

## Everybody Has to Be Somewhere: Speculations on the Relativity of the Self.

William Tillier

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Paper presented at the 1996 Dabrowski conference. The figures are not included here, if you want them, please consult the pdf version of the document.

### Abstract

Dabrowski presents a multileveled, hierarchical theory of personality development. A review of the implications of Einstein's relativity theory for psychology provides a helpful context for Dabrowski's work. In addition, recent works on personality provide further context. The implications for Dabrowski's theory are explored and suggestions made concerning the usefulness of this approach for psychology.

Everybody Has to Be Somewhere: Speculations on the Relativity of the Self.

Dabrowski's theory (1937, 1964, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1972, 1977; Dabrowski and Piechowski, 1977), provides a powerful tool of analysis for studying psychology. His multileveled approach advances and strengthens our understanding of the self and of how individuals see themselves, others, and the world. An appreciation of Einstein's theory of relativity provides a helpful analogy and context to Dabrowski's work. This paper will review the implications of Einstein's work on frames of reference, and their relativity as an analogue to a multileveled approach to psychology. The vital roles played by overexcitability and by subject-object in shaping the multilevelled view will be considered. Implications of multilevelness will be discussed on both personal and social levels with speculations on the developing self within a relativistic context. To conclude, recent literature on personality will be reviewed and linked to Dabrowski's ideas.

Contextual Overview: A Multilevel Paradigm.

Today, many scientists express an appreciation for the deeper, multi-layered organizational structures that form the foundation of systems and for the complex interrelationships between systems.

Scientists like Brian Goodwin (1994), George Johnson (1995), Stewart Kauffman (1995), Scott Kelso (1995), and Murray Gell-Mann (1994) are leading the way in looking for deeper, organizing and unifying principles. These approaches lead us away from relativism toward an appreciation of the

[TOP](#) [Main Page](#) [Brief Overview](#) [Glossary](#) [Order DVD](#) [Bibliography](#) [Supplemental](#)

Parallels between Dabrowski and recent directions in science are obvious. Both are trying to mine "deeper layers" and both appreciate how seldom the surface reflects the reality of the "whole picture." In both science and psychology, we have come to understand some parts of "the surface" in great detail but we need to remember that this only begins to account for the great complexity and interrelationships that exist below the surface. Dabrowski was trying to achieve a level of analysis that could more realistically explain both the breadth of behaviour seen "on the surface" and the "depth" and complexity of psychology and personality. Personality cannot be understood simply by the study of behaviour. Theories of personality must be generated and measured against behaviour, just as theories of Nature have to be generated and measured by empirical observation.

The paradigms we adopt to understand the world continue to yield to new world views. Man was the universe until Copernicus. The Copernican universe gave way to Kepler. This was followed by a Newtonian universe until Einstein. Do the trends reflected in recent scientific literature herald the beginning on another shift in our world view? I believe they do and that the multilevel approach will play a major role in the paradigm emerging from recent work.

As theory and research continue, specific links between developments in science and Dabrowski's ideas will be forged, reviewed and clarified. For example, is there a relationship between the recent theory of emergence and Dabrowski's third factor? Is there a basic tendency for all natural systems (from single cells to personalities) to organize themselves and to try to move (to emerge) to higher, "more elegant" levels?

This paper will begin to shape these links by discussing relativity and relating it to multilevelness and Dabrowski's theory.

### Relativity and Frames of Reference in Physics.

The study of relative frames has a long history, perhaps beginning when Galileo presented a theory of relative motion in 1632. He described shipboard experiments showing that a coin dropped on the deck of a ship would land at the feet of a sailor whether the ship was moving or not. Newton also incorporated relativity into his laws of motion. Modern relativity theory postulates the existence of an infinite number of possible frames of reference and rests on the idea that each frame must be considered relative to each other frame (Robinson 1990).

Einstein established modern relativity by combining two ideas in his special theory of relativity. The "old" principle of relativity, says that all of the laws of physics are the same in every frame of reference. Einstein advanced relativity by adding the idea that the fastest signal speed possible is the speed of light in a vacuum and that the speed of light must be the same in all frames. Therefore, according to Einstein's theories, later confirmed by experiment, while various other quantities can vary, all measurements of the speed of light taken in any frame of reference must produce the same result (Robinson 1990, p. 46). This "requirement" of Nature produces many odd situations and unexpected results when comparing two or more frames.

Problems quickly arise when comparing experiences or perceptions between frames and relating information from two frames can be like looking in the "fun-house mirror." Two events that appear simultaneous from one frame may appear separate from another frame. Space, time and mass become fluid relationships that no longer can be thought of as representing fixed quantities. Because they represent relationships, their values will vary from one frame to another, to ensure that the Laws of Nature (and the speed of light) "come out" the same in all frames (Johnson, 1995). "As two laboratories move through space at different velocities, length will contract, time slow, mass increase by just enough to guarantee that the rules that govern creation appear the same in both domains" (Johnson, 1995, p. 73). Measured quantities will vary as required to "even things out" between frames to ensure that the relationships between the quantities remain the same in any frame. Through this mechanism, scientists conducting experiments in any frame will discover the same Natural Laws of the Universe.

Our perceptions of the physical world are valid and accurate for us in our frame, as are those of others in their frames. However, a comparison of the frames of two people reveals that perceptions of space and time are quite different. Let us consider a specific example. Two observers meet and carefully synchronize their watches, then one begins a rocket flight. The watches now are running in two frames, both of which are governed by the identical laws of physics. In spite of this, subsequent measurements comparing the time displayed on the watches will not agree. The timepiece on the spacecraft will "run slower" and will show a slower time compared with the one on the ground (Robinson, 1990; Schwinger, 1986). Within each frame, each watch will be perceived to be correct and can be measured to be accurate and running normally. In fact, our normal perception of time passing would hold. Although it would intuitively seem that one watch must be "wrong," each is correct within its own frame of reference.

