give the impression that the levels form an orderly succession of stages, but the theory serves best as a theory of transforming growth. A case of advanced development has been reported yet without the evidence of the dynamism of inner transformation as described by

Dabrowski (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991). Cases of advanced moral development that do not necessarily fit into Dabrowski's framework have been presented by Grant (1988). While this theory appears to provide the best description of inner change which centers on spiritual growth, alternative paths of inner transformation and self-actualization cannot be excluded. Ferrucci (1990), for instance, described seven such paths.

Still, when all is said and done, we are left with the question of the exact nature of the process of inner transformation. Frick (1987) identified "a creative process within the person" from which springs inner transformation. It is the way in which an experience acquires symbolic power and becomes a turning point in a person's life. In the examples given by Frick, a person shifts to a new way of finding meaning in oneself and in the surrounding world. The new perspective is then deeply felt to be a more aware way of apprehending things—a paradigm shift but in the inner self.

Three Lives in Transformation

Three cases will be presented briefly to illustrate how inner transformation works. (A fuller account is given by Piechowski, 1991, 1992). Case one is Ashley, an intellectual, a university professor who wanted to create a record of her inner development and, in this way, sort things out for herself. Over a period of four years she wrote extensive answers (totalling nearly 100 pages) to an instrument for the assessment of developmental level (Gage, Morse, & Piechowski, 1981). Case two is Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish woman living in Amsterdam in World War II; her diary is a remarkable record of spiritual growth (Hillesum, 1981/1985; Spaltro, 1991). The third case is Peace Pilgrim, a woman from New Jersey

who in 1953, at the age of 44, started a 25,000-mile pilgrimage on foot for peace, and whose talks and appearances are collected in a book (Peace Pilgrim, 1982).

A detailed record of inner transformation is rare. Such documents are sometimes produced by members of religious orders or persons undergoing spiritual training. The significance of these three cases is that they record far-reaching inner development of secular persons. One of them produced her reports in response to specific psychological inquiry.

These three cases illustrate transforming growth in rich detail. All three complement each other because they represent different, though overlapping, phases of transforming growth as well as alternative paths (Piechowski, 1992). They have much in common yet are extraordinarily individual and unique. Peace Pilgrim exemplifies the highest level of development (Level V) and offers a direct view of a life simplified and perfected into a consummate union with the "all pervading spirit—which binds everything in the universe together and gives life to everything." In Etty Hillesum's description of her inner growth one can discern the succession of Levels III and IV. In her life, love perfects the will. Ashley represents a different path—an uncompromising search for perfection—a life in which the will perfects action as work of love. Her unceasing self-examination and unwavering self-direction make the record of her inner growth the purest, most clearly focused expression of Level IV. All three are gifted individuals, all three are superb examples of *intrapersonal* intelligence representing its highest degree, analogous to expert level or extraordinary talent in other domains.

Studied closely, moral exemplars strike me as the embodiment of Maslow's dictum about self-actualizing people: "they do right and they do not do wrong." To do right

means for them to move away from self-involvement and ego-defensiveness, and instead to be of service to others. This is not easily accomplished—it calls for unrelenting inner work. Eleanor Roosevelt described it as "knowledge of yourself, a knowledge based on a deliberately and usually painfully acquired self-discipline.... This self-knowledge develops slowly" (Roosevelt, 1962, p. 63). The courage to know oneself, self-discipline, methods of coping with inner conflict and emotional pain, and the presence of an inner ideal are the main themes of Roosevelt's inner growth (Piechowski, 1990). The same basic themes, and a number of others, are found in the other exemplars to be presented here: Etty Hillesum, Peace Pilgrim, and Ashley (a pseudonym).

Two principles emerge in individuals who have undergone far-reaching inner transformation. One is the principle of *nonseparateness*, a transpersonal perspective in which individuals are seen not in isolation but as a part of larger whole, as cells in one body of humanity. The other is the principle of *inner peace* as a necessary condition of world peace. These two principles are logically linked. For Peace Pilgrim there was no doubt that peace in the world will be secure only as each person works toward inner peace.

