Kazimierz Dąbrowski refers to his view of personality development as the theory of positive disintegration. He defines disintegration as disharmony within the individual and in his adaptation to the external environment. Anxiety, psychoneurosis, and psychosis are symptoms of disintegration. In general, disintegration refers to involution, psychopathology, and retrogression to a lower level of psychic functioning. Integration is the opposite: evolution, psychic health, and adequate adaptation, both within the self and to the environment. Dąbrowski postulates a developmental instinct—that is, a tendency of man to evolve from lower to higher levels of personality. He regards personality as primarily developing through dissatisfaction with, and fragmentation of, the existing psychic structure—a period of disintegration—and finally a secondary integration at a higher level. Dąbrowski feels that no growth takes place without previous disintegration. He regards symptoms of anxiety, psychoneurosis, and even some symptoms of psychosis as the signs of the disintegration stage of this evolution, and therefore not always pathological.

Kazimierz Dąbrowski, M.D., Ph.D., (1902 - 1980) was born in Poland. He received his medical degree from the Forensic Medicine Department of the University of Geneva in 1929, and earned his Ph.D. in psychology, as well as a second medical diploma, from the Adam Mickiewicz University in 1931. Dąbrowski was a very prolific scholar; his publications number in the hundreds in Polish, including some twenty major books. Dąbrowski's titles in English include: Personality-shaping Through Positive Disintegration, Mental Growth Through Positive Disintegration, and Psychoneurosis Is Not an Illness.
“Dąbrowski’s theory is not only interesting but even exciting in its breadth and depth of its implications. The ubiquity of psychological symptoms has always confounded a simple descriptive psychopathological approach to mental illness. Dąbrowski’s theory gives these symptoms a role in normal personality development that is consistent with their broad distribution as shown by epidemiological studies and as felt by those aware of the problems in themselves and in those around them.”

~ Jason Aronson, Harvard Medical School

MENTAL GROWTH THROUGH POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

“I consider this to be one of the most important contributions to psychological and psychiatric theory in this whole decade. There is little question in my mind that this book will be read for another decade or two, and very widely. It digs very deep and comes up with extremely important conclusions that will certainly change the course of psychological theorizing and the practice of psychotherapy for some time to come.”

~ Abraham H. Maslow, Brandeis University

PERSONALITY SHAPING THROUGH POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

“Dr. Kazimierz Dąbrowski is no ordinary psychiatrist. Although educated as a physician, he has developed a conception of man and his ‘existential’ vagaries which radically transcends the physical and biological realms; and although later trained in Freudian psychoanalysis, he has a point of view which, instead of denigrating morality and idealism, puts them in a place of supreme importance.

Dr. Dąbrowski has certainly been a pioneer in the development of the kind of psychiatry that is set forth in this book, and he deserves great credit for his originality and courage. But, at the same time there is nothing singular or eccentric about his particular orientation. It is, in fact, part and parcel of a widespread and growing perspective in clinical psychology and psychiatry which can only be described as revolutionary.”

~ O. Hobart Mowrer, University of Illinois
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