The space and time of each frame differ because each frame "splits" or divides space and time in a different way. Again, space and time are not absolute and distinct quantities; each can vary depending upon the specific circumstances of a given frame. Space and time are also dependent, they are connected because both are components of the broader phenomenon known as space-time (Robinson, 1990, p. 49).

In summary, all observers within one frame will have the same perceptual space and time, but observers in another relative frame will have a different perceptual space and time (Robinson 1990). Discrepancies in comparisons of frames are a central and common problem in psychology because two people viewing what is apparently the same situation, generally will perceive and interpret what they see quite differently. To paraphrase Max Weber, our highest ideals will be formed through a struggle of interpretations, ideas and other ideals that will be as vital and important to others as they are to us.

As described, when measured quantities are compared between two frames, discrepancies will often be observed. However, these differences are not random. They are the product of complex and

precise mathematical laws. These laws always reflect two important aspects of Nature, projection and horizon (Robinson 1990). To understand these features, imagine yourself standing on a set of train tracks that extend infinitely over a flat desert terrain. As you look down the tracks, you will see "the results of a projection process that takes place in the retinas of [the] eyes" (Robinson 1990, p. 375). At a point corresponding to the horizon, the projective process brings the tracks together where they seem to meet and disappear. A person standing anywhere on the tracks will see the two rails converge at a finite point on the horizon. The observer's perception of this "fact" will be identical no matter where on the tracks they stand. Moreover, anyone else standing in the same position will see essentially the same view.

Wherever a person stands on the tracks, he or she will be standing at the centre point of a finite view projecting between horizons on either side. This center point is experienced psychologically and is commonly used to judge "where we are." "Each of us must judge other things in relationship to our own values, which is equivalent to saying that we consider our location as the center point of the road with no ending" (Robinson, 1990, p 377). The perceptual space between the two horizons represents the inertial frame of reference for a given person.

Projection in our example corresponds to the principle of relativity in nature, that all of the laws of Nature are the same in every frame. Each person can position himself anywhere on the track and will still see the same projection of the track (Robinson, 1990).

The horizon is an artificial psychological limit. As one moves down the track, the horizon will correspondingly move but the view will remain constant. In a sense, this is a real life example of the practical limits of human neuropsychology, one illustrating the ease with which reality is modified. In reality, the tracks never meet, the joining at the horizon is a psychological construct. As Robinson notes, our world "is projected into that finite extent allowed by the human mind" (Robinson, 1990, p. 377). Robinson says that "the horizon in the analogy corresponds to our view of perfection in nature" and is currently represented in physics by the principal of light (Robinson, 1990, p. 379).

Two other aspects of relativity are important, the perfective and the perspective, and each frame of reference must display both aspects (Robinson 1990). The perfective aspect can be described using the metaphor of an Olympic athlete. Each athlete tries to achieve "a perfect ten" performance. An athlete's objective frame of reference is a continuum from the worst performance (a zero) through to the perfect (a ten). The highest score possible is a ten. Perfectivity says that if someone scores a ten, then this person must appear as a ten to anyone observing the performance. In other words, "a perfect ten appears as a perfect ten to all concerned" and the perfect ten athlete must be placed in the same position (the highest) on every Judge's scorecard, just as the speed of light must be the same in every frame (Robinson 1990, p. 76). It follows that the perfective aspect of relativity is represented in nature by light (Robinson 1990).

The second aspect is the perspective, reflecting an individual's point of view. It is the subjective evaluation of relative significance (Robinson 1990). In our example, it is the perceived rating that one

athlete gives another after watching their performance and saying "this person is worse, the same, or better, than I am." A third athlete may watch and say that their performance is superior to either of the first two. The major psychological implication of relativity is that one person's point of view does not readily transcribe into the point of view of someone else. "This is the most difficult point of relativity theory, but one faced every day in human relationships" (Robinson 1990, p. 74). The psychological gestalt of one person cannot be transcribed to the world view, perceptions, thoughts, ideals, feelings, etc., of anyone else. This insight is a first brick in the foundation of multilevelness.

Multilevelness and relativity have dual roles; both reflect basic features of Nature and each can be used as a method of analysis. In the former context, the physical structure and relationships of Nature describe a relativistic and multilevelled universe. The preceding discussion has outlined this observation. In the next two sections we will lay the groundwork for multilevelness as a tool of analysis.

### Overexcitability.

A person's view of life and their interaction with the environment is drastically influenced by the presence of overexcitability (OE). People exhibit a wide range of intensities when responding to stimuli, reflecting sensitivities at the neuronal level, in Dabrowski's words, "each form of overexcitability points to a higher than average sensitivity of its receptors" (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 7). Above average neuronal sensitivity commonly leads to a pattern of behavioural and emotional responses of above average intensity. Dabrowski distinguished five areas where over responding is seen: sensual, psychomotor, imaginal, intellectual and affective (emotional). Emotional OE forms the cornerstone of advanced developmental processes, and along with imaginal and intellectual forms, the three "give rich possibilities of development and creativity" (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 7).

Overexcitability is a component of developmental potential (DP), a constellation of genetically based factors that predispose an individual toward multilevelness and advanced development. The individual's relationship with the environment is interactive, therefore the stronger the OE, the stronger the impact of the environment on the individual and the stronger the individual's reciprocal influences on his or her environment.

The foundation of how a person "sees life" emerges from their perceptions, which in turn, rest on the information gathered by the basic senses. The unique physiology of an individual's perceptual attributes establishes a predisposition that ultimately influences their beliefs, attitudes, values, and behavioural responses to life. Essentially this represents a systematic bias; my view of life is based on the reality that I experience and that reality is based upon the unique physiology of my sensory system. Individual differences in genetic potentialities, neural differentiation, neural organization, neural reactivity, and such, create "my perceptual world." When "hyper stimulated" by strong OE, the senses will interact with environmental experiences to create the dynamics that fuel disintegration and ultimately, advanced growth.