Etty Hillesum (1914-1943)

In 1941 at the start of her diary Etty Hillesum was 27 years old. While she led a happy life full of intellectual stimulation, rich in friends and lovers, she found her life lacking a deeper meaning, and she wanted to reach what was truly essential in her; she sensed it to be present but locked away. Etty's inner growth is a clear example of transforming growth in Dabrowski's terms. The first phase (Level III) is the conflict

between the lower and the higher in one's self. The lower is what one wants to remove, what one does not accept in oneself. In the first part of her diary we witness an inner struggle to fight restlessness of spirit, inner chaos, depression, despair, and physical pain. These inner battles were sometimes "short but violent," but each made her feel "a little stronger." This process can be upsetting, especially when one does not always win and is subject to despair after a setback. It is still the phase of inner growth when self-acceptance is lacking—the acceptance of one's being as the raw material to be shaped and transformed.

Many significant themes can be noted in Etty's diary. Her inner growth is the principal theme; hatred as the problem of our age is another. Inner peace and her inner space ("wide plains beyond space and time") are themes in close connection with her life of prayer and her intimate relationship with God whom she found within herself: "That part of myself, that deepest and richest part in which I repose, is what I call God" (Hillesum, 1981/1985, p. 214). Her sense of life as an eternal current, from which she could draw strength directly, is another significant theme, and so is preparation. Etty discovered the importance of acceptance and of living in the present. She practiced meditation "to turn one's innermost being into a vast and empty plain, with none of the treacherous undergrowth to impede the view. So that something of 'God' can enter you, and something of 'Love' too" (Hillesum, 1981/1985, p. 27).

Within one year of intense inner growth Etty achieved great confidence in her inner direction, a strong sense of true self, profound inner peace, a deep sense of the meaning of life, and a great compassion for the suffering of others. Subsequently her growth exemplified Level IV in Dabrowski's theory (Piechowski, 1992; Spaltro, 1991).

Aware of the Nazi program of annihilation of the Jews, Etty faced the problem of hatred. "I no longer believe that we can change anything in the world until we have first changed ourselves. And that seems to me the only lesson to be learned from this war. That we must look inside ourselves and nowhere else" (Hillesum, 1981/1985, p. 87). She affirmed again and again, "Each of us must turn inward and destroy in himself all that he thinks he ought to destroy in others...every atom of hate we add to this world makes it still more inhospitable" (p. 222). These are clear expressions of the transpersonal perspective that we are not separate, and that individual change is the building block for world change. Etty's intense inner focus did not remove her from contact with others—just the opposite. It made her eager to be of help.

Etty volunteered for the transit camp at Westerbork where Jews, and later also non-Jews, were packed together before being shipped to the concentration camps, gas chambers, and ovens in Poland. Even behind the barbed wire of Westerbork, Etty was filled with inner joy and felt that life was "glorious and magnificent." To the inmates she was a "luminous" personality; she helped others in any way she could. Her last words from the transport for Auschwitz were "We left the camp singing."

"Ashley"

Ashley is a woman in her forties, divorced with two children. She teaches at a university and leads, unknown to others, a life of silent preparation. Significant inner changes took place in the four years between her first and last reports: the beginning of deep inner peace, growth of detachment and inner freedom, and the realization of her true nature. These changes exemplify Dabrowski's concept of the growing power of the

inner magnet he called *Personality Ideal*. Ashley's record is the strongest expression found so far of the dynamisms of Level IV.

Ashley's inner work is directed toward purification of motive, purification of desire, purification of the body, and purification of thought. Purification of thought—the elimination of all negative thoughts—is the area to which she had to put the greatest effort in order to cease being extremely impatient with people over their inefficacy and inharmonious ways. She had long understood that mankind is one, all connected, and she renounced the idea of separateness. But while the knowledge exists as a fundamental concept, Ashley has not yet translated it into what Peace Pilgrim saw in everyone—their divine nature, everyone as a shining light—and therefore unconditionally worthy of love and compassion.

What guides Ashley is her extraordinary conscience; it is almost personified. It was there from childhood, her own inner compass rather than a result of the ways she was brought up, and clearly a constant in her life. She remembers as a child that if her parents were angry with her she could not sleep until she begged and received their forgiveness; as she said, her slate had to be clean. Her conscience keeps her on an unrelenting search for perfection:

The opinion of the world means nothing to me as long as I am clear with myself.... I have always felt that I could take on the whole world if I have my conscience on my side. Conversely, if nobody else can destroy me, I could...and I could do a perfect job of it too.... That is why it is so important for me to do the very best job I can, always.... Otherwise my conscience will torture me. I will take no "guilt trip," from no one, but the genuine feeling of guilt coming from inside can be absolutely devastating. That is why I have to live my life in such a way that there is never a feeling of guilt.... That's why I want to live, HAVE to live, as "impeccably" as I can.

