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Varieties of Personality Integration

Frequently when the five levels of personality development are described the emphasis is, quite understandably, on just two types of personality integration: (1) an initial primary integration (level I); and (2) a form of secondary integration in which the individual is governed by an ideal or personality as well as by authenticity, autonomy and responsibility (level V).

However many readers of this newsletter might be interested to know that in Dabrowski's book-length expositions of the theory of positive disintegration, several more types of personality integration are identified, although many of these remain conceptually undeveloped.

Let me begin with Dabrowski's notion of initial integration, which is so called because it is the original integration with which individuals begin their lives before, if ever, going through a process of disintegration. There are three types of initial integration: one higher form and two lower forms. Dabrowski's description of the highest kind of initial integration is as follows:

It also should be kept in mind that there are people, though rarely met, whose initial integration belongs to the higher level, whose rich structure, constantly improved by life's experiences and reflections, does not undergo the process of disintegration, but harmoniously and without greater shock develops into a full personality. (Dabrowski, 1967:58)

In my study of mystical lives I have encountered only two possible examples of this phenomenon. One of these is the Hindu sage, Ramana Maharshi (Osborne, 1979:i & iii) and the second is a very little known mystic, Emmanuel Sorensen, who adopted the name of Sunyata (Camhi & Isenberg, 1990)

Initial integration of a lower kind is level I of the five-stage model of personality development. However a further distinction can be made between the lower and upper ranges of primary integration (Dabrowski, 1972:154-155) or what Piechowski (1977:19-20) refers to as the strong and weak forms of primary integration. Thus there are a total of three forms of initial integration: a higher form, a strong lower form and a weak lower form.

negative, or chronic, disintegration (Dabrowski, 1972:299) or else they experience one or another type of personality reintegration, referred to as secondary integration. One type is that in which, following a period of personality disintegration, there is a return to primary integration, with the personality unchanged (Dabrowski, 1964:21 & 1967:134-135). Another type is that in which there is a return to primary integration with the personality changed in the sense that there is a new directional focus, but of a non-hierarchical nature - i.e., the change is of a superficial kind while the fundamental structure of personality remains intact (Dabrowski, 1964:21 & 1967:135-137).

Dabrowski also uses the term negative adjustment to refer to three additional types of personality integration, which occur subsequent to a process he identifies as one-sided development: (1) paranoia; (2) psychopathy; and (3) conformity to an uncritically accepted external value system. Of the first two he says,

One-sided development may take a totally negative turn. This occurs in psychopathy and paranoia. In this case mental processes and structures are strongly integrated and resistant to environmental influence. Intelligence serves to manipulate objects in the environment, including, and foremost, other human beings. Combined with great intelligence such integrated structure produces criminal leaders and dictators... (Dabrowski, 1974:31)

Dabrowski's third form of negative adjustment is characterized by an

Unqualified conformity to a hierarchy of values prevailing in a person's social environment. The values are accepted without an independent critical evaluation. It is an acceptance of an external system of values without autonomous choice. an adjustment to "what is." (Dabrowski, 1972:299)

Such persons may even possess talents and creative potential, but the personality is not a developing one:

Such creativity...lacks universal components. Only some emotional and intellectual potentials develop very well while the rest remain undeveloped...There is often disproportionate development of certain forms of expression of emotional, sensual, or imaginal overexcitability. It may be manifested for instance as excessive identification with others to the point of losing one's identity but which lacks the more mature and balanced aspects of relationships, or as great fascination with the whole range of the world of real life or the dream or the occult world but without any sense of discrimination. This may give rise to copious creative outpourings in writing, painting, movie making or scientific endeavour but it will lack the universal context of human experience, knowledge, and objective hierarchy of values. (Dabrowski, 1974:30-31)

Thus of the above types of personality integration, one forms the basis for an interesting, even creative, but non-developing, individual. The four others are markedly regressive, with two of them being severely pathological.

In addition to these five forms of developmental secondary integration, Dabrowski discusses two forms of positive secondary integration. One of these is the already mentioned level V, and no further discussion of that type is needed for those familiar with Dabrowski's five-stage model of personality. A less well known form of positive personality integration is **partial integration on a higher level**, which may follow from a process of **partial disintegration**, which Dabrowski defines in the following words:

[Partial disintegration is] Disintegration within one or a few related dynamisms. It may lead either to reintegration at a previous level, to reintegration at a lower level (primitive integration), to partial integration at a higher level, or to global disintegration. Partial disintegrations followed by partial integrations at a higher level characterize the developmental pattern of people with average developmental potential. In contrast, global disintegration and global secondary integration (if any) are the privilege of people with rich endowment for accelerated development. (Dabrowski, 1972:300)

Since there are presumably many more persons who are examples of partial integration at a higher level than there are persons at level V, this form of secondary integration deserves further elaboration and research.

The above has been an all too brief survey of Dabrowski's typology of personality integration. But even a brief survey makes it clear that there are many types of personality integration and that this variety is capable of accounting for the many variations in the human condition in a way that a bipolar model consisting of levels I and V cannot.

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