While it is tempting to say that we use our OEs to creative ends, it is more accurate to say that we are "the victims" of our OEs. One does not control or easily direct the OEs. They act on us, thrusting us into hyper states, conflict, emotional angst and disintegration. When we appreciate and see our horizons and our center point for what they really are, limiting psychological constructs, we often feel compelled to try to change. OE is a mechanism of analysis that gives us this appreciation. OE continues to act throughout the developmental process, first as the raw fuel of motivation, later under more conscious application and direction. We learn to direct and apply our talents (our developmental potentials) and this is a hallmark of the creative process.

Interpersonal differences will arise, in part, due to relativistic factors. People interact from, and between, different frames and people's "clocks of perspective" will run at different rates because each person lives and perceives in their own unique frame. In other words, because each of our frames is unique and all relate to each other relatively, all of our "perceptual clocks" show conflicting information to some degree. Individual differences in developmental potentials will add to these differences as high DP will initially accentuate existing differences. I believe that this is a major source of the initial conflict and disintegration caused by high DP.

The reality experienced and described by people with high DP will be both quantitatively and qualitatively different from that experienced by people with a "normal" or average level of DP related factors. Individuals with a high endowment of OE and DP will often be out of harmony with their families and with society, a feature Dabrowski called positive maladjustment. People with enhanced potentials form discrete subgroups of individuals in the population. Usually, the stronger these potentials, the greater the impact on the development of the individual but the more "out of step" he or she will be with many of those around them. This will contribute to varying levels of stress and social isolation. How well an individual can cope with these developmental conflicts will, in part, determine how much DP will eventually be realized. As development proceeds, these differences will diminish as one comes to accommodate the frames of others and work to overcome differences.

Developmental factors are especially influential at times of crisis or trauma; times when the psyche is weakened and therefore more open to reorganization. For example, as Kohlberg's moral dilemmas test one's existing moral code, an opportunity to develop a more advanced moral solution is created. Dabrowski's theory is based upon the idea of mental growth through successive breakdowns of psychological organization. The strength of developmental factors will mediate the impact of a given crisis and how it will be experienced and dealt with. Several outcomes are possible, the person may recover from the crisis and reintegrate at a higher position than previously held, or stay at the preexisting level, or he or she may occasionally regress and reintegrate at a lower level.

Subject-object and the Self.

The "subject-object" process is a critical aspect of laying a psychological foundation for multilevelness, for self development and the differentiation of individual values.

"The process of evaluating one's own internal environment is essential for multilevel disintegration. The feeling of the separateness of one's own self increases and this is so not only in contradistinction to the external environment, but also, even primarily, in relation to one's own inner environment, which is evaluated, is made into a hierarchy, and becomes a subject of more precise cognition and appraising thought. A 'subject-object' process takes place in one's own self. One's internal milieu is divided into higher and lower, into better and worse, and into desirable and undesirable. There appears here the feeling of 'lower value' and the feeling of guilt when one 'falls down' to a lower level, knowing that he has the capacity to raise himself up" (Dabrowski, 1967, p. 69).

The "method" of subject-object allows us to see and understand ourselves from both objective and subjective perspectives. Using imagination, one can literally step back from the self and see oneself as an object. As Jaspers (1963) noted, this allows us to see the usual cause and effect connections that exist between our self and life from another "outside" perspective. We see that we normally live life as unthinking puppets controlled by life's strings. This creates an opportunity for us to reevaluate our selves as individual, single entities in the world and to take fundamental control of our selves in relation to the external, causal relationships that act on the self. As the self is transformed through "the crises of self-understanding," a person comes to appreciate and take control of the basic relationship between the self and the world. This new relationship and the new self responsibilities that it entails compel a person to be, to rise above the predetermined scripts of life and to move toward authenticity and autonomy, the two hallmarks of development. The "new" self becomes an ongoing construction project, in the end becoming autopoietic, continually self-producing, building itself over time (see Maturana and Varela, 1980). The direction of the old cause and effect relationship with life is reversed and the person begins to "pull their own strings." This autonomy is initially reflected by a new confidence felt in basic decision making and, ultimately, by actively deciding what stimuli to react to and how to respond. Guided by the hierarchy of values, automatic reactions are replaced by a deliberate "plan" of responding to life. Returning to our analogy, we take an active role in determining our center point and our horizons.

The "method" of subject-object also allows us to see and understand others both objectively and subjectively. "In this way we perceive and understand the other individual in his full personality, in his differentiated feelings and aspirations. This results in a much more complete and deep insight and understanding" (Dabrowski, Kawczak and Sochanska, 1973, p. 124). The ability to approach oneself as object is in direct proportion to one's ability to approach others as subjects (Dabrowski, et al, 1973). "Discovery of the object in oneself is at the same time the discovery of subject in others" (Cienin, 1972, p. 25). Self-discovery goes hand-in-hand with the development of a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of others. In large part, this process is the basis for the development of empathy and the foundation for positive relationships in life.

It can be a startling realization to discover that other people see the world differently than we do and that "we all do not think alike." Eventually, we realize that each person has, at least potentially, a unique frame of reference and a correspondingly unique view of him or her self and of life. This

recognition allows us to use our imagination to move out of our frame and into the frame of someone else. We can imagine another person's subjective view of life and the associated thoughts and feelings that would accompany it. That is, to imagine ourselves at the centre of someone else's frame and to try to extrapolate their world view.