She refers to her conscience as her higher self.

Ashley is charged with energy, endowed with a sharp intellect, and tireless in her dedication to her students and to the institution she serves. Therefore, when she stated that her ideals are "to live impeccably, to practice harmlessness, and to serve humanity," one can be certain that they are carried out with unwavering will and inner discipline. By practicing *harmlessness* she means to do no harm in thought, word, or action. This she found to be by far the hardest task of her life. Because of her critical capacity to instantly find faults in others she experienced great difficulty when she attempted to stop her criticizing even in thought. Now she believes that even unspoken negative thought can be harmful. To practice harmlessness means, in truth, to refrain from letting the critical thought be condemning: "It requires constant attention, vigilance, deliberation, and consciousness...deliberate abstention from the negative." She has achieved a state of detachment that enables her to take note of the faults and imperfections that once offended her but without the charge of negative emotion, a very freeing process. At the same time she has grown more accepting of herself, not in being content with herself but as "the garden to be weeded, the wild horse to be tamed, the clay to be shaped." The metaphor of the self as the clay to be shaped suggests an analogy with the creative process:

The clay has to perfect itself and rid itself of all impurities if it is to become adequate matter for the hands of the potter. The artist will not use inferior material to make a beautiful pot. The "still small voice" does not impose, it calls, but one has to choose to become worthy, to make oneself worthy.... "Refiner's fire," what an exalting notion! But, my God, it is so difficult!

In Ashley's life the guiding force is her conscience and the search for inner perfection. Her sole desire is to be of service. While in Etty love perfected her will, in Ashley will perfects action as a work of love.

Peace Pilgrim (1908-1981)

While engaged in ordinary living, Peace Pilgrim felt that her life lacked meaning. She was determined to find it. As her quest became more intense and desperate she arrived at a point in which she felt a complete willingness to dedicate her life to service. She prayed to God to use her in any way He saw fit. She experienced a great peace. This was her first significant moment of transformation, a point of no return, as she said, "After that, you can never go back to completely self-centered living" (Peace Pilgrim, p. 7). In the 15 years that followed she struggled through inner conflict between the self-centered nature and the God-centered nature. This was her conscious effort to start to live what she believed. Powerful inner transformation was at work.

Then in the midst of the struggle there came a wonderful mountaintop experience, and for the first time I knew what inner peace was like.... I felt a oneness—oneness with all my fellow human beings, oneness with all of creation. I have never felt really separate since. (p. 21)

From then on her inner peace deepened with only an occasional slipping out of it until one morning she knew that inner peace was hers for good. It also came with an endless supply of energy and it never left her for the remaining 27 years of her life. Her inner peace was put to the test in a number of critical and life-threatening situations but apparently nothing could shake it (Peace Pilgrim, 1982).

With this second significant point of no return she knew that her mission in life was to work for peace: "peace among nations, peace among groups, peace within our environment, peace among individuals; and the very, very important inner peace" (p. 7). She said, "Ultimate peace begins within; when we find peace within there will be no more conflict, no more occasion for war" (p. 98). She was now anchored in transcendent truth where there is no doubt as to what is morally right because it flows out of compassion for others and the real and actual experience of nonseparateness: of seeing the higher nature in every human being.

We are all cells in the body of humanity. We are not separate from our fellow humans.... It's only from that higher viewpoint that you can know what it is to love your neighbor as yourself. From that higher viewpoint there becomes just one realistic way to work, and that is for the good of the whole. As long as you work for your selfish little self, you're just one cell against all those other cells, and you're way out of harmony. But as soon as you begin working for the good of the whole, you find yourself in harmony with all of your fellow human beings. You see it's the easy harmonious way to live. (Peace Pilgrim, 1982, pp. 18-19)

On her mission to arouse people to the cause of peace it took her 11 years to complete the first 25,000 miles, with one pair of tennis shoes for every 1,500 miles. Peace Pilgrim stripped her life to pure essentials; her approach was of utter simplicity. The basic conflict in the world, she said, is not between nations but between two opposing beliefs: the way of war versus the way of peace. The way of war is the belief that violence can be controlled by violence. But evil cannot be overcome with more evil, only with good. The first goal is to stop physical violence so that we can concentrate on stopping the psychological violence which exists in many forms of conflict and hate: litigations, verbal abuse, wishing ill on

others, seeking one's own advantage, and so on. Our goal in every instance ought to be to resolve the conflict rather than to want to win, a principle Gandhi discovered to be his vocation as a lawyer and Peace Pilgrim taught wherever she went: "I have extended my pacificism to include non-use of psychological violence as well as non-use of physical violence. Therefore I no longer become angry. I not only do not say angry words, I do not even think angry thoughts!" (Peace Pilgrim, 1982, p. 112). To her, hurting others was not justified even in war or self-defense. She once faced a man intent on beating—even killing—a little girl. Feeling nothing but compassion for the man as someone who was psychologically very sick, she stepped in front to shield the child and looked him in the face. He stopped and looked at her for a long time and turned away. But she was certain that had she tried force against him, he would have killed them both.