As the ideas of self, others and empathy are understood, insights mount concerning the relative relationship between the self and the world at large. The appreciation of the self as an object and the apparent meaninglessness of the self and of life, creates a humble understanding of what it means to be a self. To appreciate the self in this way is to realize that we are essentially insignificant and powerless, like a leaf in a maelstrom. Existential crises arise from the dual realization that "we are in this world alone" (no one else is like me or can understand me) and that "I am the only one who can help me find out what I am. What my life means." At this point, an individual realizes that to find out where they "fit" and to find meaning in life, they must actively take control of the self and to construct the self. Generally ascending from despair, self-determination and self-responsibility become more vital than ever. Through disintegrations and reintegrations, blueprints of the self can be revised, renovations done, and new constructions begun. As this process becomes a way of life, the autopoietic fabrication of the self and of the relationships between the self and the world builds what is meaningful to the self. This becomes Dabrowski's hierarchy of values, a system of values that interactively constructs individual meaning for the self, meaning in relationship with others, and meaning in the world at large. Individualized values evolve, moving away from "the lower" and toward "the higher." This is the only satisfying resolution of the existential crisis brought on by the development of the self.

In summary, self-discovery leads to an increased understanding of the self as object and of others as subjects. The result is often a life crisis resolved only by developing a true self, in Dabrowski's terms, by developing one's unique personality. This involves a recognition of the personality ideal, the perfective "ought" aspect. We thus consciously come to strive, to move from "is" to "ought," a hallmark of multilevelness in action.

### The Multilevelled View.

The multilevel view of life is a critical component in empowering individual human development and in laying the foundation for social and cultural growth. Dabrowski says that the development of the self begins with fundamental qualitative shifts in how one sees the world, shifts characterizing the move from unilevel to multilevel perception. Unilevel development is limited to quantitative change, choices between options on the same plane. In contrast, multilevel growth involves quantitative and qualitative change. Multilevel growth involves becoming aware of the existence of higher planes and seeing contrasts between higher possibilities and lower actualities. This leads to a shifting of our values, beliefs and behaviours to a new track on a higher plane.

Robinson (1990) notes that each of us must judge everything else in relationship to our own position. We are at the centre of our own frame, but this is not simply a metaphorical physical position, it is a

psychological position bounded by our encircling perceptual horizon. This landscape and our position can represent many psychological dimensions, for example, Robinson notes that our position can represent our values. The ultimate phenomenological gestalt of this position is an individual's perception of their self and of the world. We intuitively feel and relate to our self as at the centre of our landscape. We each have our own self (our own position) and our own frame of reference (our own landscape). In our metaphor, each of us has the same physical tracks stretching out in front of us and each of us sees life with the same projective process that brings the rails together at the horizon (the perfective aspect). We each have the same type of clock, however, when our frames are compared, our interpretations of our perceptions differ widely, and our identical clocks show different times (the perspective aspect).

In other words, as in physical frames, our psychological frames of reference are not readily equatable with those of others. Specifically, the perceptions that we compare are produced in different frames and the frames relate relativistically. This adds to interpersonal incongruities. Multilevelness is the psychological equivalent to the theory of relativity, the perception of, and accounting for, the fact that psychological frames relate relativistically. Multilevelness as a method of analysis allows us to understand a multileveled world just as relativity as a tool of analysis helps us understand the physical, relativistic world. The achievement of multilevelness is analogous to realizing that our horizons are artificial and that there are levels of tracks running on planes above and below ours.

We project our selves out from our centre, to the horizon, the functional perceptual limit of the boundary of the self. In unilevel development, we coexist with others and the world at large and we interface at the point where our horizon meets the outside ("the other"). In advanced development, we come to appreciate that we are an integral part of others and of the whole.

With developing insight into the self, our horizon expands and more of the world is encircled and integrated into the self. In this model, we do not simply see further (quantitatively), we rise higher and come to take in more of the scope of the "big picture" and its relative importance (the qualitative). We develop an enlarged perspective as we "see out" to the edge of our expanded horizon (Robinson 1990). We come to see ourselves in a new relationship to others and the world and we develop an interactive, dynamic adjustment of our self within the larger frame, realizing that we are a small, but important, part of a greater whole.

Along with the expansion of the horizon, the horizon becomes more permeable and allows a more open exchange between the self and "what is beyond." "Frame-exchanging" and "frame-sharing" (deep empathetic experiences) can occur with others, for example, falling in love. The overlapping of interpersonal horizons is a sign of multilevel interaction, revealed by an empathetic understanding of the other and of their position.

In addition, frame sharing and exchange can occur between a person and Nature. Many descriptions of this can be found, for example, Maslow's oceanic experience. One's frame of reference is momentarily unbounded and one intuitively comes to share some fundamental "understanding" with

"the larger world." I believe that this is commonly seen in creativity and in moments of creative flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). We temporarily see beyond our normal human constraints (horizons) and for a moment, see more of the "real" world around us. This enlarged perceptual domain is normally unavailable to us and represents an example of the perfective aspect of psychology.

A new appreciation for the vertical strata of life and of other people comes to dominate an individual's world view. These forces create a multilevelled appreciation and an ongoing awareness of the perfective and perspective aspects in life. A person constructs a scale (just as the Olympic athlete did) to represent the highest goals of what is possible in life. The person constructs their own perfective ideal self, the Olympic "ten" of personality. This also forces a person to confront and rate their "is" in comparison to their imagined ideal, their perfective "ought." Beyond this intrapsychic "yardstick," multilevelness also allows us to compare and rate our behaviour relative to that of others (the perspective aspect). Multileveled (vertical) views of the self, and of the self in relation to the other, create an ongoing evaluative component that helps to guide the formation of our beliefs and values. In turn, our attitudes and behaviour become increasingly congruent with this "revised" value structure.

Qualitative shifts are fuelled by OE and the conflicts it creates. In perfective and perspective contexts, individuals come to question life and the "traditional wisdom" of social institutions, which perviously had been taken for granted. Development begins a process of critical evaluation of the basic tenets on which one's current world view is based. As individuals begin to see contradictions and injustice, their existing value structure begins to disintegrate. Individual values start to replace social values. The seeds of subject-object and of the growing sense of self, the third factor and the inner psychic milieu, eventually contribute to the development of a unique, individual value structure.

The development of the hierarchy of values sharpens the focus of the vertical dimension of "the lower versus the higher." As vertical comparisons continue to create accumulating conflict, momentum builds to reject the lower aspects of the self and to literally "set one's sights higher." At some point, you realize that "the lower" cannot be part of your self anymore. You now see "what you must do," leading to an ongoing commitment to maximizing the "higher" elements of the emerging "new" self. This self is actively constructed upon the foundation of the new (or renewed) set of basic beliefs and values. This hierarchy of values guides the behaviour of an authentic, integrated, individual self and represents a product of the fundamental qualitative shift of multilevelness.

A multilevel view has a dynamic relationship with the developing self. The more intense the vertical conflicts, the more intense the need to find resolution through growth. The more growth, the broader the multilevel comparisons that fuel developmental dynamisms. Simultaneously, the sharper the feeling that "you have to overcome the lower."

Manifest characteristics of unilevelness and multilevelness are discernible in the general philosophy and behaviour espoused by groups of people. Unilevelness is characterized by more psychopathic thinking and behaviour, emphasizing the selfish satisfaction of individual needs. The higher levels reflect increasing awareness of the emotional and spiritual needs of people, respect for others, and

the empathic bonding of individuals. This creates more socially oriented and socially appropriate behaviour. At the highest levels, individuals act autonomously, guided by higher human and group values based upon a deeper, critically examined understanding of the self, of others, and of life. Social institutions are critically examined and injustices and inequities vigorously protested. The social dimension of life becomes one oriented toward making the world a safe and fair place where people can live in harmony with each other and with Nature.

Individuals with similar developmental potentials will share a generally similar perception of the world and exhibit similar psychological features (similar energy levels, conceptual sophistication, emotional sensitivity, reactivity to situations, etc.). A Dabrowskian view helps explain why an individual finds solace with people who share his or her level and explains the differences seen in social and cultural groups. This is the relativity of frames applied on a social level.

In contrast to multilevel growth, unilevel, quantitative change of the self is limited to moving along our horizontal track. Moving horizontally on the tracks is easy and is commonly seen in initial stages of development. Horizontal moves often create ambiguity reflected by ambitemperies, the result of trying to make choices between equal (same level) alternatives. Moving horizontally gives temporary feelings of newness and relief but often the realization that "you are no further ahead" quickly sinks in.

As prototypes of Level 1, primitive integration in Dabrowski's terms, traditionally defined psychopaths see the world as an extension of their self and needs. For the psychopath, others and the world are encompassed within their frame, for them, the only frame that exists. Dabrowski extended the term psychopath to include all unilevel individuals, in his terms, those who are primitively integrated at the first level. He said that these individuals are operating at a lower, automatic, robotic level and thus lack a true personality.

### Dabrowski and Contemporary Personality Theory.

I conclude this paper by placing Dabrowski in the context of recent work in personality. McAdams and Emmons (1995) note the resurgence of personality theory and, in particular, of a renewed appreciation of levels of personality. Recent works in the area are very reminiscent of Dabrowski's theory and some adeptly encapsulate his ideas. For example, the development of personality as outlined by Dabrowski's three factors is reflected in the following:

"In the optimal situation, fully integrated individuals would be able to liberate themselves from genetic commands and cultural constraints (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993) to gain control and develop an autonomous and self-determined life, while at the same time benefiting humankind by shaping the direction of future generations" (Emmons, 1995, p. 354).

Dabrowski emphasized that development went from more automatic, less differentiated, to more conscious and more differentiated forms. His levels reflect this; the first level reflects behaviour that is largely reactive to, and controlled by, biological and social influences. Three levels describe various degrees of disintegration (unilevel, spontaneous and organized), followed by a final level outlining

secondary integration, a level that I would describe as "self-autonomy with social responsibility."

Other level-based approaches also involve a progression from lower levels that are more biological and social, to higher, more autonomous levels. For example, McAdams's first level consists of dispositional traits that are "relatively nonconditional, relatively decontextualized, generally linear, and implicitly comparative dimensions of personality" (McAdams, 1995, p. 371). At this level, traits depict the most general and observable of a person's behavioural patterns that can be described and summarized by the five-factor model or similar models. "Personal concerns" is the name McAdams gives his second level, a level "concerning what the person wants, how the person goes about trying to get what he or she wants, what the person is concerned with, what the person is 'into', what his or her plans for the future are, how the person feels about his or her children and wife or husband . . . and so on" (McAdams, 1994, p. 304). Constructs at level II are motivational and developmental, reflecting "a person's conscious articulations of what he or she is trying to do during a given period of life" and thus they are anchored in a given social and temporal context (McAdams, 1994, p. 304). As Emmons (1995) summarizes, level I is what a person "has" and level II is what a person "does." These first two levels echo Dabrowski's first and second factors and both would fall within Dabrowski's first level.

Stories form an important part of McAdams's third level, identity as a life narrative. According to McAdams, this ongoing life story "concerns the making of the self" and defines a person's identity (McAdams, 1994, p. 306). These stories give people "a sense of identity lending a sense of overall meaning and purpose to their lives" (Emmons, 1995, p. 352). In Dabrowski's terms this would correspond to the process of personality formation described in levels 3, 4 and 5.

Further research will help flesh out the descriptive hierarchy of levels that best describes the developing self. As Emmons (1995) reminds us, theory must be developed and tested to specify the connections and relations hypothesized between levels and between constructs within a level.

Another of Dabrowski's central underlying themes was integration. Ryan's (1995) review of integration is extremely helpful in placing Dabrowski's work on secondary integration into a broader context. Integration is an ongoing psychological process, involving the "mastery and ownership of one's actions" (Ryan, 1995, p. 419) that is "powerfully dependent . . . on the cultural and social conditions that are available to nurture the self" (Ryan, 1995, p. 421). Thus, if sufficient nurturing and sustenance are available, integration will be optimized. These conditions include "opportunities to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness" (Ryan, 1995, p. 421). Ryan (1995, p. 403) describes three motivational processes that "represent different manifestations of an overarching tendency to differentiate, integrate, and actualize oneself." These are, intrinsic motivation, internalization and emotional integration. Again, these ideas echo Dabrowski's work and his emphasis on emotion within an encompassing view of (secondary) integration.