To some people Peace Pilgrim in her childlike simplicity appears rather naive, yet she carried out her mission without money (neither did she have any personal money) and without an organization to back her up. No one knew her to ever be tired or upset or in any way wanting anything for herself. She knew her true self:

This clay garment is one of a penniless pilgrim journeying in the name of peace. It is what you cannot see that is so very important. I am one who is propelled by the power of faith; I bathe in the light of eternal wisdom; I am sustained by the unending energy of the universe; this is who I really am! (Peace Pilgrim, p. 126)

The whole purpose of Maslow's search for self-actualizing people was to find those individuals whose moral judgment we could trust. Mohandas Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Dag Hammarskjöld, Peace Pilgrim, Ety Hillesum, and Ashley are that and much

more. They shaped their lives in the light of transcendent truth, their creative endeavor was to discover their true selves.

People engaged in this kind of inner journey are not as rare as one might think. Sinetar (1986), for instance, studied 40 cases of persons, currently living, in the early and advanced phases of self-actualization.

Is it Creative?

Peace Pilgrim, Ety, and Ashley are extraordinary and unique individuals. What characterizes them is that they live moral truth. But moral truth is achieved only as a result of advanced inner transformation. Can one be creative in regard to moral truth? These individuals engaged in an intense and deliberate process of inner transformation which presented many individual problems to be solved, for example, finding ways of coping with emotional pain and tasks of self-discipline, freeing oneself from possessiveness and jealousy, practicing harmlessness, finding ways of being of service in a selfless way, and striving for greater acceptance of others and of themselves. As Gaarlandt, the editor of her diary, said of Ety, "she wanted to leave some trace behind and share the solutions she found for her life" (Hillesum, 1981/1985, p. xvi). But the principal task for Peace Pilgrim, Ety, and Ashley, was to give a new meaning to their lives and to discover their true self. One could interpret this as problem-finding in the intrapersonal domain: the self as the object of discovery and creation.

The significance of these cases lies in the fact that they led ordinary lives held no positions of prominence, and had no religious training to speak of, yet from within their inner being came a spiritual search. All three responded to the desperate call of their brothers and sisters with a willingness

to serve. All three had a sense of preparing themselves and being prepared for their mission. They all came to the firm conviction that the inner situation determines the outer situation, that we each individually create our personal and collective reality. All three shared the transpersonal perspective of nonseparateness that we are "all cells in the one body of humanity;" that our lives and destinies are interconnected; and the choices we make—for personal gain or for the good of the whole—shape the world situation toward war or toward peace. Interestingly, Eleanor Roosevelt believed this too. In her essay, *The Moral Basis of Democracy*, she wrote: "laws and government administration are only the result of the way people progress inwardly, and that the basis of success in a Democracy is really laid down by the people. It will progress only as their own personal development goes forward" (Roosevelt, 1940, p. 62); and further,

if we believe in Democracy and that it is based on the possibility of a Christ-like way of life, then everybody must force himself to think through his own basic philosophy, his own willingness to live up to it and to help carry it out in everyday life. (Roosevelt, 1940, p. 76)

The ideas of nonseparateness and of inner peace as the foundation of world peace, are not ones with which we grew up, and neither did Peace Pilgrim, Etty, nor Ashley. They came upon them within the depth of their inner self, of which Etty said, "everything we need is within us." And if we accept their discovery that we create our own reality, and that all the "material" can be found within the inner self, then we have come upon creativity in the ultimate sense. Frick (1987) in fact recognized that the turning points in inner growth are symbolic transformations powered by "a creative process within the person." Or, as Dag

Hammarskjöld (1964) put it in the diary of his inner journey:

The ultimate surrender to the creative act—it is the destiny of some to be brought to the threshold of this in the act of sacrifice rather than the sexual act; and they experience a thunderclap of the same dazzling power. (p. 166)

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