Summary.

Dabrowski presents a rich and complex theory of personality and its development. The ideas of multilevelness and overexcitability provide a valuable context to understand the development of psychological conflict, especially in individuals with high developmental and creative potentials. Dabrowski's multilevel view is the psychological equivalent to relativism in physics. Einstein's theory of relativity and its implications help us to appreciate the multilevel approach to personality and as a view of life. Dabrowski's work is essentially repeated in the recent psychological literature, a sign of his pioneering insight and lasting contributions.

## References

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Dabrowski, K. (1937). Psychological basis of self-mutilation. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 19, 1-104.
- Dabrowski, K. (1964). *Positive Disintegration*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Dabrowski, K. (1966). The Theory of Positive Disintegration. *International Journal of Psychiatry*, 2, 229-244.
- Dabrowski, K. (1967). *Personality-Shaping Through Positive Disintegration*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Dabrowski, K., with Kawczak, A., and Piechowski, M. M. (1970). *Mental Growth Through Positive Disintegration*. London: Gryf.
- Dabrowski, K. (1972). *Psychoneurosis Is Not An Illness*. London: Gryf.
- Dabrowski, K. (1973). *Developmental Psychotherapy: Psychotherapy Based on the Theory of Positive Disintegration*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Dabrowski, K. with Piechowski, M. M. (1977). *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development: Volume 1 - Multilevelness And Positive Disintegration*. Oceanside, New York: Dabor.
- Dabrowski, K. and Piechowski, M. M. (1977). *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development: Volume 2 - From Primary Integration To Self-Actualization*. Oceanside, New York: Dabor.
- Cienin, P. (1972). *Existential thoughts and aphorisms*. London: GRYF Publications.
- Emmons, R. A. (1995). Levels and domains in personality: An introduction. *Journal of Personality*, 63(3), 341-364.
- Gell-Mann, M. (1994). *The quark and the jaguar: Adventures in the simple and the complex*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Co.
- Goodwin, B. (1994). *How the leopard changed its spots: The evolution of complexity*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Gould, S. J. (1989). *Wonderful life: The burgess shale and the nature of history*. New York: Norton.
- Johnson, G. (1995) *Fire in the mind: Science, faith and the search for order*. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Kauffman, S. (1995). *At home in the universe: The search for laws of self-organization and complexity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kelso, J. A. S. (1995). *Dynamic Patterns: The self-organization of brain and behaviour*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Maturana, H. R., and Varela, F. J. (1989). *Autopoiesis and cognition: The realization of the living*.

Boston: Reidel.

McAdams, D. P. (1994). Can personality change? Levels of stability and growth in personality across the life span. In T. F. Heatherton and J. L. Weinberger (Eds.), *Can personality change?* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

McAdams, D. P. (1995). What do we know when we know a person? *Journal of Personality*, 63(3), 365-396.

McAdams, D. P., and Emmons, R. A. (Eds.). (1995). Levels and domains in personality [Special issue]. *Journal of Personality*, 63(3).

Ryan, R. M. (1995). Psychological needs and the facilitation of integrative processes. *Journal of Personality*, 63(3), 397-427.

Robinson, E. (1990). *Einstein's relativity in metaphor and mathematics*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Schwinger, J. (1986). *Einstein's legacy*. New York: Scientific American Library.

Sternberg, R. J., and Lubart, T. I. (1995). *Defying the crowd: Cultivating creativity in a culture of conformity*. New York: Free Press.

Waldrop, M. M. (1992). *Complexity: The emerging science at the edge of order and chaos*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

We have nostalgia for the future

As we can imagine how things could be

And wish it were so.

END

.

**ETR is to Physics as TPD is to Psychology**

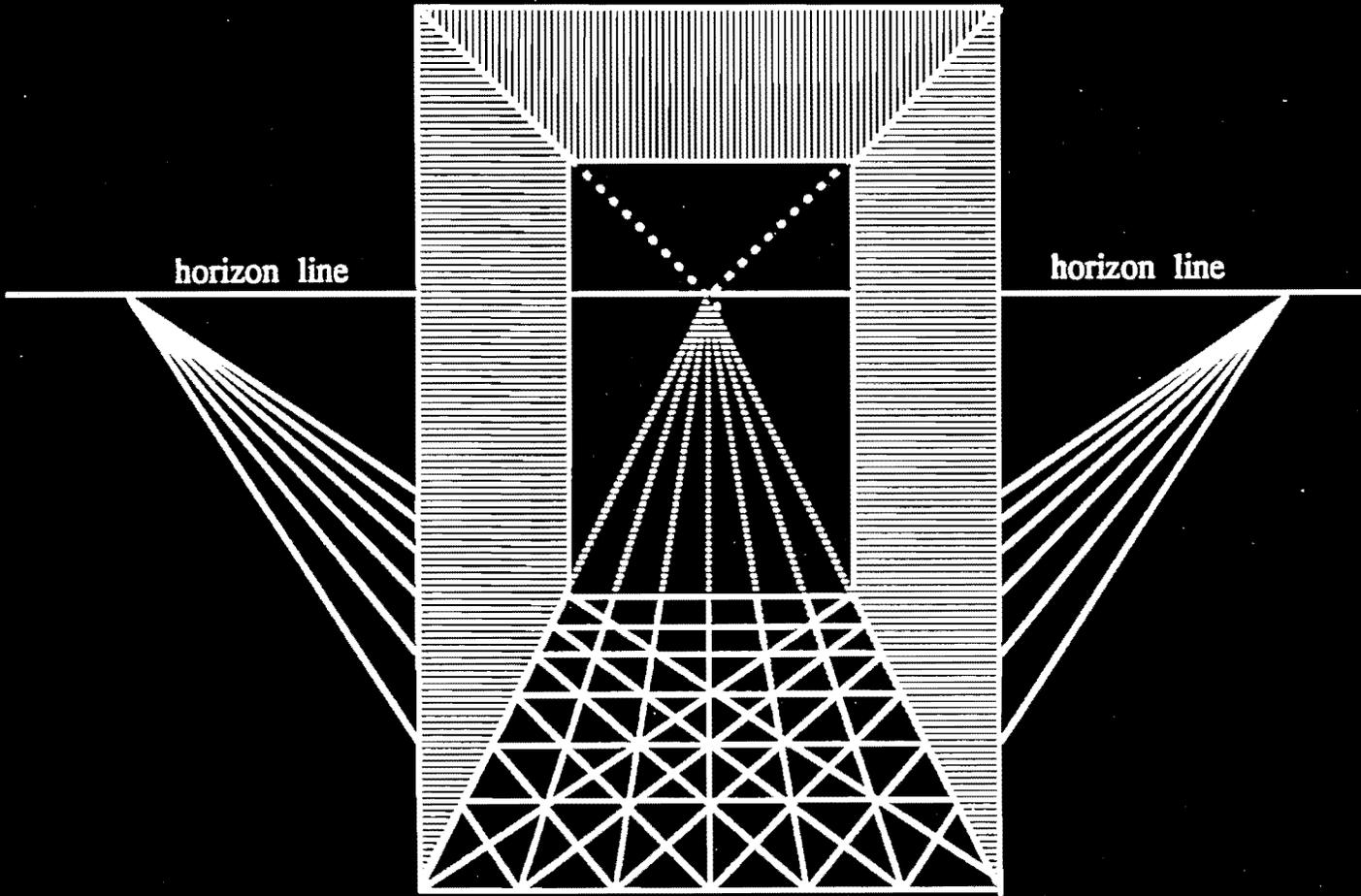
**More specifically, relativity brings forth many implications that are paralleled in multilevelness.**

**Unilevelness is equivalent to living with a Classical view in Physics.**

**Multilevelness mirrors the subtly and richness of relativity.**

horizon line

horizon line



Human Perception



Artificial Horizon



Reality (no end)

4

Endless train tracks;

Projection; everyone sees the rails come together.

Horizon; rails meet at an artificial point -- the brain limits frame of reference seen -- different brains, different limits.

Unilevelness -- fixed limits "what you see is what you are," view limited to one level.

Each person has a psychological frame, frames relate in a relative way, this produces discrepancies. This aspect is not appreciated in a unilevel world.

DP, OE & SO etc. predispose vertical comparisons => stress & conflict.

Multilevelness allows analysis & understanding of the relativity of the self's frame in relation to the world and other's frames.

Multileveled growth; old self disintegrates, new self forms.

Olympic Athlete

Perfective Aspect

Athlete's performance = Judges

A "ten" = a "ten" for all judges

Dabrowski: Personality Ideal

Perspective Aspect: relative perception (relativity of frames)

Athlete number one watching athlete number two

Athlete number three watching the first two

Dabrowski: Multilevelness

Level I (behaviour driven by Factor 1, biological impulses  
and Factor 2, social learning)

Unilevel view of life



**Categorical Transition**

DP (OE)

“Overloads”  
Positive Maladjustments

Unilevel  
Level II Stress & conflicts ←—————→  
Disintegrations

“Higher versus lower” starts to develop

Subject-object

Level III

Multilevelness  
(Qualitative changes)

IV

Third Factor: Autonomy  
(Inner Psychic Milieu takes  
control)

Dimensional  
transitions between  
III, IV and V

Disintegrations  
**Re-integrations**

V

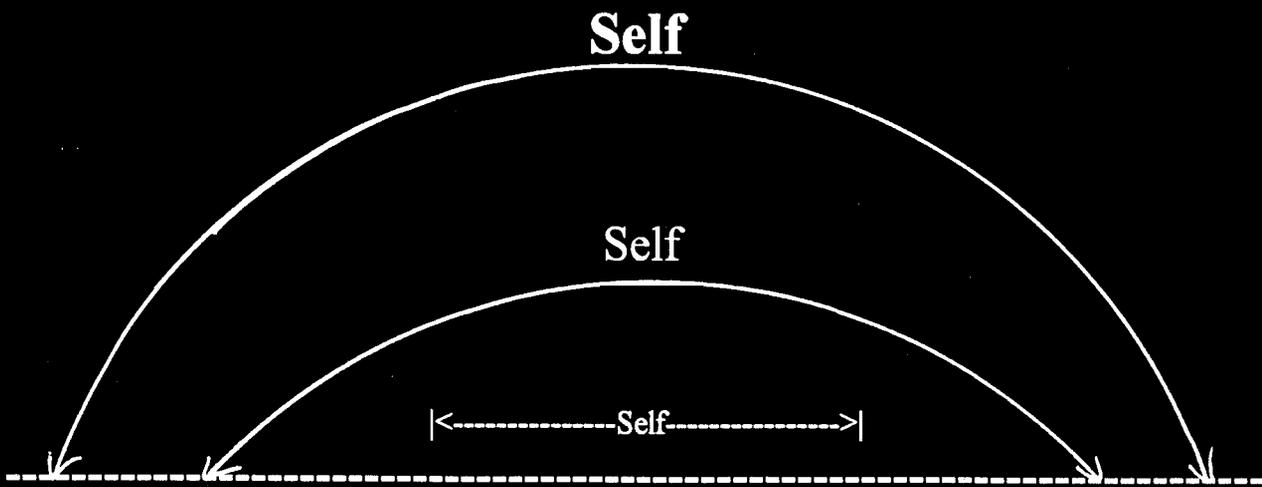
Disintegrations  
**Integrations**

### Unilevel "fixed" horizons



### Multilevel

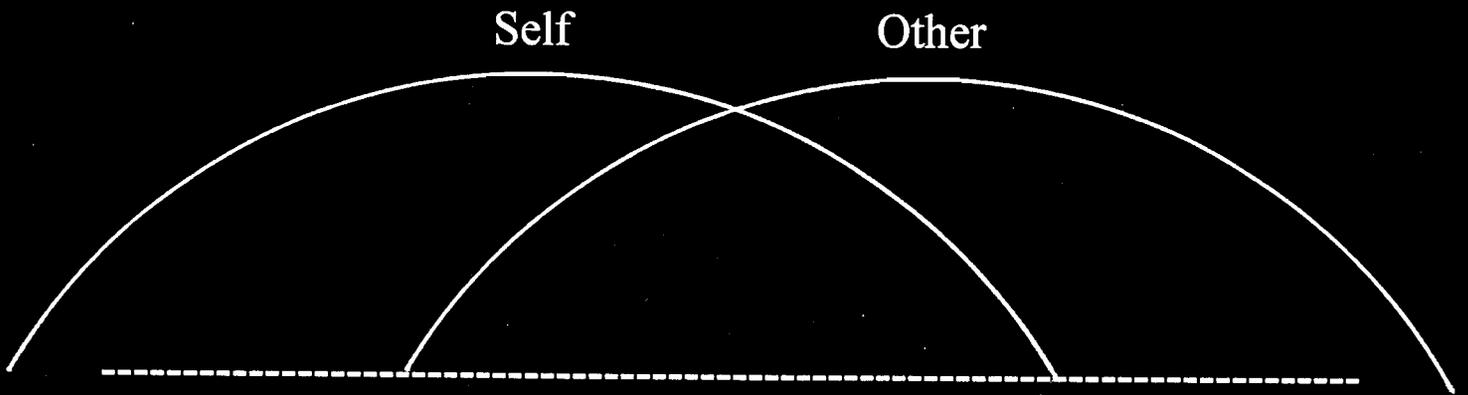
As self grows, frame expands quantitatively and qualitatively.



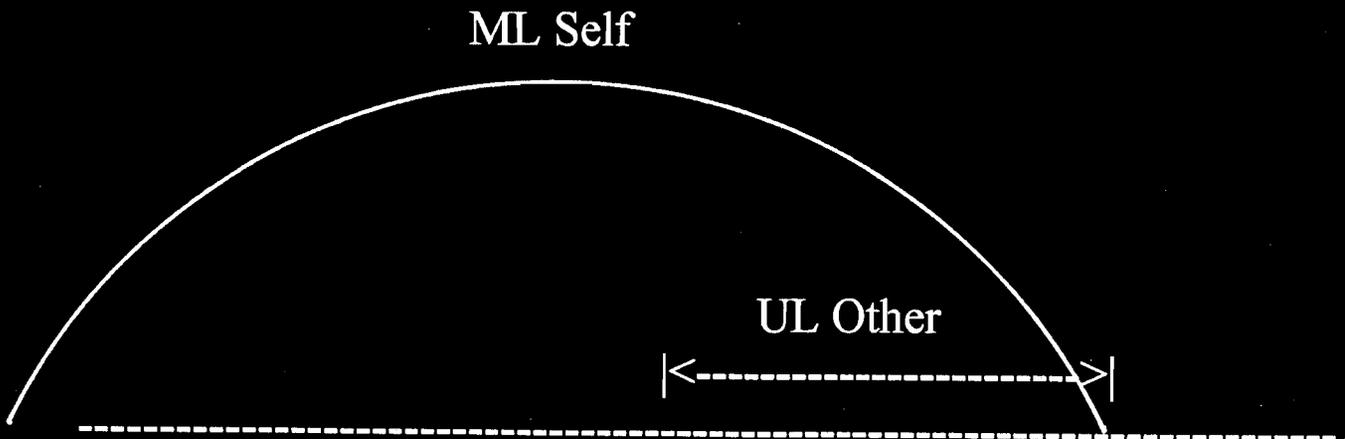
### Unilevel Interaction



### Multilevel Interaction

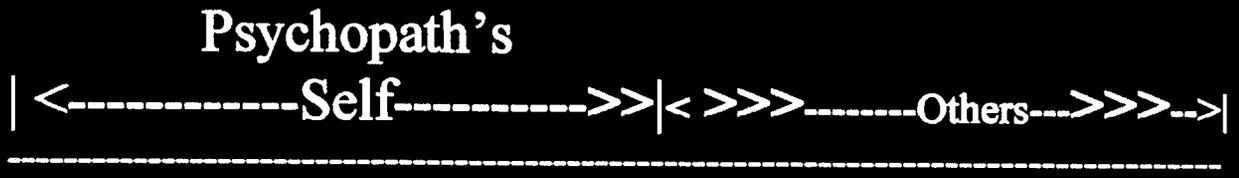


### Multilevel and Unilevel



“Color person” also sees in B/W. B/W person sees only in B/W.

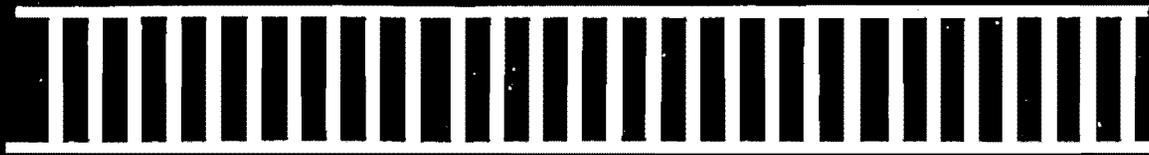
**Psychopath's Interaction**



**The force of the strong psychopath's self overwhelms the other's self.**

# Multilevelness

Perfective Ideal Ought



(Absolute Reality)

